

Land Speed Racing in Australia: How the DLRA got started...

It all started in the early 1980's, a group of guys who wanted to go fast got together and Dry Lake Racers Australia was born. Meetings were held in a tent at Bendigo Swap Meet, convenient for Andy Jenkins from Broken Hill and Ted Robinette from Melbourne.

With a small group in attendance inside the tent, it was decided to search for a place to race. Lake Tyrell in Victoria seemed the obvious place to start so a survey trip was organised in January 1985. Ted Robinette, Andy Jenkins, Eddie Ford, Leighton Rawlings, Patrick Clarke and Colin Clarke set off to Lake Tyrell only to prove it not to be Australia's answer to Lake Bonneville after all. Three of the four cars present were bogged in the lake and it took several hours to get all cars free. I expect the locals would have thought it hilarious.

Andy Jenkins got his A Model Ford out of the bog by removing the floorboards of the car and placing them under the wheels, then he used the A Model to ferry timber from the shore back to the rest of the convoy to enable them to get back to the road. A second trip was organised to Lake Tyrell the following year. The crew were now aware of the dangers and no one sank, but a suitable race area was not found.

Undeterred, Andy Jenkins kept searching. In 1988 Andy teamed up with John Veivers who was looking for a place to make a world land speed record attempt in a streamliner motor cycle. The guys went on a survey trip to Lake Gairdner in the South Australian outback.

Lake Gairdner is about 90 miles long and 30 miles (144 x 48 kilometres) wide. They returned very excited and convinced that the gleaming white salt flat of Lake Gairdner was the perfect place to race.

Access to the lake was at Mount Ive station - a hundred year old, 220,000 acre sheep station



run by the Andrews family. The Andrews had a lease that extended to the 32 parallel which covered 30 miles of the salt lake - plenty of space to race!

Upon hearing the great news, Mike Davidson from South Australia joined the group and a race area was mapped out. A race date for a weekend meeting on March 31st, 1990 was locked in. A track with a two mile run up, two beams for timing and one mile to slow down was planned.

The foundation racers present at this first race meeting included Rod Hadfield with his big block powered A Model roadster. He achieved a very respectable 147mph result. Ted Robinette with a 186 Holden-powered P76 came home with a 97.62mph grin. Peter

Gregory with a 272 Y block in a 1934 Ford sedan also ran a 97mph. South Australian Peter Noy in a HD Holden, 87mph and Mike Davidson driving his Flathead powered Ford proved flatheads not only look cool but can hold their own at 121mph.

The first 12 members of the Dry Lakes Racers Australia were Mike Davidson, Andy Jenkins, Rod Hadfield, Garth Butterworth, Geoff Rea, Peter Noy, Peter Gregory, Steve Watts, Peter Williams, Peter Andrew, Bernie Kelly and Robbie Carroll. Most are still involved with the club. The rest of the club owes a great deal to these guys for doing the hard yards setting up our first Speedweek, starting out as a Speedweekend in outback Australia.

Speedweek in Australia, as it still is in the USA



CLOCKWISE FROM ABOVE: Mike Davidson's 'Flat Attack' twin flathead powered streamliner. ■ New Zealander Dave Alexander is going to share driving duties in the Big Knob roadster in 2017 with Mat Lagoon (pictured) and Neil Davis. ■ The 'Salt Shaker' is one of many of Rod Hadfield's salt lake rides over the years. ■ Hadfield's 'The Castlemaine Kid' Big Block Powered A Model roadster was present at the first ever DLRA salt lake racing event in 1990. ■ Lake Tyrell survey trip, mid 1980s.



is an amateur sport. The people involved are ordinary people doing extraordinary things. DLRA currently boasts a membership of 1,416.

At Speedweek we now run two tracks - a short three mile track for vehicles with speeds less than 175mph and a nine mile track known as the Long Course for vehicles capable of speeds over 175mph. Both tracks have the latest timing equipment and times are officially recognised on both courses. Records are broken on both tracks.

The event now attracts people from all over the world to race or spectate and is still growing, to find out more check out www.dlra.org.au.

Speedweek 2017 is on from the 27th February to the 3rd of March at Lake Gairdner, South

Australia and the entries have started rolling in. Five American drivers, one of which is David Freiburger, the editor of Hot Rod magazine, have entered Speedweek 2017. They will be sharing the driving in three Camaros being shipped from the US. The Camaros are running in four classes and have motors ranging from 410ci to 600ci.

Lake Gairdner record holder and all round nice guy, New Zealander Dave Alexander will be joining the Big Knob Racing team at Speedweek 2017. Also holding Bonneville records, Dave, with huge support from his wife, Pam, are building a new streamliner that will hit the race tracks soon. In the meantime, Big Knob Racing has invited Dave to satisfy his salt bug, to drive the fastest hot rod in

Australia, Big Knob Racing's roadster, sharing driving duties with Neil Davies, Mat Lagoon and yours truly.

Sadly, the Treit/Davenport entry, Target 550 have postponed their visit to Lake Gairdner. They were planning, during our event, to attempt to break the world's fastest wheel driven record. The American Streamliner ran 385mph at Bonneville this year but the guys are still not happy with the testing. They have decided the planned record attempt in Australia was a little premature and are saying they will be over when they finish their homework. Bummer!

See you at the salt,
Norm Hardinge

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