

Celebrating 50 years of NitroThunder

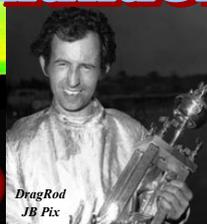
eXclusive mcMix for eurodragster.com



words & photos
mike collins

the razor's edge

With the first Winston Championship and 5.63/250mph NHRA Top Fuel records fresh under his belt, "Big Daddy" Don Garlits really was the King of the Dragsters when he came to Santa Pod's 10th anniversary meet in 1976. Earlier he'd told me, "There are so many little things that can go wrong. One little oil spot, one little gust of wind, one spark plug cracks, the engine j'st," slapping his hands, "pooft, you know, coughs once, the clutch doesn't hook up right. A million and one little things can cause the car not to run at its maximum." But when it does, like Eurodragster sponsor Urs Erbacher at right, wow it's kinda awesome.



DragRod
JB Pix



Dedicated to "Bootsie" Herridge, our first Nitro Champion, a true drag racing legend, and a friend who'll never be forgotten

Urs took pole with this 4.80, lifting early to 309.27mph, and then won a second straight FIA title and the FIA Euro Finals in 2011, the final quarter-mile race at the Pod for Top Fuel. The Razor's Edge images are a different type of awesome! The violent fireball from Sweden's Stefan Gunnarsson was a 4.36, 276.81, quicker than Jari Halinen's Sisu car or Duncan Micallef's troubled passes at the 2015 Euro Finals, won by popular Finnish driver Halinen. And side-by-side fuelers at full power show the Razor's Edge personified! The red car gave Pod fans the quickest, fastest pass of the season as the green car shows the eXplosive power of Nitro, an 'I was close enough to almost feel the heat. "Wow!" I thought, "What a way to celebrate 50 years of NitroThunder," and both cars were en route to glory at the Euro Finals - but let's not get ahead of the game. Today it's common knowledge amongst fans that, especially if you're blown and injected, strange things can happen when you put Nitromethane in your fuel tank - but not when we began! Allan "Bootsie" Herridge, our first NitroWarrior, experienced NitroPower at the 1964 DragFest's final event, "tipping the can" in a go-or-blow effort at a 12second ET in Dragster Developments' aged straight-8 Buick powered device - sadly it couldn't handle the extra power and just let go! When drag racing came into my life during Santa Pod's 1966 season, the team had learned a lot, thrilling fans with 10-second runs, and we were soon friends. Click the link below to see Bootsie racing in 1966 - it's silent, but there's much magic to enjoy, and you'll see just how lucky we are today!



mcPix



Asphalt Archives
photographer
unknown

More than 30 years ago photo archives were being dumped into black plastic bags for waste disposal! Some were rescued by the Black Bag Liberation Front and, thankfully, the work of those unknown professional photographers can be enjoyed by fans old and new. When was the last time you saw a Top Fuel car burn out in a parking lot onto a city street?!



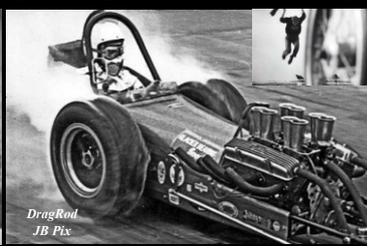
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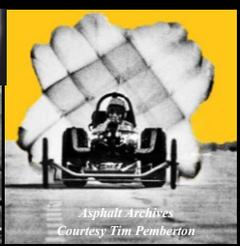
mcSnips courtesy Ron Bailey
SANTA POD RACEWAY



FIRST QUALIFIERS MEET
DRAG RACING & HOT ROD
TONY'S T SOOPA COUPE
MOTOVATION
1968 Drag Racing Champion!



DragRod
JB Pix



Asphalt Archives
Courtesy Tim Pemberton

Some 1966 style NitroPower from my eXtreme crop of Bootsie getting it on in Pulsation, and some happy fans from Ron Bailey's 1966 Drag Racing at Santa Pod Raceway, both courtesy Nick Pettitt's time travel dvds. Bootsie's new ride (launched late in 1967), was a Chevy powered rail, the Herridge & Beadle Bros Motovation, complete with a fuel shut-off cable from a Lambretta and a drive shaft UJ from a Land Rover!

Back then the razor's edge was something you shaved with, but their nitro fueled problems on the new track were baffling rather than explosive - the car didn't run worth a damn! After many weary hours, they discovered the Hilborn fuel injectors were set for California - maybe the name Santa Pod had a So-Cal ring, but our air could never taste like Pomona's! Once re-set, the horsepower began to appear, culminating in a fantastic title-winning run at the 1968 Drag Racing Championships - to say I was going nuts in the commentator's booth would be a gross understatement! "Tik" Ticker got a huge hole shot in Geronimo, an injected Olds powered dragster (that'd recently run our first unblown 9-second ET), and hit a 10.04 at 144mph. But Bootsie came from behind to take the title and trophy (image at top right), with 9.907 at 141.64 mph, driving into drag racing legend on the first single digit pass by a Junior Fueler outside the USA. Noticing only an oil pressure gauge in the rail, I'd asked Bootsie how he drove without a tach - "Scream it, drop it and hang on!" Try that today and see what happens! Motovation's up there in action from JB, and on my first DragRod cover, shot while filming a TV commercial, with Bootsie waiting for the director to scream "action!" Shortly later, he drove Motovation full throttle the wrong way down the track straight at the camera (in the gold-backed image from that film), where I stood with Tim Pemberton. Bootsie blasting by at speed with a swirling chute is an awesome memory indeed!



DragRod

Fast forward to 2016 and it'd be cool to say the Auto Glym gal's smiling at my fuel Zippo's, but untrue. Unlike the fact my black AA/FZ at right's running strong while t'other has problems. More fuel-mixture than the Razor's Edge shown by the pair of fuelers in this Xtreme crop from 2015! At left it was our latest NitroWarrior Liam "Bomber" Jones thundering to glory with a new personal best of 4.05 at 296.86 whilst Patrik Pers' engine malfunctioned - k'boom! The engine expired in an expensive fireball, but Patrik was unharmed and back out racing again in the next round



On seeing this type of explosive action, I always recall "Big Daddy" Don Garlits' words. He also told me, "Running a fueler, it's a split-second situation, but it takes so much preparation to get it all to come together, people just don't understand how complicated it is to get it perfect every time." That weekend "Big Daddy" got a good hole shot, but lost his first qualifying race to Clive Skilton.... "He drove straight by me," Don said with a chuckle, "It's j'st th't ma enjun wasn't going on eight cylinders. It was on six on that particular run, 'n we got down the end we had two pipes dead cold and wet." With more than 8,000 horsepower produced today, drivers walk a Razor's Edge between 3-second, 300mph glory and k'boom that's almost infinitesimal, especially on a 1,000 foot short track. For 2016, RFM's Liam Jones was joined by another Brit, Steve Ashdown, also with Norwegian legend Rune Fjeld's NitroCorral that's provided us with much thundering AA action during the past few years. This season was no exception, so here's a look back at some highlights as our NitroWarriors raced for glory on the 2016 FIA Top Fuel Championship trail...



The last time I met Don was in 2014 in the Pod's VIP room where he stood enjoying sunset out the window during a break in proceedings. Again I was late, but we had a fun reunion



2016 FIA Top Fuel review



Let's start this Top Fuel feature with DragRod boss John Bennett's shot of the Pod's first AA/FD race on July 20th 1968 (my birthday!), when Tudor Rose red lit. Then JB's seen shooting the action, and that's real cool! This time it's Commuter going red - drag racers do it in pairs... In 1966 they had six baby rails (click for data), 50 years later we'd eight ground-pounding Top Fuel cars chasing 3-second, 300mph glory! Standing in this large crowd, I wondered how many drivers would get lucky, and how many'd get nicked by that Razor's Edge! Dave Wilson welcomed me with a first taste of NitroFire for 2016, a 5.48 at 258 as Rod Harrison clicked off early with problems, oops!

Main Event 2016



Big Go 1966

Ron Fisher photo courtesy timetravelvids



words & photos
mike collins

FIA race stats courtesy
eurodragster.com

JOHN WOOLFE RACING

Made a quick visit to Nitro FM to offer a few words of thanks for their music before requesting a shout out to other folks celebrating 50 years of straight-line craziness, then I was off, strolling into the pairing lanes, ready to enjoy any action thrown my way...

Stig Neergaard's blown and injected power plant in his Eye of the Storm looked ready to rumble, a couple of his crew chilling out and enjoying some brief moments of quite knowing full well there'd be little respite once their motor was fired in anger. Something the young fan was obviously waiting for - me too!



Defending FIA Top Fuel champion Micke Kågered was all smiles before turning to walk off, his gaze leading me to rookie Top Fuel driver Stave Ashdown's RMF Undertaker ride and team mate Liam's new paint with its Hellfire missiles already in flight.



Next up was the real deal, bumping into friends old an' new and my 50th anniversary celebrations began in fine style. I first enjoyed Anita's smile back in the 20th century when she drove a TAD, Liam's at the Main Event last year, and Gary Page was a teeny bopper when we first laughed with his lovely Mum Iris and the family. They're three of the happiest folks you'll ever meet, how lucky can a guy get! Fire the first pair...



Unfortunately, one of the wild Pro Mod cars got w-a-y out of shape and crossed the track, tagging the wall at speed ahead of Michael Gullqvist's Camaro. Although the car was wrecked, the driver got lucky and only suffered a broken leg, but it was more than two hours before racing was resumed! Shortly later they fired the first pair of fuel cars, the 2016 FIA Championship was underway, and it didn't take long before we all discovered just how sharp that Razor's Edge had become...

Anita Mäkelä's first pass of the season made her Santa Pod fans happy, taking pole in Q1 with her 4.07, slowing to 246.55 with problems at the top end. Defending FIA Top Fuel champion Micke Kägered's run was also aborted early



Check out the nitro clouds around The Undertaker, Steve Ashdown's new ride with Rune Fjeld Motorsports. As usual, getting in amongst all the fuel cars during their warm-ups added more power to my day than you could imagine, oh yeah! When Eurodragster sponsor Urs Erbacher went up in smoke, Steve's 4.30 in Q1 got his first win light, good for second ahead of RFM team mate Liam Jones' 4.62 and Stig Neergard's 5.16 seen at left



A great side-by-side launch for fans as things went better for Stig in Q2, with the Eye of the Storm taking pole at 4.02, clicking it early at 267. Anita Mäkelä had problems, and not just yellow NitroFire, the car soon tossed its blower belt. After a strong launch, Stefan Gunnarsson's fueleer lit up Q2 with this colourful explosion



After their wild wheels-up Q2 launch at the rained-off 2014 Main Event (below), Batman sped to a 3.91 at 309 (low ET/Top Speed), as Anita Mäkelä hit the Razor's Edge, tyre shake leaving "stepping stones" big enough to walk on! Anita's 4.01, 293.92 was second



2014 photos by Wojtek courtesy F&A Racing

Neither of the front runners ran strong on Sunday, but rookie Steve Ashdown again bested RFM team mate Liam Jones' 4.32 with a 4.30, upping the ante in Q4 with a 4.16 staying ahead of Liam's 4.19. Steve's 291.13mph was top speed of the weekend by a bunch! And things got better on race day. Although he was a couple of tenths late off the line behind Stefan Gunnarsson, Steve Ashdown drove on by to give The Undertaker its first race round win with a 4.23 at 283 over Stefan G's troubled 4.93. Click the link for the 2016 Main Event FIA Top Fuel first round action (after a shaky start!), or [SantaPodTV](#) for their event coverage, including a close pedal fest with Liam Jones 4.99 taking out Urs Erbacher's 5.10 by less than half-a-car. Micke Kägered's 4.13 won after Anita Mäkelä clicked-off to a 5.0 with tyre shake and Stig took a bye when Björn Mårtensson was sidelined

In the semi's Stig left on Liam Jones, staying ahead all the way to give fans their first three of the year, a 3.99 at 299.75 to Liam's 4.11. That pass nicked the Undertaker's Top Speed mark, and Steve Ashdown's glory run ended as a chute deployed after his burnout, leaving Micke Kägered to take the green and idle down track to save parts and undue expense. In the final both Stig and Micke K suffered tyre shake, the Eye of the Storm went k'boom - but took Stig to glory. Click the link and feel the power!



Main Event Top Fuel final mcSnip courtesy Nitro uk

Although the Main Event was known as the Big Go since 1964, blown an injected NitroPower wasn't seen in competition until 1968. Clive Skilton won with ET's consistently below 9.2 over 160mph in the Allard/Skilton rail, slowing to 11.4 at 129mph in the final on a wet track! Rex Sluggett took Top Speed in the Tudor Rose AA/FD at 179.53, but Clive's 9.005 was Low ET of the event by over a tenth!



John Bennett DragRod photo

Sweden Internationals

Rain stopped play on Saturday at Sweden's Tierp Internationals, with eurodragster.com sponsor Urs Erbacher's 4.08 at 288mph taking pole ahead of Micke Kågered's 4.49 and a 5.08 from Birgitte Bremnes - back in the seat of her 2015 RMF ride, Duncan Micallef's Manta car. Anita Mäkelä was the only driver to make Q2, moving into second with a 4.46. On a sunny race day, the first round saw Stig up-in-smoke at the hit leaving Birgitte to take her first round win in Top Fuel with a 4.23. Micke Kågered and Urs Erbacher also moved on with Anita Mäkelä setting low ET at 4.025. Urs Erbacher had a fire and Birgitte took another win with a stout 4.14 at 288 in the red RMF car. Then Anita Mäkelä gave the Swedish fans what they wanted, a 3.95 at 302 in defeating Micke Kågered's 4.04, this win leading to the FIA's first ever all-female Top Fuel final.

mcSnips courtesy [Joucin Wennerberg @ YouTube](#)

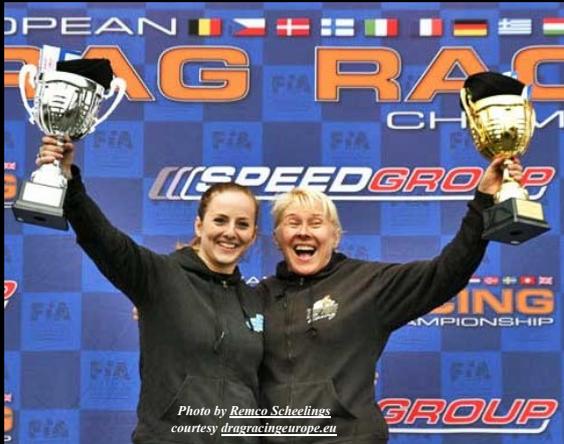


Photo by [Renco Scheelins](#)
courtesy [dragracingeurope.eu](#)



The ladies did not disappoint; Birgitte left first by 0.059, but Anita thundered by, giving fans another three, clicking off early to 282.91mph. Her 3.97 win just ahead of Birgitte's best ever numbers, a 4.12 and a charging 296.15. Birgitte's certainly come a long way since we saw her licence at the Main Event in 2015!

Click the link to enjoy this good close race, and smile as an umbrella springs into life seconds after the two fire breathing fuel cars thunder through the lights!

Anita moved ahead of Stig by seven points...

Nitro Nationals

The FHRA's Nitro Nationals in July at Alastaro, Finland was rained out just before the semi-finals; Liam Jones was set to race Stefan Gunnarsson and Stig Neergaard was going to meet Anita Mäkelä. Stig's 4.17 pole position gave the Dane a slim one point lead over Finland's Anita Mäkelä in the FIA championship. Ten years after he first licensed at Alastaro in one of Rune Fjeld's Top Fuel rent-a-rides, Janne Ahonen was back in the saddle again, qualifying second with a 4.18, only to go down to Liam Jones in round one

Okay it's the 2015 Finals at Santa Pod, not Tierp. But it's Stig (you can see the bullet hole on the wing), up-in-smoke and definitely having all sorts of Nitro related power issues, and some psychedelic problems too!



Up-in-smoke early, Janne Ahonen hit it again, went sideways and shut it off.

Click the link and crank it up (mcSnip courtesy [JENT Motorsport Video @ YouTube](#))

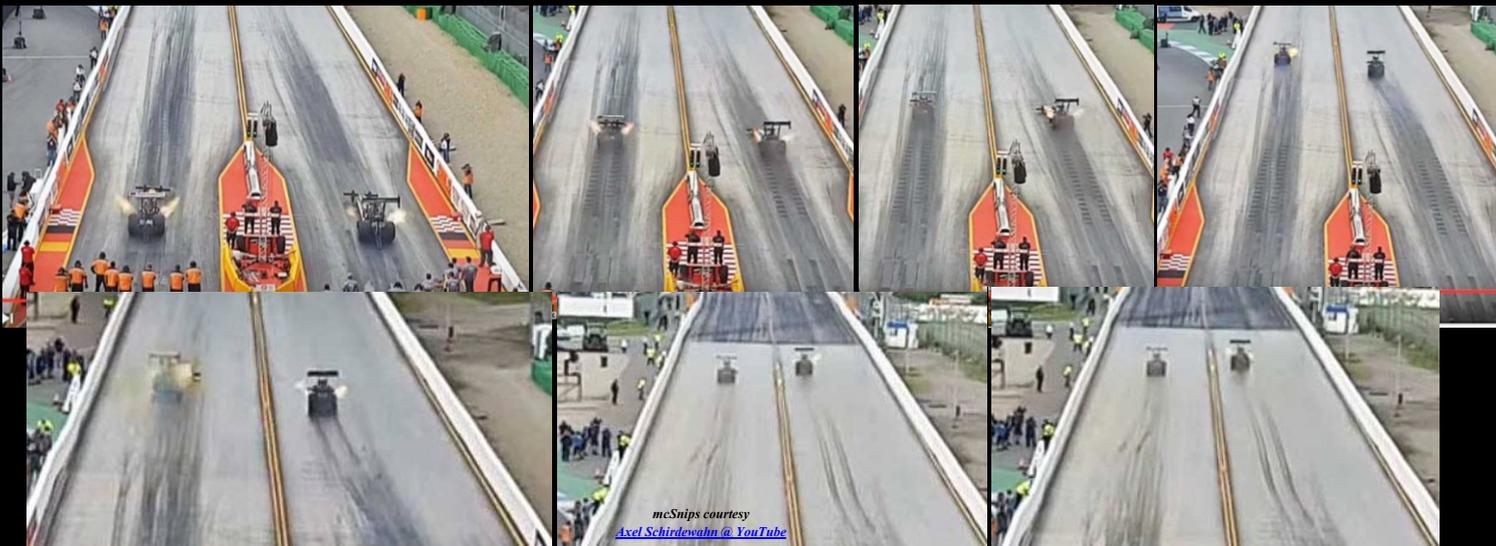
NitrOlympX

In August at Hockenheim's NitrOlympix in Germany, Saturday qualifying was once again rained out with Stig Neergaard's 4.05 taking pole over Liam Jones 4.17. Anita Mäkelä was fourth, but she made her move in round one, sending the NitrOlympix fans nuts with the first three second pass in Germany, a great way to debut her new-look fueler. Although Urs Erbacher got the hole shot, Anita Mäkelä drove on by to a 3.962 at 299.25mph. Micke Kågered's 4.15 led all the way over a tyre-shaking Liam Jones and, with only five cars, pole-sitter Stig Neergaard had a bye-run, giving fans a strong burnout, clicking off just after launching and then idled through. In the semi's Stig got a hole shot to give Anita a race, but she powered by, the Eye of the Storm went bang and Anita Mäkelä gave fans a set of threes, a quicker 3.93 at 302.55mph to set the stadium rocking. Having a bye run, Micke Kågered once again took the realistic option, taking the green and cruising through.

There was no cruising in the finals, just good hard racing as Micke K got a slight hole shot, swapping leads all the way before Anita won an exciting pedal fest - click the link and enjoy Axel Schirdewahn's film of the snips below, it reminds you that big numbers aren't needed to make a great drag race! And that Top Fuel pedal fests are a wonderful way of feeling the ground shake...



mcSnip courtesy [SantaPodTV](#)



mcSnips courtesy
[Axel Schirdewahn @ YouTube](#)



Scandinavian Internationals

According to the eurodragster.com race report (presented by John Woolfe racing), it was raining so hard on the opening day of racing that a lighthouse was set up "at the end of the shutdown area to warn shipping away." Gotta admit, that fuel car looks kinda water-logged and the tractor does have the appearance of a tugboat! But at least the rubber duck was having fun! The next day was just wet and foggy, with racing put on hold due to poor visibility – understandable really, at 300mph it helps to see where you're heading! The weather improved and apparently by the time Swedish legend Monica Öberg opened Top Fuel qualifying it was warm and sunny, but she had problems and clicked it off early. Unlike the Maltese Lion, who roared back to the FIA tour in style after a brief break - paired alongside Finland's Timo Lehtimäki, both cars gave fans what they wanted, launching hard with sheets of NitroFire filling the air. Timo had problems and clicked off early, while Duncan Micallef thundered down track to a blistering 3.91 at 304mph, thrilling fans and his crew with new PB marks. Up next, Björn Mårtensson and Stefan Gunnarsson both had problems after launching, while Micke Kågered got a tad further before his BAHCO Tools steed gave it up. Alongside, Liam Jones was mixing cylinders all the way, but hung on long enough to run a 4.03. Then it was time for fun and games in the fast lane as the two FIA title chasers came to the line, with Anita losing reverse and having to be pushed back old-school style after her burnout. Like the true sportsman that he is, Stig waited, Anita staging quickly, also as you'd expect, and the race was on - NitroFire rent the air with Stig visibly ahead at the tree...

Top Fuel qualifying mcSnips courtesy [Chris Hobson @ YouTube](https://www.youtube.com/user/ChrisHobson)



...then the world's quickest chicken farmer's car arched up and thundered past, only to lose a blower belt, Stig blasting by in the lights with a 3.97 at 297, Anita a click behind with a stout 4.01 at a slowing 237. The drag racers lamented to mind, "could've, would've and should've..."

Q2 saw Micke Kågered improve to a 4.69 at 282, but only one car made a full pull, Anita Mäkelä storming to the second spot with a 3.969, again clicked off to 261.84. Andy Marrs, Eurodragster's "stats guru" said this was the first time we'd had three fuel cars run sub 4-second ET's which is pretty cool. But that record was short lived. Most of the nine cars that answered the call for Q3 ran in double figures, but Micke Kågered improved from a 4.69 to 4.31 and Duncan Micallef ran an 8.11 - quicker than his earlier number of 8.61, but a country mile away from his 3.91 pole! Going into Q3 Stefan Gunnarsson had only made one pass, an 8.32 in Q1, and with a 7.26 bump spot he was on the outside looking in. But then he thundered, blasting out NitroFire from wire-to-wire, going from the outhouse to the penthouse with a mighty 3.900 to take over pole at 307.93mph! So fans now had four cars running in the threes, more than just cool that was kinda awesome...



Micke K ran double digits during Q4 along with a pair of nines and Stig fireballed to an eight, but there were full pulls. Anita Mäkelä ran a rapid 3.95 at 306.61mph, then the pole-sitter came to the line, taking the most dramatic trip down track thus far. Stefan ran alongside the Maltese Lion, but Duncan's RMF car was soon up in smoke, the yellow car thundering ahead, suddenly exploding in a huge fireball that Eurodragster said "was big enough that the car disappeared behind it"! It's awesome action, and as you can see in my Snips the "Wow" factor is right up there - and Stefan still ran a stunning 3.917, slowing to 271mph - imagine what the numbers might've been without the fireball!! Wow, NitroThunder indeed! God willing an' the cr'k don't rise, it seemed that race day would prove more than a little entertaining – it was the penultimate round of the season and the points lead was at stake!



Eurodragster reported a "beautiful morning," with "lots of sun" putting smiles on the faces of happy race fans, but for nitroholics the bad news was that only seven cars answered the call, and five of 'em went up in smoke! This included the Maltese Lion who, when Timo Lehtimäki did not answer the call, had a bye run to open eliminations – and smoked 'em! But that's drag racing! In the first pair both cars slowed, but Stefan Gunnarsson hit the throttle one more time, cruising through to take the win light with a 6.41 to Björn Mårtensson's 15.37. Anita Mäkelä added another 300mph, 3-second pass, a 3.98 at 303.65 in driving around Micke Kågered and then Liam Jones' event went up-in-smoke at the hit while Stig Neergaard moved on with a clicked off 4.10. Things were tad different in the second round when Stefan Gunnarsson red-lit, handing the win to an up-in-smoke Stig Neergaard! Duncan Micallef left on Anita Mäkelä, but once again tyre smoke ended his race. Anita took the win with a 4.09 at 288 making for a great shootout between the championship chasers in the final round...

If not for the dude in the beige jacket and the trio of fine looking American cars, it could be the start of their Q1 shootout – but trust me, it is the Top Fuel final!



Stig Neergaard put a tenth on Anita at the green, but her NitroFire-powered, nose-high launch showed she was charging hard...



mcSnips courtesy
Chris Hobson's Top Fuel final @ YouTube



...more than just charging, Anita Mäkelä thundered past, putting a car length on Stig and the race was won - then her engine quit!



Click the link and enjoy Chris Hobson's 25second mini-clip of this race on YouTube

Yep, a wire-to-wire replay of their Q1 shootout and that kinda luck's tough even by the harsh standards in Top Fuel! Click the link below and enjoy Chris Hobson's film on YouTube, it's packed with 3.51 minutes of Top Fuel highlights from the event.



Stig took the win with a 4.18 at a clicked off 284mph ahead of Anita's 4.7. Shortly later the rains came, so Top Fuel fans got lucky in that respect...

Although drag racing, especially blown an' injected on nitro, has always been a hard task master, the SHRA's Scandinavian Internationals showed j'st how fickle fate can be – but at least Anita didn't hit the Razor's Edge and go K'boom like the dudes below...



No matter how big your budget is NitroPower will blow it anytime, anyplace! Yeah, I know we're talking Top Fuel, but when I asked ol' Nitro Nostrils for a favourite shot I forgot to say TF. However, you must admit his shot of Robert Hight's JFR car really captures the essence of K'boom, as does Andy's shot of Timo Lehtimäki dumping it big time at Tierp last year. Ludwig Björnstad's seen fire ballin' his fuel car while running the first Norwegian five, a 5.95, during a match race with pioneering nitro legend Tom Hoover's Showtime fuel coupe at the Pod's 1987 World Finals. Tom told me later, "I saw he was going to blow, so I hit the chute early an' watched." From the best seat in the house! The full width image with reflected fire painting the side of the track has always been a personal favourite. Ludwig said it wasn't as expensive as it looks! But I believe Stig's 2015 k'boom when his input shaft let go at the Euro Finals was...

Celebrating 50 years of Nitro Thunder at Santa Pod Raceway

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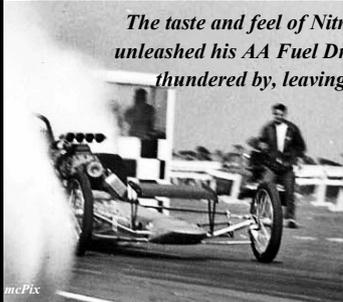
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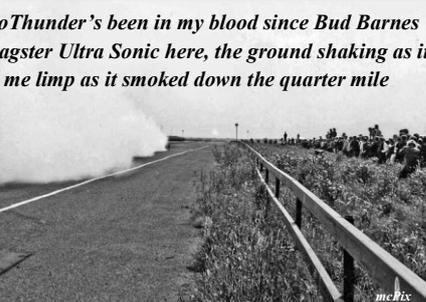


SANTA POD RACEWAY
LUBYSIL SUPER LUBRICANT

It's 50 years since fans stood waiting in the rain to watch Santa Pod's first nitro messiah Bud Barnes, seen receiving fans accolades after his AA/FD Ultra Sonic ran an 8.57ET on a solo pass (we had no speed clocks), but he did race the nitro-burning roadster Runt, also on the tour. We didn't have real toilets either, and for years this fact was the subject of complaint and ridicule. Today we have 'em in the plural, with those by the pit entrance used to promote "The UK's most action packed venue" – gaining more ridicule for product placement at its finest, and I j'st love it! And Santa Pod got into the "safe sex" game in Golden anniversary style – wonder how fast you'd need to go to "burn rubber" as the package suggests! Although I missed the first visit of the US Team, by the time Bob George returned with his drag racing circus in 1967 I was well and truly part of the Santa Pod family, firmly ensconced on the start line when Ultra Sonic made its first pass sporting a trendy new high rise front wing. Later I was stood alongside DragRod's John Bennett for some in y'face Nitro Thunder when he shot Bud Barnes on his record setting run of 8.47 at 189mph, once more on a solo pass! It was a natural for the 1968 advert from DragRod for our Special Match race, but again, let's not get ahead of the game...



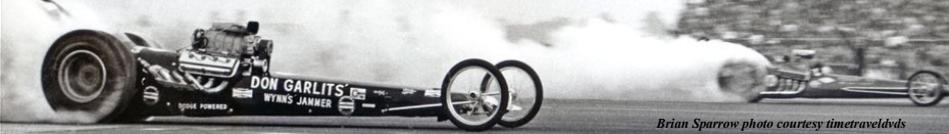
The taste and feel of Nitro Thunder's been in my blood since Bud Barnes unleashed his AA Fuel Dragster Ultra Sonic here, the ground shaking as it thundered by, leaving me limp as it smoked down the quarter mile



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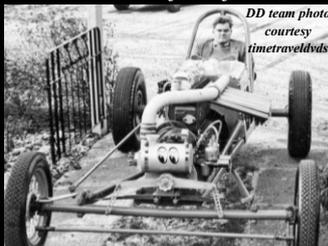


Soon after this, Don Garlits (23rd in a 32 car field at Indy), took a stunning 6.77, 220mph win at the 1967 US Nats, his first six, after which he shaved! Big went almost two seconds and 31mph faster than Ultra Sonic, and we've been having fun playing catch-up ever since! My year also ended on a high, taking a team of racers to Ramstein, including Bootsie, John Harrison and the Beadle Brothers with the new Motivation junior fueler, Harold Bull's Stripduster crewed by Pam and Derek Metcalfe (set a track record at 11.4), Pete Allen's blown Triumph and Ian Richardson's awesome Moonraker. And I got to race heads-up for "protest-money, the trophy and the title," winning Top Stocker in Tip Franklyn's GT500 over a 427 Chevy on a hole shot! Tip presented me his NHRA trophy and a red cap – far-out, especially as I'd screwed up racing Clive Skilton in it at the Pod! But, let's get back to the story...



Be sociable... have a Pepsi
DragFest '64 programme

In 1960 Sydney Allard read about Chris Karamesines' unique 204.54mph thunder run in his ChiZler AA/FD at Alton, Illinois, which resulted in his building the Allard slingshot, our first US style dragster. Its creation led ultimately to the 1964 DragFest's with the earth moving performance of the AA (blown and injected) Fuel Dragsters of "Big Daddy" Don Garlits (Low ET of 8.09 and Top Speed of 197 mph), and "TV" Tommy Ivo racing side-by-side and making a bunch of new fans. The logistics of that tour are mind boggling – as many races in three weekends as they run on the whole FIA tour!



A tale of two budgets! In 1964 Dragster Developments' blown Buick powered rail, now running sans front brakes thanks to the RAC's acceptance of dragsters – photographer Brain Sparrow in the hot seat outside the lock-up garage it was built in at a cost of £114,13s.3d! At that price, no wonder it blew up using nitro at the '64 DragFest's final Blackbushe race. Alongside it's the "factory built" Allard dragster with Sydney watching his son Alan driving to best ever 10.28ET – both cars were retired after that event. A thing of beauty then as now (shot in 2010 following restoration), it was replaced at the 1965 DragFest with an all-new Allard/Chrysler dragster using the old Potvin blown motor in a longer, modern-style stainless steel chassis. Alan won rounds, tipped the can and was the first Englishman (and British built dragster), to run a single digit ET- a best of 9.3 and 168mph. He also set an FIA record of 9.37 the next year. DD's new Cadillac powered Pulsation (above right at the '65 DragFest), raced the Allard/Chrysler in the first round, but the Allard's 9.71 at 167mph was too much for Pulsation's 12.94 at 138mph. Bootsie ran a best of 11.2, 138mph that year.



In 1967 the Allard/Chrysler only ran at London's Crystal Palace and became the Allard/Skilton in 1968, with Alan seen giving instructions to new shoe Clive Skilton prior to his first outing at Santa Pod. He learned well, winning the advertised Match Race when Commuter failed to answer the call, with a best ever ET of 9.13 and 163.4mph Top Speed of the meet, before going elimination racing as mentioned earlier. In 1969 Clive joined the modern set, putting a top mounted blower on the Allard/Skilton dragster - the car's performance didn't improve at all, but they still won the BDR&HRA Championship with a 9.56 at 156mph. Now let's shift gears, and go take an in-depth look at the final Top Fuel race of the season, hoping for some 3-second, 300mph action...

FIA Euro Finals



But first, a 1320 intro to the 2016 season finale - my choice has long been Saturday qualifying as, generally, you get to see the fuel cars run twice, and there's always the chance of some real NitroFire as seen in an all-time favourite shot of Timo Lehtimäki making the final Q pass down Santa Pod's quarter mile in 2011. Forget pin-sharp, think pure NitroThunder - unleashed on a truly magical run that all we quarter mile nitroholics cherish to this day.



words & photos
mike collins

Risto Poutianen's last night time full-pull down the 1320, 4.91, 293.22 in Rune Fjeld's Bad to the Bone car (at left), had more power, but neither was as mind-blowing as Batman's legendary 2014 Friday night thunder run, a 4.03 at 315.51mph, the fastest short track speed outside the USA, and he pedalled it, as you can see in the Snips below of that awesome run.

The Karsten and Pers Andersen car went even faster on race day! All the clips are short, so click the links above (those on the snip below don't work!), and relive some stunning NitroFire from those Q sessions, including Chris Andrews' 3.97 in the Lucas Oil car, the first by a Brit. You can check out that amazing weekend in my [September Showdown](#) feature on the race.



"Would've, could've and should've" has long been the drag racers lament - but it was certainly true on this run



As you can see from the second Snip, Batman had to pedal it, the brief lose of power and momentum sufficient enough to help lose a three perhaps! And for the Maltese Lion to play catch up - until his engine began eating itself, the car slowing to a 4.11 at 279.45 mcSnip strip courtesy [No5antapodhoater](#)

Before the 2016 Euro Finals, Santa Pod sent an email suggesting "possible rain showers" on the Saturday and offered me the chance to exchange my tickets for either Friday or Sunday... As I knew it was going to piss down, it was a no brainer - Sunday was fine with me for this weekend, especially with the title race so close! Forget the Friday night show, just like 2015, I knew that the Q session would be delayed - and this turned out to be the case yet again when they brought out the dancing girls! Then "adverse track conditions" helped provide a surplus of AA awesome NitroFire super-farts with a total lack of full pulls, but as the place was once again packed I guess the fans don't care so long as they get to smell and feel that NitroThunder! Maybe they consider any resulting big number as a bonus, and that's cool 'cos they are supporting the sport! Six cars made it out for Q1, and they all had problems except Stig Neergaard who came close to a full pull, grabbing a couple of points for his second place 4.08 at 282.18. Oh, and Liam Jones, who made his best ever pass, running a set of threes off-the-trailer, a 3.98 at 306.91mph to also claim his first pole. And he was leader of the pack again during the Friday night session with a 4.11 that had better numbers to half track - then his blower belt came off! But you know that Rune, Liam and the team were over the moon with their performance. Other than that, it was mainly the aforementioned display of NitroPower on a chilly track, but at least fans got to enjoy the sounds and fury of NitroFire at the hit, and until the cars got tyre shake, went up in smoke or were clicked off. Second quickest was Tethys' 5.18 at 145.70mph. And Stig Neergaard was once again ahead of his Championship rival with a 7.27 at 83.19 over Anita Mäkelä's 8.17, 80.22, not what either of them hoped for. But it wasn't their fault racing was delayed a tad too long once again, or as it was put so succinctly on the RMF site "It got late before it started, and the track was 58 degrees F. Too cold for most cars..."

Seems my arrival on Sunday was too early for the Auto Glym girls, so I just drove on through, parking up alongside some bangers being cooked, the aroma sending me straight off to enjoy a leisurely breakfast at the Pit Stop café. I turned left 90 minutes later, and almost walked into the ever smiling Duncan Micallef, ready to rumble with his Manta fuel car out of Rune Fjeld's NitroCorral, so it seemed I'd missed all the Top Fuel warm-ups!



2016 mcSnips courtesy
SantaPodTV@YouTube



Great start, then its lights out on the left lane!



No problem, I was well fed an' ready for racing, and as all the fuelers were being pushed down the pairing lanes maybe an 11am race time was really on the cards!



Bootsie boilin' the hides
Asphalt Archives Photographer unknown



Good to see Eurodragster sponsor Urs Erbacher's delightful daughter Jindia out with her A/FD at the Pod, and it was easy to wish 'em both good luck as I walked on by



Anita Mäkelä was thrilled when her kids arrived unexpected, and her greeting from a still jubilant Liam Jones put smiles on team member's faces too



It was cool to see Tommi relaxed and happy, with Anita responding to fans high in the stands, the smile getting broader when she heard the call from some Finnish fans



Then it seemed everyone woke to the fact they were going racing, kicked down a gear and moved along kinda rapidly, with Anita's crewman gloved up, ready for work and stepping out in style



Brian Sparrow photo courtesy timetravelds.

Dennis Priddle set to push the first dragster he drove, Tony Gane's 1966 Championship winning Wicked Lady. It's a far cry from his last ride (left), or those of today's title seekers!



Photo courtesy Britool



A beaming Steve Ashdown and Tethys almost mowed me down, looking happy to be back in the saddle, obviously hoping to improve on their troubled Q sessions. The Undertaker's crewman was also beaming, as was Tethys in the cool of his umbrella, but it was too much like a traffic jam!



Brian Sparrow Pix courtesy timetravelds.



British drag racing Pioneer Nobby Hills stands waiting in line behind his Houndog rail in 1966, showing some things never change, and he's also wearing his flip-flops!

Then I was gifted with my own smile from Anita and Tommi, wished 'em luck and headed off to grab a fresh top-up on my beverage and take a quick comfort break. On the way back it was easy to pause alongside the Commuter, just like paying my respects to an old friend from back in the day...



A young Antony B donned my crash-helmet in 1968, refurbished the Commuter in 1996, having taken over from his dad Peter Billinton as Mr G-Max - it looks good behind Rico A's injectors. Always loved the cockpit stripes, the car and the nitro!





Ron Fisher photo
courtesy timetravelvids

If you've ever visited Malta, you'll know it's a very religious island, and when I first met Duncan it was easy to ask when his prayers were made, "Every time before I run," he'd told me with a grin. "And d'you say thank you afterwards?" I'd asked him with a chuckle. His grin had widened even more as he'd laughed and said "always, after each run, no matter what!" Positive thinking indeed.



By the time I'd returned the racers were getting ready to rumble, Anita and Tommi taking a quiet moment while Steve Ashdown was being kitted out in his safety gear. It's a far cry from that worn by Mick Ticker back in 1968 – and so's Geronimo's roll bar, cockpit and its pie-crust slicks!



From Tommi & Anita's Facebook, maybe it's that cameraman doing his job!

Anita and Tommi's quiet was long gone, with an in y'face cameraman looming as she prepared to climb into her car in search of a second FIA Top Fuel title, and a few more with long lens by her tow-truck all searching for that special image. Liam and his crew were just laughing quietly as he was suited up

Liam had been positively glowing when he'd told me about his first set of threes, "The buzz of driving is awesome, but the best thing ever mate is y'come back here and everybody's goin' mental an' it's f*ckin' awesome," his grin growing broader as he added, "There's no feelin' like it, honestly it's like bein' a f*ckin' rock star," laughing out loud as he added, "And there's no feelin' like that, it was j'st brilliant..."

Liam had shook his head, lost for words for longer than it took him to run new personal bests, his first three's, 3.98 at 306.91mph and a first pole position, so I added, "They did tell me you were over the moon..."

He was still shaking his head, adding with a chuckle, "As I say, there's no feeling like it, it's absolutely," Liam's face lit up again before saying, "Mike, it was j'st awesome, absolutely the best feeling on the planet!"

All I could think of was, "Well, I'm glad you enjoyed it, good luck in the next one..."



As Liam made to slide into the cockpit, a crewman was tightening his RFM team mate Duncan's safety harness up, the tighter the better to ensure a safe journey down track, and in the event of any mishap.



Three of the four cars in this shot are Rune's, and sometimes I ponder his thoughts in the quiet before his RFM NitroCorral goes racing!



When I do, my thoughts are always the same, "Thanks Rune, you help keep our Top Fuel racing great!"



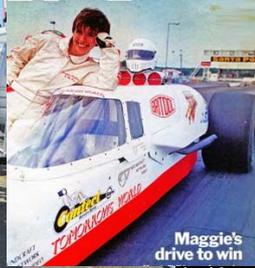
DragRod JB Pix

In August of 1968 we finally got our first green light AA/FD race, the Battle of the Giants, Tudor Rose's 8.87 (left), taking the win over Commuter's out-of-shape and clicked off 10.12. Both cars ran 146.84mph! Doubt if we'd get anything that weird, but we'd definitely have a few one-horse races from our far more powerful Top fuel cars



It must be tough getting to race a Top Fuel car only once in a season! But chance'd be a fine thing, so I stopped off to wish Tethys all the best again, 'cos I'm told that every little bit really does help!

RadioTimes



Maggie's drive to win

We all know that those rear wings help get a Top Fuel car's power down. But in 1983 a Tomorrow's World boffin suggested one wasn't required, and Dennis Priddle was asked to test out the theory. The car made the front cover of the BBC's Radio Times with presenter Maggie Philbin, but as you can see from my shots below things didn't quite work out, the car acting like it was on ice! Click the link to see how Dennis' and Gerry Andrews' driving skills averted what could've been a serious incident. It's a wild ride indeed! Later Dennis ran a straight, 6- second, 230 mph pass, and then he put the wing back! But the enclosed cockpit and engine bay's cool, and maybe even aerodynamic!

The rear wings create 8,000lbs of down force and really do work, but they need to be balanced with those f-a-t front spoilers that are meant to keep the front end kissing close to the track. Get it right and a driver can often get his Top Fuel car's 8000+ horsepower down with no problem...



Photo by Andy Willheer



Rico Anthes contemplates his good fortune!

In 2009 Lex Joon's team got it wrong and ol' Nitro Nostrils captured this in y'face wheel stand! Worse for Lex, he red-lit, giving the race to Smax Smith in a battle of FIA Top Fuel champions. The Top Fuel wheel stand – and flip-over came from Rich Anthes' in 1993, I'd heard two fuel cars launching from the main gate, but moments later only one pair of 'chutes came into view – oops!



DrugRod JB Pix



Colin Underhill photo courtesy timetraveldiv

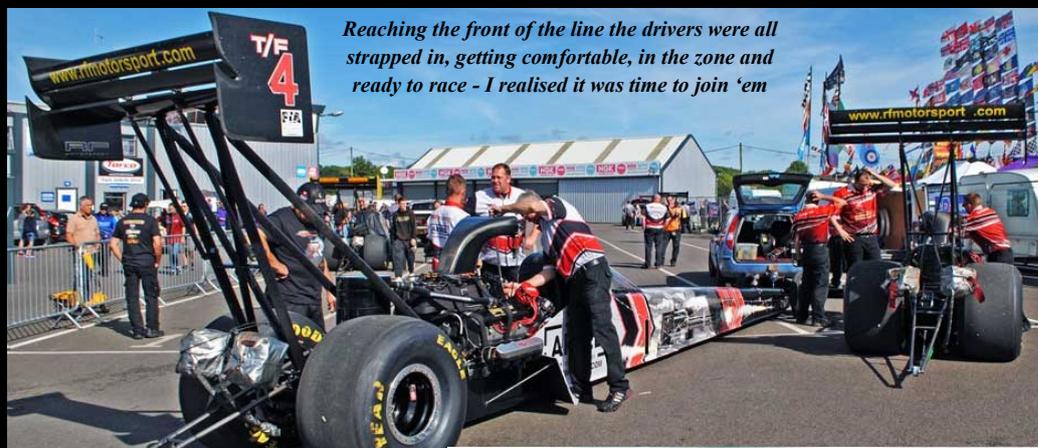
Bootsie's 1966 open helmet and nitro mask with a nose flap show just how far our driver's safety equipment has come in 50 years!

What a difference between Stig and Urs' 21st century kit and the fire suit and shoes worn for Tudor Rose in 1968!



I've always enjoyed Stig's paint job, and his Eye of the Storm's team shirts are just superb, they're totally over-the-top and we fans j'st love 'em for it!

Reaching the front of the line the drivers were all strapped in, getting comfortable, in the zone and ready to race - I realised it was time to join 'em



Dennis Priddle drove the Sluggett & Priddle Tudor Rose to victory at Sweden's inaugural "Big Go" at Anderstorp in 1968 with his first 8-second ET's the same day Tony Densham ran his first pair in Commuter at the Pod! Prid's best was 8.53, TD's an 8.45 at 180.83mph

The difference between the Sluggett & Priddle Tudor Rose AA/FD from 1968 and the long, skinny 21st century Top Fuel cars above is quite stunning. Today, just a wisp of smoke usually sees a car lose, back then fuel cars often smoked the whole quarter mile!



Gifted by Rex Sluggett
Photographer unknown



50 years on with fans packing both sides of the track, I was getting comfortable in the sold out stands, totally blown away by the size of the crowd. With eight Top Fuel cars ready set to do battle, it was easy to wonder if we'd see any side-by-side full pulls!

Smiling quietly amongst the largest crowd I'd seen in many a moon at the Pod, thinking that it really is a long, long time from May to September, especially if you're a fan of Nitro fueled racing!



Then they fired the first pair, eight trunks trumpeting, the sound of thunder filling the air and the race for the FIA title was on, with Anita Mäkelä having to maintain her position to win the title while Stig had to go one step beyond! Anita got the ball rolling with her short, sharp burnout, pounding the ground for the VIP's, husband and crew chief Tommi Haapanen walking slowly alongside, checking the sound and feel of the engine as the car got up on the tyre, smoking into the view of the thousands of fans filling the banking to capacity.



Photo by Wojtek

Steve Ashdown was close behind and I thought, "Wow, here we go..."

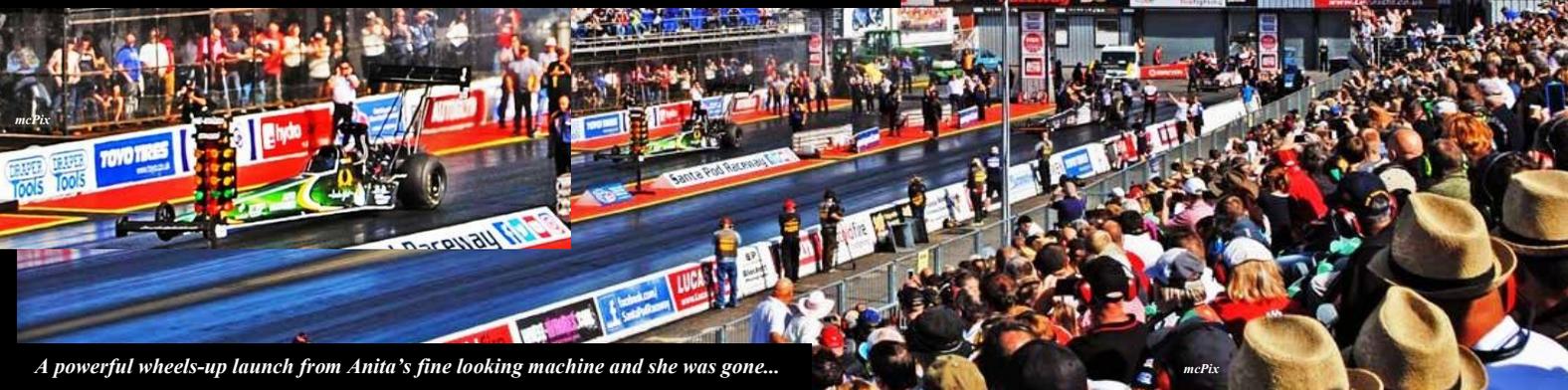


Photo by Wojtek



Photo by Wojtek

It was cool to see Anita's daughter Hannah backing the car up through the haze still floating above the packed banking, but very sad when the Undertaker's engine suddenly went quiet. Eurodragster reported that "car owner and tuner Rune Fjeld looked absolutely mystified." You j'st know Steve and the crew were gutted after qualifying second and going rounds at the Main Event! But drag racing can be a totally humbling sport – in an instant!



A powerful wheels-up launch from Anita's fine looking machine and she was gone...

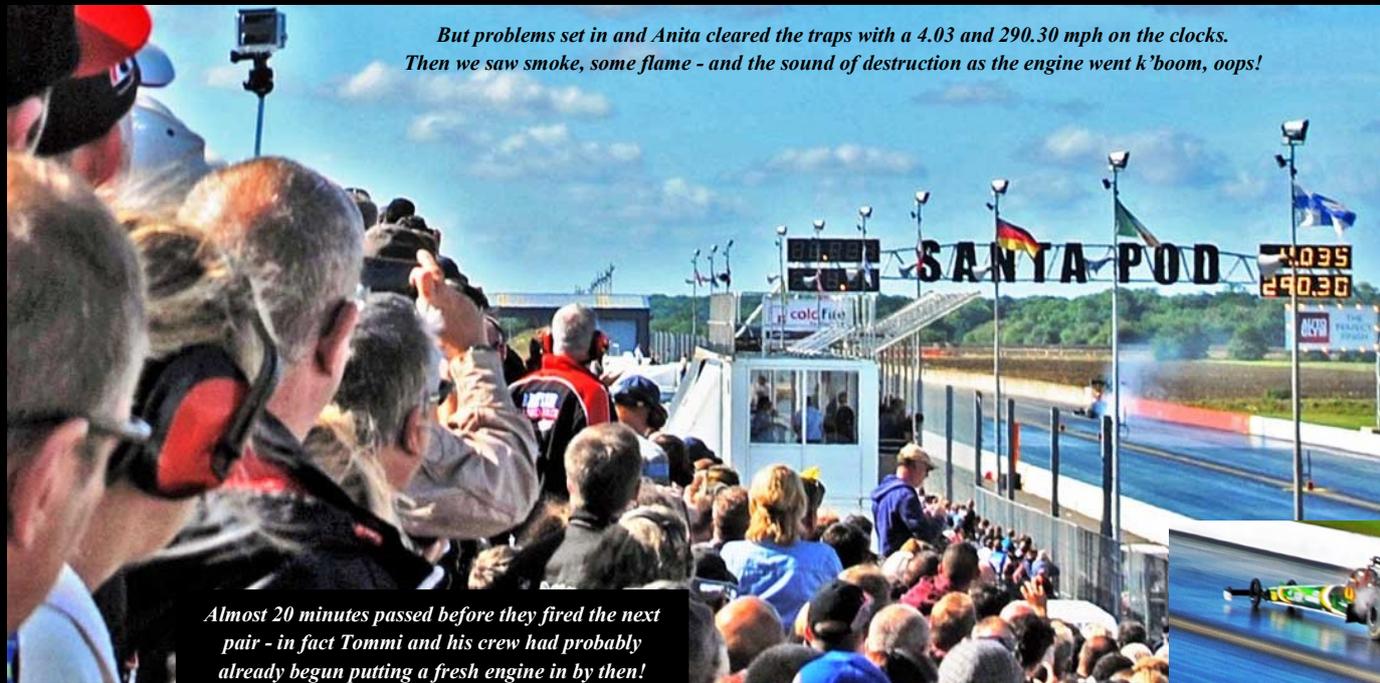


Photo by Wojtek



Anita thrilled fans packing both sides of the track, trailing the sweet scent of NitroPower as she thundered by. The car stayed hooked up, really "booking it down the road" as say in Noo Joisey With the orange marker post in sight, Anita's Northern Lights car was arched up, her rear slicks growing tall

But problems set in and Anita cleared the traps with a 4.03 and 290.30 mph on the clocks. Then we saw smoke, some flame - and the sound of destruction as the engine went k'boom, oops!



Almost 20 minutes passed before they fired the next pair - in fact Tommi and his crew had probably already begun putting a fresh engine in by then!



If I'm going to stay stuck up in the stands, then it's definitely time to get myself a big gun like ol' Nitro Nostrils and Wojtek!



Liam Jones was next into the arena, his car making much noise as the media gang all went for some smoke-laden, in y'face shots



And so did Wojtek, with Gary Page already backing Liam up along the sticky rubber in search of maximum traction for the launch when Duncan Micallef's Manta car shook the VIPs silly with his power, smoking rapidly beyond the tree. Then they both backed up behind the start line and the crew went to work on the slicks as the crew chiefs dove into their engine management systems



Photo by Wojtek



Manta car owner and tuner Rune Fjeld looked across to see if Liam's team were ready, making a final adjustment before walking away as the pair of RMF cars staged



Photo by Wojtek

Duncan's Manta car was 0.022seconds ahead at the green, but Liam Jones hiked the front end and seemed to be charging...





Photo by Wojtek



...Liam might even have been gaining as Duncan drove the Manta car through some tyre shake, but then Liam's ARXELL machine also shook, smoking 'em big time and making a move towards the wall!



Photo by Wojtek

mcPix



Although Liam's car got back up on the tyre, the Maltese Lion was thundering away

mcPix



Then Liam's ride smoked and shook some more, seemingly going backwards and starting to make a move as the Manta car drifted left towards the centre line

mcPix

Liam pedalled it again, getting back on the power and leaving some heavy black stripes behind, the left one fatter than the other, the car making a hard move to the right. It was later discovered that Liam's rear axle broke and dumped oil under the left wheel...



Photo by Wojtek

The Manta car continued to thunder away, Liam got his car straight again but soon gave up the chase, Duncan clearing the traps with new PB's and a track ET record of 3.89 at 311.99mph, a lifetime ahead of Liam's cruising 5.64 at 118.85.



mcPix

NitroThunder indeed, the fans showed their appreciation, most of 'em with a tad more reserve than my whoops and hollers, much like the Santa Pod fans I'd shot at the NHRA's California Hot Rod Reunion in 2015. Click it to see some side-by-side Nostalgia Nitro action photos in a feature called NitroFever!



mcPix

Asphalt Archives
Photographer unknown



Photo by Wojtek

But that was their problem, right now I was up for more NitroThunder as the next pair of fuelers shook the ground with their burnouts, which in the 21st century make less of a smoke screen than our 1970s Top Fuel cars despite being far more powerful! Peter Crane (above), was credited with running the first European 5-second ET whilst racing "Big Daddy" Don Garlits at Santa Pod in 1976 at the track's 10th Anniversary meeting



However, the ground shakes a whole lot more today and the NitroPower taste's much stronger!



Photo by Wojtek



Photo by Wojtek



mcPix

Despite pulling ahead the defending FIA Champion needed every inch of his hole shot before the race was done!

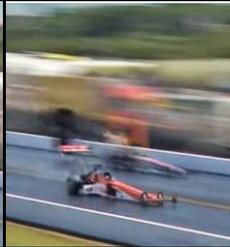
Micke Kägered hole shot Tethys by better than a tenth of a second!

Sadly my Nikon's images went wobbly after its green light shot, but thanks to SantaPodTV @ YouTube these snips show you some of the excitement...



Micke K still has the lead here, but Tethys is getting closer with both cars mixing cylinders

Then Tet's rent-a-racer arched up and it started to thunder just as the BAHCO car had more problems...



And then Tethys took the lead, only to start mixing cylinders, dropping his chute as Micke K's motor kicked back to life and he blasted pass to win – just!

Well it might've been a Pedal Fest, and maybe not what you'd call full pulls, but when two cars are racing wire-to-wire and the finish is that close, it's definitely NitroThunder at its best! You might notice a dark shape on the side of the BAHCO car – it lost some body panels, but Micke K still got the win, his 4.36 at 264.69 just nipping Tethys' 4.35, the early chute deployment slowing him to only 208.88. And it was definitely one of those would've, should've, could've runs, but Micke K's hole shot gave him a close win.

Then we had a championship-critical race, with Stig needing to win to stay in contention! Both cars came close to making side-by-side burnouts, but close only works in horseshoe challenges!

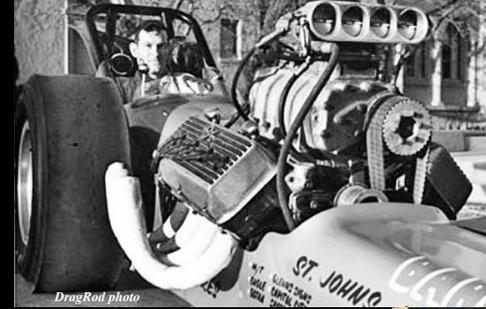


But then horseshoes only make a sweet sound when they strike the stake and make a ringer! Top Fuel cars sound sweet no matter what they're doing and when they get those huge rear slicks churning and a burning, the ground shakes, women grow weak at the knees and grown men have been known to weep!



Stig's burnout felt stronger, and his smoke trail on the track had more power than Urs, but with short track racing burnouts just don't seem to mean as much...





DragRod photo



Photo by Wojtek



With the cars backing up it's a perfect chance to see the amazing difference between 1966 hero Bud Barnes' Ultra Sonic AA/FD and today's slick, back-motored thunder-cars. Heck, Stig's paint job looks more powerful than Barnes' hemi, and when you put it alongside Urs motor, it looks naked-wow! Now let's go racing, with Stig's championship hopes on the line...



Photo by Wojtek



Photo by Wojtek



mcPix

Urs had a slight 0.0383 hole shot at the green...



Photo by Wojtek

...but started mixing it up a tad and Stig moved on by as they passed the tree



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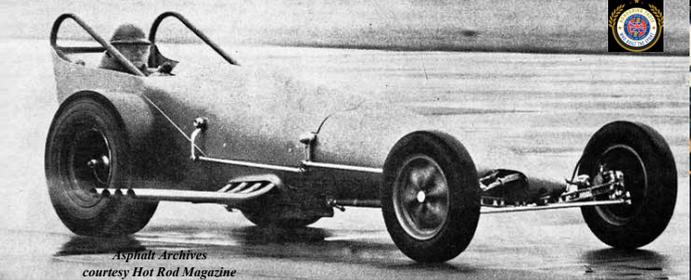
Then Urs flamed back up and moved ahead...



...until he had to pedal it while Stig got up and thundered, taking the win to keep his title hopes alive with a 4.05 at 292.01, Urs trailing with a troubled 4.44 at 247.93



Then the teams went back to work, preparing their cars for the next race, which gives me a chance for some more retro reminiscing from the Pod's first decade, and our racing roots...



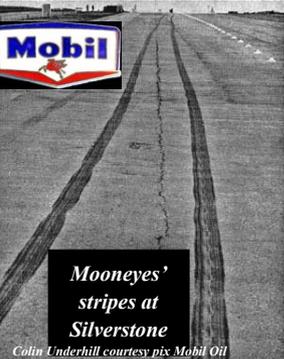
Asphalt Archives courtesy Hot Rod Magazine

When this wet-track image of Sydney Allard making a test run appeared in the March 1962 Hot Rod Magazine it was seen by Dante Duce in Las Vegas, prompting him to telephone and challenge Mr Allard to a race - it was readily accepted. Shortly later, Dean Moon's blown and injected gas dragster Mooneyes and team landed in the UK with backing from the Revell model company. First stop, Silverstone for a media demonstration with Mooneyes, the Allard, Tony Densham's Worden, Bootsie's DD Buick and the show began... Mooneyes showed 'em power, smoking down the Club Straight to a 9.25 at 166.6, the first single digit ET outside the USA, sadly the Allard had problems



Photo by Wojtek

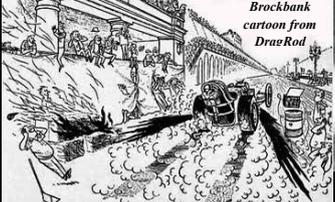
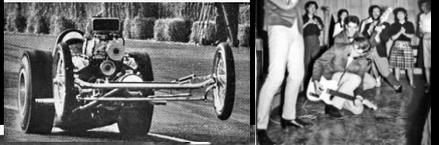
Tommi and the crew are busy rebuilding, and Anita looks ready to rumble



Mooneyes' stripes at Silverstone
Colin Underhill courtesy pix Mobil Oil

Next up was the Brighton Speed trials and Mickey Thompson, already a drag racing legend, crashed the party with his Harvey Aluminum Special AA/FD. MT told officials they were doing it wrong, Mooneyes set fire to the straw bales - and they were not allowed to race! It would've been cool to see MT's wild wheels-up pass, but I was finishing off on a rock an' roll tour of the Far East and kinda busy - having fun! You can catch the tour's action on [timetravelvids](#) number 10 - with an audio sound track on the film of this awesome race!

BRIGHTON SPEED TRIALS



Brockbank cartoon from DragRod



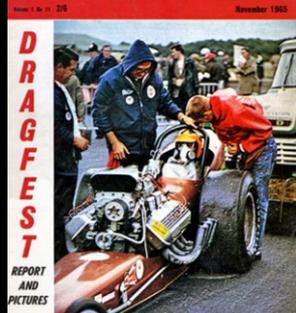
Colin Underhill photo courtesy timetravelvids

Mick Wheeler photo courtesy timetravelvids

The final stop at Debden wasn't meant to be for the public, but they came in their droves and saw NitroThunder unleashed for the first time in the UK - in a race! Dean Moon gave a flag start, Dante Duce took a hole shot with Mooneyes, but Mickey T had tipped the can, quickly passing the screaming small block Chevy to run a smoke-laden, ground shaking 8.84 at 178mph. MT also suggested he ran a half mile in search of 250mph, an offer that was politely declined!

For the 1965 DragFest the US Drag Race team had eight AA/FDs! It rained at Blackbushe (right), yet Buddy Cortines set low ET and Top Speed with an 8.78 at 179mph! Could you even imagine "driving" a blown, injected fuel car to 179mph? Not just in the wet, but with spray-filled vision and the seat of your pants telling you the car's straight - and you have to guess where to pull the chute! Happily, Woodvale was dry the next weekend, Danny Ongais ran a 7.99, the UK's first such pass, and a 7.91 on our first 200 mph run. Then Buddy Cortines went quicker (below), with a 7.83 at 200 and a 7.86, winning the event with a thundering 7.74 at 201 mph! Awesome stuff indeed, but I bet he remembered the wet ride more though! Click and enjoy...

BRITISH DRAG RACING

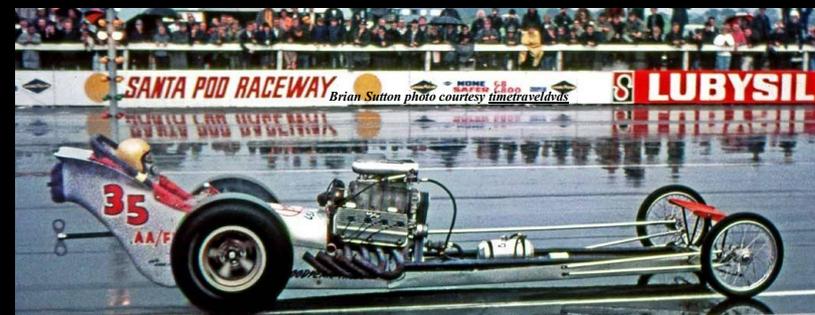


Ron Bailey courtesy timetravelvids

At right it's Bootsie's nitro fueled Pulsation let loose on the Pod's wet track back in 1966's crazy days



DragRod JB Pix



John Bennett DragRod photo

Bud Barnes is seen hanging on in the wet in 1967 Ultra Sonic, which was cool to see, but obviously we all preferred it when the track dried for some real smoke and thunder! The run at right I remember well, the Keith Black hemi sounded strong and Tudor Rose looked good as Rex Sluggett got up on the tyre, launching hard at the 1968 BDR&HRA Championship event. Out of shape early, he clicked off to a 12.95 at 73.42mph! None of those wet runs at the Pod came even close to Buddy Cortines' awesome 8.78, 179mph pass at Blackbush, but TimeTravel DVDs can take you back to enjoy it! Just love the cool image snipped from Ron Bailey's movie on drag racing at Blackbushe and Santa Pod, 1965-'68, it's JB getting down to take the shot of Tudor Rose above.

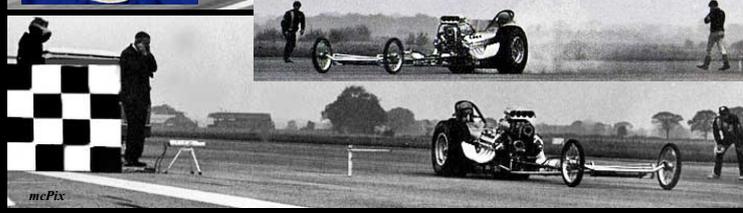


At that race, Rex Sluggett again red lit against Commuter, Tony Densham won with an 8.52 at 167 over Rex's 8.69 – our first pair of eights, and the fans went nuts! Then Dennis Priddle hole shot TD's 8.83 to win with an 8.88 in our second green light AA/FD race - actually, it was the only side-by-side full pull race of the season! Yep, even in those halcyon days it was tough to get a pair of fuel cars to run right and stay together, so what chance has today's fuel car pilot with far more power, and less space to use it all in! At right it's the final, and Tony Densham red lit this time, clicking off as Prid' ran an 8.46 at 171.23, just 1/1,000ths of a second slower than TD's 8.459 track record, but both were now quicker than Ultra Sonic. Click the link to check out those races, and Rex Sluggett's wet runs, they're all seen at the end of Nick Pettitt's first ever Time Travel DVD produced from slides and cine film by Ron Bailey.



John Bennett DragRod photo

Later in the year, the Tudor Rose team went to Elvington for the FIA World Record event to take on the Commuter's year old mark of 8.91seconds. Initially they had problems with a blown oil filter, but FIA officials were extremely helpful, allowing time for the delivery of a case of Wynn's before they had to make a run.

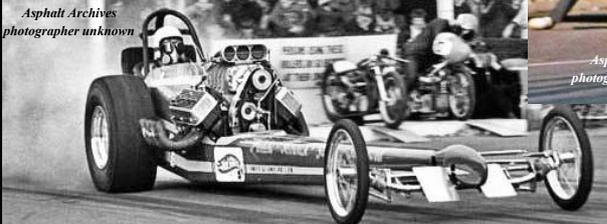


Prid sat snug in the leather bound cockpit and staged Tudor Rose, but there was no Christmas tree, just a signal from a time keeper, then you went when you were ready! Tudor Rose launched hard, but unlike runs at the Pod there was no smoke! The car just thundered down track, breaking the timing beam 8.291 seconds later. After twenty minutes, the big Keith Black Chrysler had cooled down and staged to make the return run, launching with a three inch halo of smoke encasing the slicks the whole quarter mile to an 8.301 - the FIA World Record was theirs, officially set at a two way average of 8.296!

Their engine was torn down for FIA ratification, the team returned to the Pod and Tudor Rose thundered again. Rex ran first, took out the lights and ran the new tracks fastest speed of 182.82mph (right), behind Bud Barnes' old track speed mark of 189mph, but we were getting there – slowly! We'd billed it as a Match Race of Champions, but the Commuter had a fuel leak in the first race, so Sluggett singled to his best ever ET of 8.54. Priddle got back in the seat for the next race, and ran the quickest ET ever seen at Santa Pod - side-by-side – even though Tudor Rose got out of shape and Dennis backed-off early, he still ran an 8.28 at 167.5 (with much poetic licence being used to justify that slightly overstated banner across the front cover), over Commuter's 8.77 at 157.73, its blower belching flames! Back on my birthday in July, Rex also lost his second race to Tony D via a "red light," but drove Tudor Rose to 180.83mph. Commuter had suffered a broken cam, burnt valves and popped pistons, and now his blower had gone k'boom! Maybe we weren't yet aware of the Razor's Edge, but our AA nitro racers and many fans were learning that when Fuel car drivers stood on it, there was a strong chance of parts breakage. Sluggett and Priddle launched Tudor Rose II at our Drag racing '69 show (right), but the team split up soon afterwards. Sadly neither of the two cars ever ran a seven, but Tony Densham smoked Commuter down the track in 1969 to an 8.228 at 181.82 to take both ends of the record. Once again he was the quickest, fastest British drag racer ever. Until August 1970 - Clive Skilton became the first Brit to run a seven, a 7.84 at an NDRC event. A fortnight later, Clive gave Santa Pod fans their seven, a 7.56 ET record set racing in open competition in his Revolution AA/FD, and won Top Dragster with a 7.86. Then at the Pod's 1971Easter meet, Clive drove his new Second Revolution fueler "off the trailer" to the UK's quickest and fastest numbers ever, 7.39 at 203! I was stood on the rails at the top end and when he thundered past it took my knees away - the feeling was awesome! And at last we'd eclipsed all the UK's previous AA/FD records and closed the gap on the fantasy world of the NHRA. At their Spring Nats, Big Daddy set low ET and top speed at 6.44 and 227.27 - we'd gained 1.05seconds and picked up 6.73mph!



At the 1971 Championships Dennis Priddle's Hot Wheels car ran a 7.22, and then hit the Razor's Edge hunting a six and threw a rod! In October he ran a 7.13, and at the Pod's 1972 Easter ran 204mph followed by a 7.06. Then came the Big Go, and the first 6-second runs outside the USA, a 6.99 and 6.93 at 208mph and in September he hit a 6.59! Naturally he became known as Mr Six...



Asphalt Archives photographer unknown



Asphalt Archives photographer unknown

Another all-time favourite image shows that, despite his high-end Castrol sponsorship in the early seventies, as the slicks attest, Clive Skilton's about to learn more about NitroPower's Razor's Edge!



Retro numbers courtesy Trackbytes

Racing was more than just exciting, ET's crept down slowly, but speeds went up beyond 220mph for drag racing pioneers, Bootsie Herridge, Nobby Hills with Hounddog, Dennis Priddle and others. At that speed the cars either did it right or hit the Razor's Edge and k'boom! The next big step was Crane & Edmondson's 5.97 Peter Crane (left) is set to cruise through on one of the Pod's legendary warm-up runs at the 1976 10th Anniversary race. So I guess it's time to see if our short track NitroWarriors make it or break it in round two of Top Fuel at Pod's 50th anniversary



It was great to hear that my ol' mate Prid' was inducted into Don Garlits' International Drag Racing Hall of Fame in 2016, here with long time sponsor Dave Riswick of John Woolfe Racing Andy Willsheer photo



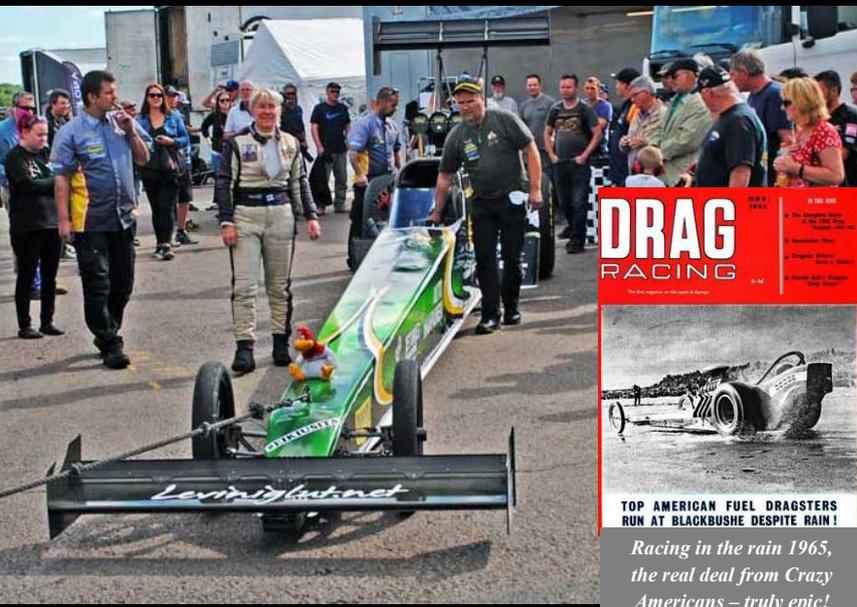
Returning after lunch at the Pit Stop cafe (possibly just to the right of the 1967 shot above!), Anita and Stig's crew were almost ready to rumble, with Stig's guy showing a more than positive attitude

The Top Fuel team's had been hard at it for a couple of hours, and, Rune Fjeld was hands on with Duncan and crew, putting the finishing touches to get their machine back together and race-ready, as was Tommi Haapanen on Anita's fueler as she returned from a comfort break



John Bennett DragRod photo

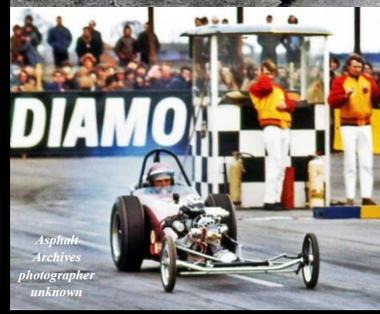
A visit to the 1964 Drag Festivals inspired Harold Bull to build Stripduster a small slingshot with an Austin A30 engine. He's seen below, having won on a wet track in 1966 on the skinniest tyres in town! Jack Stillwell aids our trophy girl



DRAG RACING
 The Best Dragsters in the World
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 Racing in the rain 1965, the real deal from Crazy Americans - truly epic!



JB Photo



Asphalt Archives photographer unknown

Running blown and injected, Harold closed out 1968 with a best ever 10.14, 132.1mph and then at 1971's Season Opener Stripduster hit an incredible 9.75 at 136mph!



...and Duncan Micallef, the quickest gun in town!

Back at the Euro Finals, where one cylinder has a larger capacity than Stripduster's engine, both Anita and Stig's teams were soon set to take up the Championship battle again, but first they'd got to get around 2015 FIA Top Fuel Champion Micke Kägered...



But a different type of power caught my ear, the laid back rumble of four Rolls Royce Merlin engines taking my gaze to the skies as Thumper, the legendary World War II Lancaster bomber graced us with a thundering fly past.



John Bennett DragRod photo

It really was a Hot August Night, sipping Colt 45, grooving to the sounds of Geno Washington! Drag racing legend Bootsie's bopping at right, a couple getting up close, Jack Stillwell dancing the light fantastic while Clive Skilton and I linger closer to the bar with our ladies. Party on dudes!



It didn't last long, but it was incredible, "Wow, what a way to enjoy the sound of freedom," I thought, and then shortly later they fired the next pair and I realised just how lucky we all are to be able enjoy such powerful entertainment



Guess I must've been dreaming, j'st strolling along when I heard the first pair fire-up and had to run into the stands, just in time to shoot Anita Mäkelä and Duncan Micallef burning out. Then I thought, "This could be a race for the ages," lowering my Nikon, taking out a little old Canon and switching it to movie mode, which turned out to be a good thing as you'll see. Happily ol' Nitro Nostrils came up with a shot from the start line 'cos ML took Wojtek to lunch, and he missed the Top Fuel action just like he did in 2014!



Photo by Andy Willsheer



Photo by Andy Willsheer

Side-side NitroFire and the Maltese Lion is off an' thundering with Anita 0.0278 behind at the green, but she'd cut his lead to 0.0027 by the 60foot clocks as her family and team look on from behind...

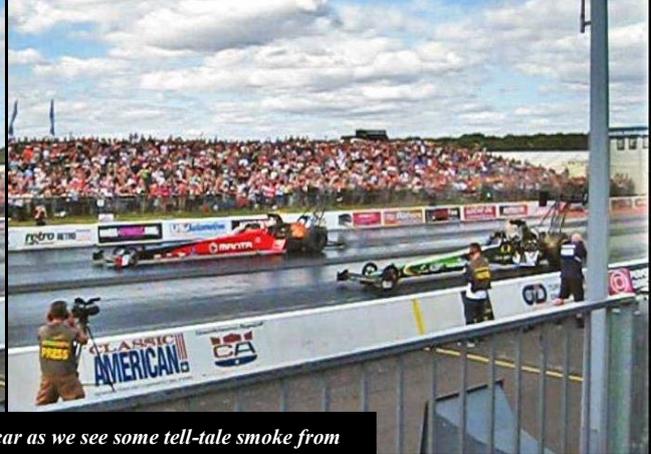


mcSnip courtesy No1SantaPodShooter



...and from across the track, both cars carrying the front end taken from the YouTube film by "No1SantaPodShooter"

...Anita was still chasing hard here



...Anita's gaining on the Manta car as we see some tell-tale smoke from her motor - can't understand why that dude stopped shooting!



Things seem to be getting worse for Anita...



...yet she's still cutting into Duncan's lead, but things are definitely going wrong in her engine department!

Wow! This explosive flash of flame couldn't have lasted a millisecond...



...the car trailing fire for much longer before extinguishing itself



Wow! The power of that passing was AA awesome, and the flame-show shot was something I'd probably have missed with the Nikon! Wow indeed, with more whooping and hollerin' from me as Duncan ran the same ET and re-set his PB mph. And he'd blown a motor, which meant more hard work, but he'd also be wondering who he'd face in the finals! Meanwhile, like Anita's team, we were all waiting to see how Stig got on in his title chase...

Back in my seat, I sat quietly, still in awe of the NitroThunder that'd shook me to the very core, yet the warmth of the flame show was almost a gentle caress. That had me smiling inside as things could've been different if the motor had k'boom'd! But it didn't, and oh boy, when I found what was on the film, talk about happy, I was over the moon!



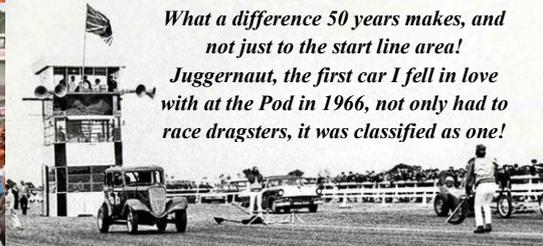
To this day, I still can't believe that media man didn't keep shooting! But all was forgotten as they fired the next pair, with Micke K leading Stig in almost making side-by-side burnouts - but we won't go there this time! Stig was definitely having problems getting his power down and this was a must-win situation for the Eye of the Storm team!



Eventually Stig's engine got things together, and his burnout was a tad longer if not stronger than Micke K's, and the fans loved it



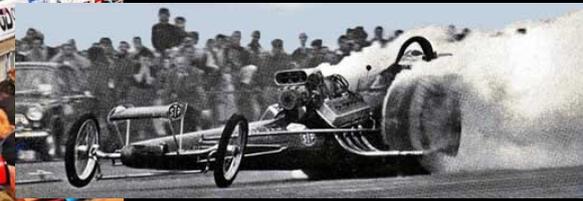
What a difference 50 years makes, and not just to the start line area! Juggernaut, the first car I fell in love with at the Pod in 1966, not only had to race dragsters, it was classified as one!



Micke K had almost two-tenths of a second on Stig at the hit...



TV Tommy Ivo launching old school style at DragFest '64 - imagine 1320 feet of smokin' NitroThunder, side-by-side!
Asphalt Archives photographer unknown





...and the BAHCO car kept on pulling away until Stig vanished from the frame



Oops - sometimes you miss, especially when shooting with two cameras!



Micke Kågered's 4.059 was his best of the weekend and the 2016 FIA title race was over for the Eye of the Storm. But you know this very popular Danish team will be back, fighting even harder for the Championship



Anita Mäkelä retained her points lead and won a hard fought, and well earned second FIA Top Fuel title. When she said later that it wasn't how they wanted to win, we all agreed as everyone had high hopes of Stig and Anita racing each other in the final, but sadly this was not to be. Click this link to see the [90second clip](#) "No1SantaPodShooter" put together from the semi-finals

That race ended about ten minutes to three, and about an hour later they were still working hard to put a fresh bullet into the Manta car, and get it ready for Duncan to try and win the race...



...rebuilding the heads, with that huge blower just waiting to be put back to work, unlike the spent bullet below – like an iceberg, most of the damage was hidden beneath the surface!

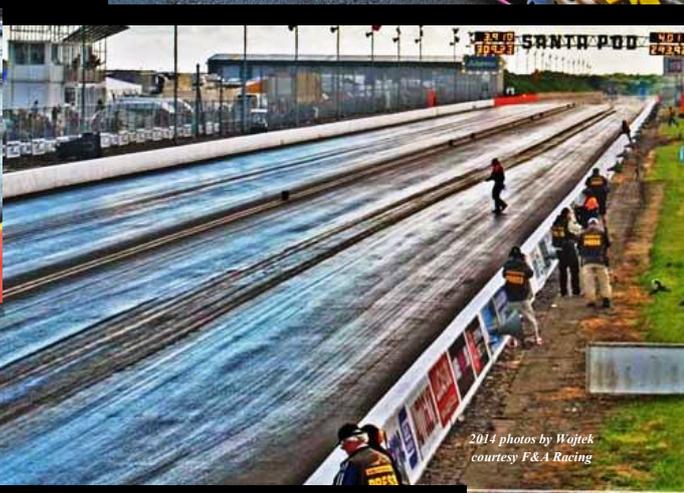


With the Manta crew still working feverishly behind then, Stig and his guys are preparing to put their Eye of the Storm away in the trailer, leaving any more work until they get home to Denmark. This break gives me a chance to show a few of the stepping stones that brought us from the Pod's 10th anniversary to modern style fuel cars, and my first race day Sunday since the record setting FIA Finals back in 2010...

Fans loved it when NHRA legend Al Segrini drove the Coca Cola fueler in a match race with Harlan Thompson's Budweiser fuel coupe in 1989.



In a great race, Harlan got the hole shot, but Al got the win with a 5.73 at 242mph over an oh-so-close 5.79 at 230! Small wheels were the "in thing" for fuel cars for some time. And talking of stepping stones, here's a larger image of Anita Mäkelä getting nicked by the Razor's Edge with horrendous tyre shake in 2014...



2014 photos by Wojtek courtesy F&A Racing

Anita did a quick pedal job and her ride to the finish line looks more than exciting, the tyre tracks showing the car made quite a violent move. "The Snake," Don Prudhomme, once said that "Tyre shake can give you more than just a headache, it can really hurt." Reason enough to be thankful that our street cars never do more than maybe get a little out of shape when we drive too hard!

Despite early problems at the 2015 Main Event, Anita's 3.96 at 301.78 was top qualifier, and she ran the events only 300 mph, 3-second passes. Backed up by a 3.92 at 305.86 a 3.91 set a new FIA ET record and a 3.98 at 300.01 won the race.



If this produced such jubilant smiles, imagine the scene when they won the 2016 FIA Championship!





And talking of the sixties, when I asked Bootsie about his tach, I was new to the race game. However, many years later, after the Snake's record setting 5.73 pass, a well know motoring writer asked the same question when he noticed his fuel coupe only had an oil pressure gauge. Snake just laughed, "Don't need one; the engine turns way less than a thousand rpm on a pass!" Yeah okay, this is fuel coupe talk, but how many people d'you know that out-qualified the Snake! Bootsie did, so it's an excuse to show these true drag racing legends - and in the same shot too, magic! Bootsie's 6.21 was low ET of the Pod's 1980 World Finals, taking pole ahead of Snake's close 6.22 run in Friday qualifying. Both of 'em went out in the first round, and the Snake's legendary US Army car didn't get off the start line, so all I saw him drive was the Pod's Ford. Here's a shot of his Wynn's Winder AA/FD seen in the late '60s, either in south London or maybe nine miles from Chelmsford!



But we've done the sixties, so let's pay another brief visit to Easter at the Pod. Clive Skilton's best numbers of 6.36 and 224mph were none too shabby in 1976 when, with consistent 6.30's, he won the Pod's legendary 10th Anniversary meet - and beat Big Daddy as I said earlier.

Don Garlits was stood besides his gleaming King Rat fueler at the top end of the fire-up road getting ready to make a Sunday morning qualifying run when I'd arrived.

A voice broke through the noise and Don turned to see Clive Skilton lean across the car. "Hi Clive," Don smiled, but his eyes stayed cool as the Englishman spoke. "I'd like to run with you, Don," Clive's voice tight as he bottled up the excitement inside, his mind filled with thoughts an off-the-trailer run against Big Daddy, "Only I might not get the chance later."

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"That's fine," Don chuckled. "Which lane d'you want?" Clive asked. Don smiled again, turning to look out over the strip. When he turned back the warmth had left his voice and Don Garlits, Professional Drag Racer answered, "That one over there ah reckon." For an instant their eyes locked, then Don made to climb into his fueler for yet another race, but to Clive Skilton it was anything but another race, it was his chance to beat Big Daddy.

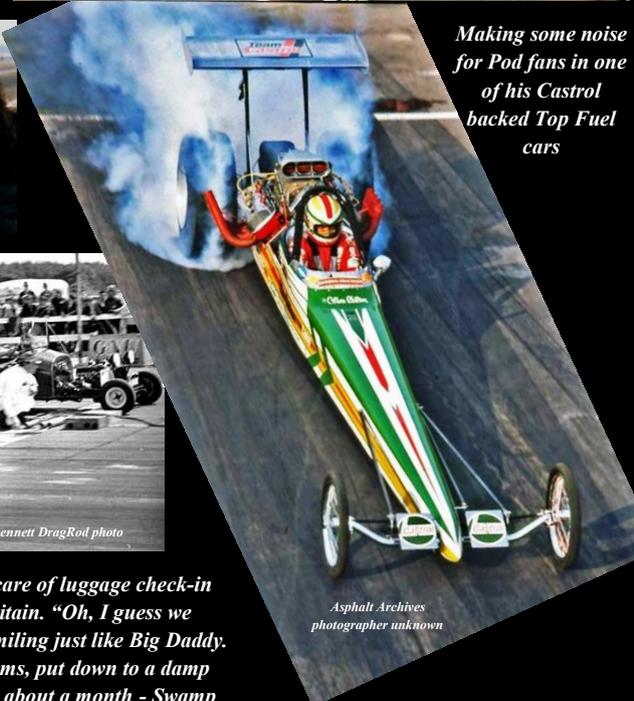


The two cars were pushed down towards the start line and fired up, the words from the PA locked in my mind forever, "Remember folk's, this is not a race," the voice in the control tower adding, "just qualifying..." Yeah right!

They made burnouts, staged, and with a pair of green lights glowing Garlits car left first but Clive just moved on by, and 6.55 seconds after the green Clive had done it. Alongside me, Dennis Priddle was wishing it'd been him!



"Fantastic," Clive told me after the race, "A lifetime's ambition, to beat the Old Man, boy I'll tell you...!" But he didn't and words couldn't describe his emotion-filled face. He was truly over the moon, thanking me for not attempting a reunion just before he climbed into his car after three years spent a world apart. He'd borrowed his old Revolution III fueler from Trevor Young, just for this event and won the race of a lifetime! Now he stood quietly, basking in the warm glow of afterthought for brief moments before adding with a chuckle, "did the crowd enjoy it?" stretching out his hand with a warm smile "good to see you Mike, how you been doing?" "After that race, I'm feeling great," came out of a big happy grin, our reunion chat was warm, and a lot of fun. At right it's Clive in 1967 racing his Henry T against Juggernaut, now classed as an altered. Check out the back-seat driver and tie-down hood, reason enough for any fan to love it!



Making some noise for Pod fans in one of his Castrol backed Top Fuel cars

A week or so later I met up with Don Garlits, busy, but still smiling as he said "Hi Mike," before taking care of luggage check-in while I talked with his family. Don really is Big Daddy to them and they'd spent the past week touring Britain. "Oh, I guess we went j'st about everywhere," followed by a list of the sights they'd seen from wife Pat and the kids - all smiling just like Big Daddy. Once Don got the bags checked, we had some more friendly family chat, then talked about his car problems, put down to a damp magneto after Dennis Priddle told him later that, without taking special precautions, one would only last about a month - Swamp Rat had been in the UK for a long, damp winter! "It's obvious that must've been what it was, 'cos we did everything and the car just kept running on about five cylinders. We kept thinking it was a valve 'n we were pullin' the heads and changin' springs, because the mag' just never occurred to me. So I guess if we come back, we'll have a fresh, hand-carried mag with us that's ready to go." Then I asked about his first qualifying run against Clive, "Were you hesitant at all or were you racing?" His southern drawl was deep and definite, "Ah wuz racin' him, and I'd have beaten him if it'd run on eight cylinders, but it was only runnin' on six." Don had shrugged, adding with a shake of his head, "But that's drag racin' for you, we got down the other end and there was two of 'em, dead, cold and wet..."

The following year Clive went racing in the USA, reaching the finals of the NHRA Winston Springnats where, despite his hole shot, a 6.15 at 228.42 was not quite enough to withstand a 6.11 at 236.22 by the soon-to-be NHRA Winston World Champion Shirley Muldowney. A 6.03 qualified him 10th in the 32-car field, U.S. Nationals that year, and he made it to the semi finals, his 6.15 losing to Richard Tharp's 6.13.



Clive riding the Razor's Edge stateside as his engine goes k'boom!

Both Dennis Priddle and Clive Skilton had competed in the USA at the 1973 Winternationals; Priddle 25th and Skilton on the 32-car field bump, but neither could stay for the event's completion as it was delayed by rain - twice! Clive's best ever, a 6.01 made the 1977 NHRA Finals in Ontario, Ca, but he lost first round. At the 1978 Pomona Winternats, tyre shake cracked his chassis and he retired from racing - like Snake said tyre shake could hurt!

In 1978 Santa Pod promoter Roy Phelps had a different take on the Razor's Edge, suggesting it wasn't always down to breakages. "Silly, stupid mistakes are the problem," he told me, "not putting fuel in the tank, putting the oil pipes on round the wrong way, just to name two of them. Putting the wrong fuel in it..." He shrugged before continuing, "Forgot to do a nut up, forgot to do this up - 'forgot,' that is the problem." Roy shook his head as he recalled, "I lost three engines at Easter because people put the oil pipes on round the wrong way. I built 'em the engines and I gave them to 'em. They put them in the car and put two oil pipes round the wrong way." Adding, "I lost three engines because of that..." And not looking happy as he said it, which was understandable!

There were no such problems for Dennis Priddle at the 1982 World Finals, he qualified on pole, 6.23/225, but in the first round he set the Pod on fire. First came this tall-tyre burnout, with the car sounding more than just strong, it truly shook the ground beneath my feet as I got wide-angle close to really enjoy the feel of NitroPower. On a bye run, Prid launched like a rocket ship, wide open injectors making the front end blur as the Top Fuel car hiked its skinny wheels and positively thundered, shaking my body and taking me knees with it.

Chief starter Stu Bradbury was physically and verbally urging him on with loud support, heck we all were, and maybe it worked as the Insurance in Motion car carried Priddle to his long dreamt of five second pass, a 5.99, the first such pass since 1976, at 230mph, a speed record he'd set in 1977 driving Big Daddy's Swamp Rat fueler. Thousands of fans lining the backs went nuts. Prid ran 230mph in the next round at 6.10, too slow to back it up.

Sadly, Prid had no chance in the final, as the race was rained off before he got to take on Andy Craddock in the Frontline fueler, but they did race in the next couple of years.

Perhaps the shot a right below captures a "silly mistake" Roy mentioned as Prid' lost to Andy in the early 80's when his chutes deployed too early - it's certainly not Razor's Edge material! Much like back in 1968 at the SHRA'S inaugural drags at Anderstorp, Clive Skilton's chute failed to open when the safety cord wasn't removed! He was match racing Prid' - got a hole shot in the final, but his Allard/Skilton blower went k'boom at the top end! Ooops and ouch on the same day!

The shot at below is reminiscent of Prid's time in the ol' Tudor Rose, but sadly he's just nicked the Razor's Edge and gone up in smoke as Andy Craddock takes the Frontline car to another win!



NitroThunder! Special 1320 PixMix XtremeCropDivision!



Recently I asked a photographer who wears an SPR media corps tabard if he took single-car shots as they're easier and he had a better chance of selling it to the owner or because two-car shots are hard? "Yes," he answered with a grin! And he's right, owners love shots of their car alone, and two-car shots really are kinda hard to get, but when they work, oh boy!

Above it's the 1990s, and you can't imagine how happy I was to capture side-by-side NitroFire that far down track, maybe en route to the NitroNirvana of two full pulls! I can almost taste the G-Max Nitro! To see the SPR Media Corps' with cameras limp and low is totally amusing!



And here's Jari Halinen set to take out 2015 FIA champ Micke K and win the 2015 Euro Finals



Urs Erbacher en route to the 2011 Euro Finals win, the Pod's last Top Fuel quarter-mile, and a second straight FIA title - with cameramen working!

At right's another all-time favourite, Wojtek's image capturing NitroFire, TJ's hole shot, Risto's awesome traction-twisted slicks (and a wall of fans in the full frame shot), in the last great Top Fuel drag race down Santa Pod's quarter mile at the 2011 Main Event in Q3 - this image blows me away whenever I see it! TJ sat out Q4, but Risto blasted to number two spot with a 4.70 at 317.06 (the same speed as TJ's here), for a new speed record, the last 1320 Top Fuel mark. Sadly the year went nuts! TJ ran the first 3-second, 300mph pass, should've won the FIA crown but had it taken away when the FIA in their wisdom decided his (NHRA approved), medication was illegal - but that's drag racing in the 21st century...



Classic NitroFire from Big Daddy and Shirley Muldowney at the NHRA US Nats - AA awesome!

Photo by Wojtek

Back in 1978 Roz Prior and Sweden's Eva Kjellin had a Top Fuel match race. Click here to see a shot of their burn out. Roz won two out of three, her 6.43 over Eva's 6.73 standing for 20 years as low ET for Brit' babes. Cords Piston Rings used the Prior's Maneater fuel car in this half a page ad in Street Machine.

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At the 1986 World Finals the ladies took over Top Fuel - Sweden's Monica Oberg (far right), qualified on top with both ends of the UK record, a 5.82 and 266, a decade after the Pod's first five, but the race was rained out. In the summer of 1988, Norway's Liv Berstad one time Pro Stock racer, drove Rune Fjeld's freshly imported ex-Joe Amato Top Fuel Dragster to a stunning 5.72 on her first full pass at Santa Pod! Only four cars made the Top Fuel field at the Pod's World Finals, and Monica Oberg won the final over Liv Berstad. The following year at Easter, Liv raced US Top Fuel star Darrell Gwynn, the young Floridian's 5.78 taking a close win over Liv's 5.84, Santa Pod's first side-by-side 5-second race! In September Liv was too late to make the Q sessions due to travel problems, but in a solo pass she made the quickest Top Fuel pass outside the USA, a record shattering 5.37, clicked off to 260 mph! But the best came in 1990 when Rune Fjeld tuned her Mobil 1 car to perfection, allowing Liv to make the quickest string of passes seen outside the USA, a 5.19, a 5.15. In the final against Tony Bryntesson, a staggering new European record of 5.13, again clicked off to only 252.60mph! Liv and Monica raced in the semi-finals at the 1991 Main Event, and not having seen it since the actual event, I just clicked the link and watched a superb short clip, try it yourself and enjoy a great, super-close drag race!



Liv's 1990 record stood for yonks, but the action stayed strong, and in 1992 we had two new ladies in Top Fuel, Oyvor Jacobson, another Norwegian driving for Rune Fjeld, and Sweden's Viveca Averstadt driving for husband Håkan - their first race was far-out.



Both ladies hit the Razor's Edge, Oyvor won, driving through tyre shake and losing a blower belt, but Viveca made many fans with her spectacular trans explosion, it even made the front page of the regional paper I was shooting for! Monica Oberg ran a new PB low ET, a 5.26 at 276 and then won the 1992 Main Event in her Bosch car, her 5.34 at 277mph, a new top speed record over Pelle Lindelow's 5.86.



In 1993, after a string of mechanically induced early leaves during the season, Liv Berstad let her mind slip out of synch long enough to wake up and launch a tenth of second behind long-gone Pelle Lindelow whose 5.37 at 260 just stayed ahead of Liv's thundering 272.34 mph charge in 5.39seconds. What a drag race, pure fuel car thunder, and Pelle's team, who'd beaten the toughest racers outside of the USA, clinched the 1993 EFTA title with a touch of consistency and a some good fortune from Lady Luck. Liv's 1990 record of 5.13 seconds and Monica Oberg's 277.41mph top speed record still remained intact. Next stop was the 5-zeros!

Although I'm sure Viveca Averstadt had run a 5.0 earlier, at Santa Pod's 1996 World Finals German racer Rico Anthes' 5.10 at 278mph led Top Fuel, and staging up in the finals against Denmark's 1995 Top Fuel Champion Jens Nybo led to side-by-side NitroFire and it changed the whole scene!



It felt as awesome as it looks, with both cars lighting us up as they filled the night with NitroThunder, Rico got the hole shot with Jens close behind, but he went up in smoke moments later as Rico sped to a 5.03 at 281mph, finally taking out Liv and Monica's European records - wow what a night! Next stop the fours, that barrier breached by Kent Persson who drove Peter Lantz's Optima car to a 4.98 at Hockenheim in 1997

In 1998 Barry Sheavills' gave Rune Fjeld Motorsports a first FIA title and the Pod's first four, three of 'em with a best of 4.942! In 2002 racing RMF teammate Andy Carter in qualifying at the Main Event, Barry ran the Pod's first 4-second, 300mph pass. More than that, they thrilled Pod fans with a pair - side-by-side!

NitroFire, a green light and top fuelers thundering down track j'st makes me want t'go racin'



And as red lights don't count in qualifying, Barry won with a 4.97 at 304.71 over Andy's quicker 4.89 at 303.07 - historic stuff indeed! Andy had already won the 2001 FIA title for RMF, and earlier US racing legend 240 Gordy Bonin won the 1999 FIA title for Rune in Barry's old ride. That car retired owning two NHRA and four FIA championships, and that's more than just cool!



A 13 year old No1SantaPodShooter shot from the banks and FeelTheNoiseDotCom from behind the line, or there's a clip from SantaPodTV. The last 1320 Top Fuel ET record at Santa Pod is Andy Carter's, a thundering 4.57 record at 320.19mph alongside Urs Erbacher's 4.84 at 298.28 in qualifying at the 2010 FIA Finals backed up by a 4.61.

Both cars had problems in the finals, Urs Erbacher's 4.88, 278.28 getting the nod over Janne Ahonen's 4.98 at 270.53. As that was my last race day, it's almost time for the 2016 Top Fuel Finals, but first...



However, in 1982 Slam'n Sammy Miller and Bootsie had a 4-second rocket car race, his 4.84 the first by a Brit. But in 1981 Santa Pod fans saw the quickest, fastest race on the planet as Al Eirdam got a hole shot and a best ever ET, a 4.63 at 240 in Sam's VP Mustang, but Sam blew his doors off, blasting past in the Oxygen at a thundering 4.53 at 320mph! That record stood for a quarter century!

Watching Darrell Gwynn win the 1990 Gator was a huge buzz as we'd been friends a few years. Darrell's 4.985 took pole, the track's first four, then a 4.982 and beat Texas legend Eddie Hill's 5.087 with a 5.011 to win.

Afterwards he spoke with media, and these words stayed forever in my mind, "It's a humbling sport, a driver can go from hero to zero in a matter of seconds." Santa Pod's Easter race had cold blustery weather far removed from the sunshine state of Florida. Wrapped in a fleece lined Coors Racing jacket to keep out the chill wind, Darrell had greeted me with a warm smile. "Hi Mike, how're y'doin' buddy? Long times no see," before he stepped behind the trailer and out of the chill wind. His greeting had been the same since our first meeting at the mighty Texas Motorplex in '87, always with the same warm smile. "Can you believe I've just left eighty degrees in Miami?" He wasn't bitching, but I knew how he felt.

We spoke for awhile, then, thinking ahead to the Bradenton Snowbirds in November I asked if he'd be there. "Aw, c'me on buddy," he'd chuckled, "there's so much c'n happen..." A couple of hours later on that cold Easter Sunday I found those words etched across my mind like fire as Darrell was bit by the cruel hand of fate and, in a tragic split second, the car destroyed itself, putting a blanket of paralysis on the life and career of one of the sports brightest stars. Darrell Gwynn was a huge hit with Santa Pod fans from his first visit, and along with whole racing fraternity they were shook by the accident. However, Darrell recovered, continued racing as team owner, with Frank Hawley winning twice that year on the NHRA Winston trail, and my Mum was cheering out loud when we saw him spin in his wheelchair at the track in celebration! Darrell began donating some of his NHRA winnings in support of the Miami Project's research to cure paralysis in 1980, continuing after the crash. Darrell and his wife Lisa were beneficiaries of this research when they gave birth to daughter Katie. His support continues to this day, in a slightly different manner. Talking of which, in 2011 Darrell finally beat Big Daddy Don Garlits at the US Nats in an electric dragster!

His Mum told me that shots of Jerry and Darrell were very rare, so this one's for all his Santa Pod fans



Meanwhile, back at the 2016 FIA Euro Finals...

It was really cool as the red Arrows swept by, but about 30 minutes later, just after six pm, we heard a lone Top Fuel car fire-up and burn out...

Sadly for everyone, including Micke Kågered, he was unopposed in the Top Fuel final when Duncan Micallef failed to answer the call. The RMF team fit a fresh motor, but as Eurodragster reported, it had "a bearing leaking into the flywheel and clutch," which couldn't be fixed in time and Duncan lost the chance of winning his first race. The whole team must've been gutted!



It's for sure that the BAHCO team did not want to run alone, and thankfully Wojtek had finished lunch, capturing Micke K leaving hard, hiking the front end, spitting NitroFire and filling the air with NitroThunder in hopes of ending our 50th anniversary season in style... Micke Kågered hit the 60 foot timers in 0.8568 seconds, not the quickest perhaps, but that's cool, the injectors were wide open - he was on a pass!



Micke Kågered photos by Wojtek



Then the engine went quite...



Micke K's still wide open and shooting NitroFire here

...the car cruised down track, Micke K winning the Euro Finals with a 7.98 at 83.18. As Big Daddy said 40 years ago, "A million and one little things can cause the car not to run at its maximum," and the Razor's Edge won yet again! Folks spoke of the dreaded tyre shake, and Eurodragster reported, "...bad shake, shut it off passing the Tree."

Micke wasn't happy with the way they'd won, but smiled as I thanked him for trying, adding, "That's drag racing, see you next year." Micke and his wife were still smiling as they walked away. Everyone was, even those who didn't win, 'cos drag racing's like that and, if you're lucky, there'll always be another shot at glory.

Wow, can't believe that it's 50 thundering years since I first raced at Santa Pod! The start line's stickier than in '66, things are definitely better and, although it still rains, we'll do it all again next year, as racers go for glory on the FIA Top Fuel trail. See you there folks, God willin' an' the cr'k don't rise

Rainy day dreamers...



To end my celebration, here are a few mini-pix, and some magic memories from my 50 years of thunder!



Finnish Auto Motorsport federation AKK-Motorsport nominated Anita Mäkelä as the Super Star of the Year 2016. Click it to see Anita in great track action and having fun with Stig and Micke K at the Pod's awards ceremony.

Stig Neergaard won the Årets profil in Bilmagasinet's Danish Motorsport Awards (eurodragster.com)

Photo by Andy Willsheer

Click to enjoy SantaPodTV's 2016 FIA Euro Finals' Top Fuel action including Friday night's Q session and all the car classes

Special thanks to Andy Willsheer & Wojtek, more than good friends, their shots always add much NitroAction to my pages. And also to Nick Pettit for his Time Travel DVDs, a site with some amazing film and images from our racing past that really can take one back in time...





Mickey Thompson's Harvey Aluminum Special, sitting in the mud the way you do, waiting to be rescued in 1966



Brian Sparrow Pix courtesy time travel dvds



Nobby Hills' Houndog and Dennis Priddle



Race day at the 2010 Finals with pals Wojtek and fellow drag racing pioneer Mike Lintern, both with American Autoparts who've kept me mobile for years



Andy Willsheer photo



In y'face NitroFire-at speed!



Bunny Nandi's Bunny cars! NitroFire!



The one and only Slam'n Sammy Miller, Santa Pod's all-time hero and a very special friend, gone, but never to be forgotten!



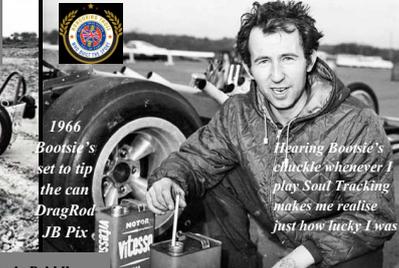
Slam'n Sammy Miller on a rocket sled



Mustang - trying to move!



The late Slam'n Sammy Miller in a Mustang



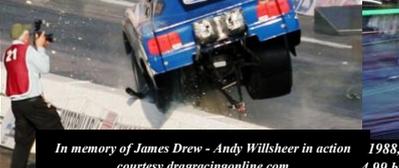
Hearing Bootsie's chuckle whenever I play Soul Tracking makes me realise just how lucky I was



Bob Phelps, with Prid



John Bennett, trophy time DragRod Surf'n' at Greatstones!



A reunion and a kiss coming from Linda Vaughan



Mr and Mrs Stig, one of drag racing's happiest families, with our long-time pal, ol' NitroNostrils, Andy Willsheer



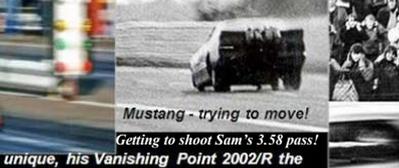
Slam'n Sammy's Vanishing Point Vega, the first car to run a 3-second ET!



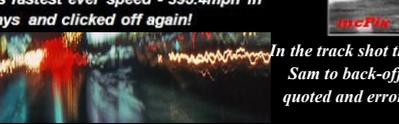
Bootsie drove the Vanishing Point Mustang to a 4.84!



In 1982 Bootsie raced the 2002/R Vanishing Point against Sam in Oxygen, leaving on 'the G in Go' he won!



Sam giving Bootsie advice



Sam's launch was the ultimate blur!

Après Battle of the Giants Tony Densham & Prid 1968



Après Battle of the Giants Tony Densham & Prid 1968



Rex Sluggers apres Budor lose's first 180mph run!



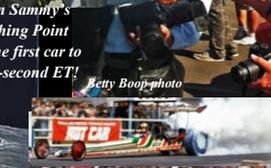
Feeling the heat - and getting expenses!



KB signing my 50th anniversary Pig Farm Pioneer t-shirt



Commentating at the NHRA's CackleFest at Goodwood 2008, 40th anniversary of the Pod's first AA/FD race



Clive Skilton's first 200mph run (not in this car!), and this awesome 2016 side-by-side, short track thunder run



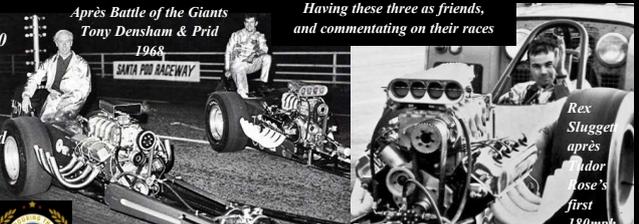
Alf Hagon, our first two-wheel NitroWarrior 9.432 at 153



Sharing sunshine and laughs with my friends Tracey Boden and Stu Brabury, a pal for 50 fun years



Knowing Tony Boden and watching the Hit Man enjoy NitroThunder. Gone but not forgotten, especially that laugh



Mustang images below mcSnip from Retro Ramblin's



The ultimate Mustang!



Getting to shoot Sam's 3.58 pass!



The late Slam'n Sammy Miller was unique, his Vanishing Point 2002/R the quickest and fastest, land-based Mustang ever. At the Pod, it ran 3.58, clicked off to 285mph with the car trying to turn! (Mono pix) In the desert, Sam drove the Mustang to his fastest ever speed - 395.4mph in 3.85seconds, sideways and clicked off again!



In the track shot the car's trying to turn, causing Sam to back-off to only 285mph, not the oft quoted and erroneous 386! See data at right!



Fast Facts! Slam'n Sammy Miller - the World's Fastest Accelerating Man



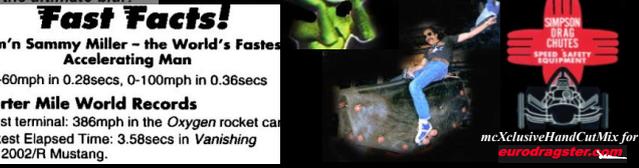
Quarter Mile World Records



Fastest terminal: 386mph in the Oxygen rocket car



Quickest Elapsed Time: 3.58secs in Vanishing Point 2002/R Mustang.



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