

Finding this amazing image a couple days ago was awesome, it's our first pair of fuel cars set to fire up for the first time at the Pod in 1968, wow! Talk about a magic moment in time...

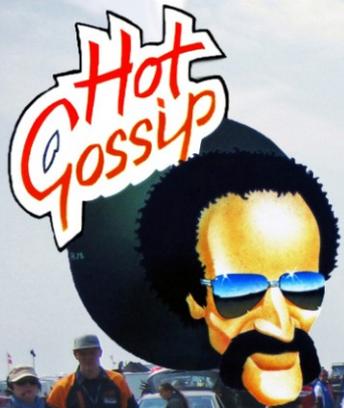


Photo by Mal Hawkins
courtesy ukdrn

Today they tow 'em down, plug 'em in an' fire 'em up! Back in the day our NitroWarriors were pushed slowly down track until they got oil pressure, gave a "thumbs up" over the roll cage, the push car accelerating to fire the fuel car's mighty engine. Sadly, as you know, they only made solo runs when first raced on our new track. Happily the 2018 concrete track's baptism by fuel cars gave fans a true taste of NitroPower...

Celebrating 50 years of side-by-side NitroThunder at Santa Pod

words and photos
mike collins



We had ground-pounding burnouts and awesome power launches, with Anita Mäkelä and Liam Jones arguably the strongest off the line. Yet despite Anita's stronger burnout below, Liam hit the 60ft clocks at 0.8514 a tick ahead her 0.8531. Anita charged hard, clicking it off early while Liam was one of the many who had problems (tyre shake and a blown burst panel), causing him to shut off. There's a subtle difference, unlike the half century between the Commuter and the Eye of the Storm...

With its fat stance (and front axle wider than Stig's front spoiler!), the gorgeous needle nose'd 427 Ford powered AA/FD's a virtual lifetime away from the outrageous 21st century Top Fuel car, but a powerful connection keeps 'em close. Tony Densham was the first Brit to exceed 200mph in an AA/FD, Stig the first European to top 300 during the short track era! And they're both a tribute to our sport...



CHANGES? My shot shows the same view as John Bennett's - 50 years apart!

The difference between the first generation Potvin blown Hemi and these angry 21st century monsters is even more glaring - side-by-side!

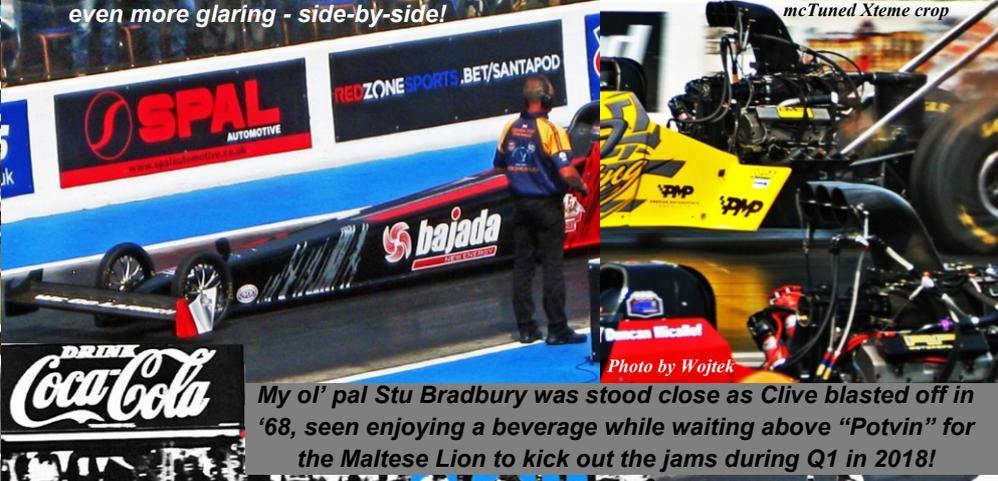
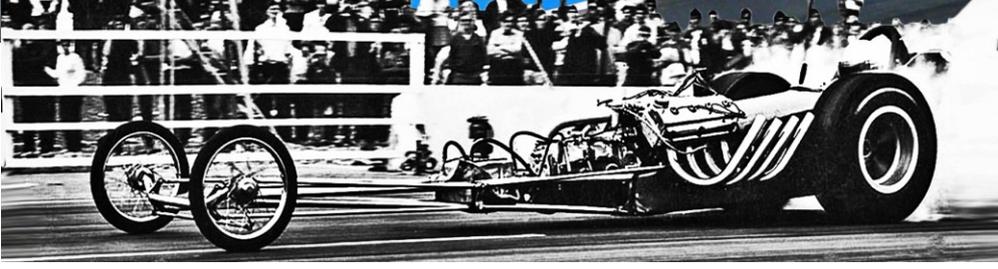


Photo by Wojtek

My ol' pal Stu Bradbury was stood close as Clive blasted off in '68, seen enjoying a beverage while waiting above "Potvin" for the Maltese Lion to kick out the jams during Q1 in 2018!

Defending FIA champ Duncan Micallef ran next to RFM teammate Antti Horto (clicking off early on a planned half pass in his new ex-Leah Pritchett DSR car), the [Maltese Lion thundering](#) (2.198 to 330 feet just 0.012 ahead of Anita's 2.210!), his full pull 3.92, 309.97, (4/10^{ths} and 114.9mph better), way ahead of the pack, just like the Allard/Skilton car in '68, so let's re-visit that halcyon summer with fans still dreaming of our new NitroWarriors pounding the ground side-by-side...

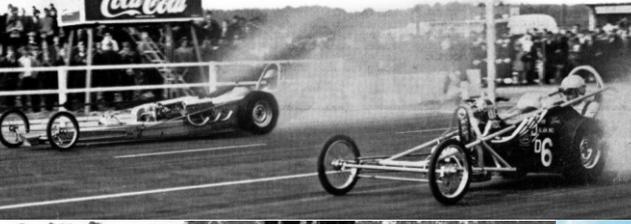
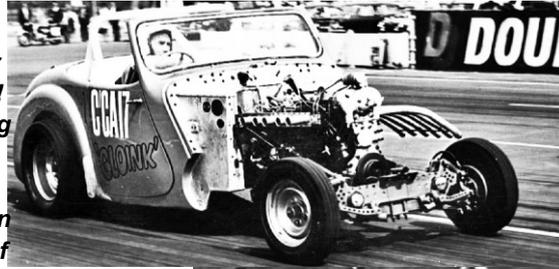
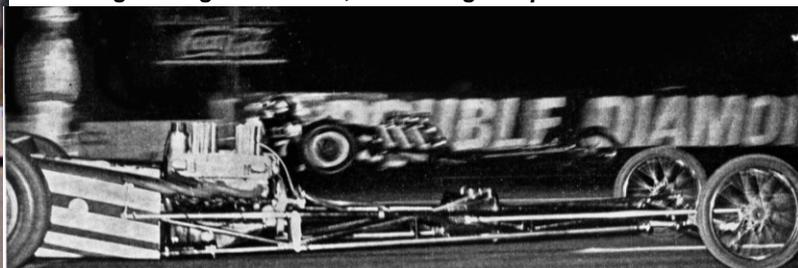


Alan Allard, the first Englishman (and British built dragster) to run a single digit ET hit a best of 9.3, 168mph after tipping the can at the **1965 DragFest**, winning rounds, and also set an FIA record of 9.37 the next year. First time out at Easter 1968, the fueler was blue, and the Allard/Skilton won our big Match Race when Commuter failed to answer the call, with a best ever 9.13 and 163.4mph for Top Speed of the meet over our two AA/FDs! Then Clive went racing as our first blown an' injected NitroWarrior backing up his Big Go Top Eliminator win and Low ET of 9.005 at the first of the season's Night Drags in June with the Pod's fastest ever run in competition, he ran 165.8mph in 9.043 seconds to take pole in the top bracket with Clive seen cruising through the pits sporting a new paintjob before he lunched the clutch on his second qualifying pass and that was his race done. Alan Blount over came Ken Cooper's hole shot to win, the "getting quicker all the time" fuel injected Chevy powered Weekend Warrior gas dragster's 11.28, 120 eating Cooper's 11.77.



Nigel Dodd photo courtesy [timetravelvids](#)

Tony Densham was back out, preparing Commuter for his match race with Tudor Rose that we were busy promoting for our race on July 7th weekend, but he still had problems with wheels flopping over when he made the turn onto the track! However the 427 Ford was working with a **9.2 ET** and Top Speed of the meet at 168.63, a tad faster than Clive! And talking of big numbers, Bill McGrath deserved a medal, pushing his Jaguar powered Triumph roadster the length of the strip, not a money run, just to get into the next round of class eliminations with an ET of 790.865 - he red lit on the next run! Bootsie's 302 injected Chevy Motovation was now really coming on strong, with an all time best of 10.3 at 143 - and blew the timing gear next run! The all-new injected Olds powered Geronimo was also headed down towards the tens hoping to join club, including the blown an' injected pair below, Houndog and 1967 BHRA Champion Alan Ing's baby Allard. Still the quickest of our other cars was Les Turner's blown four pot Ford powered rail with a screaming 10.2 at 132.4, then found he'd split a piston! With cars running quicker, faster than ever, the number of breakages increased - just like the present day racers eh folks!



Fans loved the sounds of our big American stockers - burbling through the pits Doug Harler's mighty Charger turned heads, on the track it was awesome, one of many such beasts they turned me loose in as you'll find out soon!



Jim Wanberg's '57 Chevy hole shot Joe Rico to win Top Street at the Big Go, 17.8 to 17.2 in the wet! My relationship with the Mustang was also kinda special, you'll read about this soon too...



After all the American muscle, here's Keith Sales' taking a hole shot win in SS Draguar over Rod Alonso's Mercury, 16.05 to 16.02, in the wet at the Big Go and a happy Tony Brown torqueing his beautiful Jaguar rail Limelight

No, those Mustang stockers aren't burning out - they're racing, 'cos that's how we did it in 1968, but let's head back to see how the Pro Mod cars are doing in Q1 at the Main Event, kicking off with strong burnouts from Eurodragster sponsor Andy Robinson and Jan Ericksson that led to 6-zeros behind David Vegter's 5.95, and fan favourite Fast Freddy's 6.05 ahead of Kevin Slyfield's 6.11 at #8. Jimmy Alund's 5.9154 led the Pro Mod pack, his '51 Chevy a whisker ahead of Micke Gullqvist's 5.9167! We wondered how tight their racing could get!



Photo by Wojtek



We didn't have to wait long, defending FIA Pro Mod champ Micke G gave us a thundering double track record of 5.8687 at 244.20 alongside Jimmy Alund 5.9154/241.62, wow! Meanwhile, back in 1968 it was suddenly July 7th and things were starting to happen at the Summer Match race, exciting things...

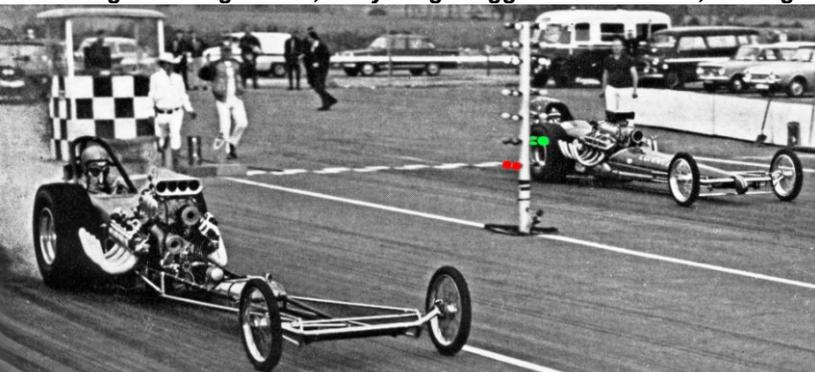
Tik Tickner unleashed the Olds powered Geronimo on its first ten second run, smoking off the line to a 10.80 136mph, then Mark Stratton, his John Woolfe Racing, 427 Chevy powered Hustler on new slicks, went deeper in with a 10.71 at 134mph! Shortly later Tony Densham powered the Commuter on a smooth as silk 9.2 second trip down the strip - then back came Tik to show his first ten wasn't a fluke, blowing our minds as he put Geronimo kissing close to the nines at 10.08 and 139.66...

Then the Sluggett and Priddle Chrysler moved out, its Keith Black hemi the sweetest sounding mill this side of the Atlantic as it smoked off the line, lighting up the slicks again before the finish line, smoking through the traps at 168.92 in 9.5 seconds. Tony Densham also laid it to the wood, with Commuter on a wild out of shape barnstormer that hit 170.07 in 9.1 seconds. I recall saying on the pa, "It's pity they didn't run side by side as Sluggett seems to be quicker off the line, but who can tell what would happen with someone sitting next to him?" Tik Tickner stepped up again to set Top Time and ET among the racers on a storming 143.47mph blast in 10.05 seconds, making Geronimo a real threat for some nine second prize money. As you can see from JB's shot at right, some dude's holding an umbrella - racing continued, but Tudor Rose and Commuter spent an hour sitting in the fire up road waiting for the strip to dry - unfortunately it didn't, and Sluggett and Densham were ready to RACE! But it was decided they were a tad too powerful have at it side-by-side on a wet strip, so yet again things were postponed, until July 20th - my birthday would you believe and this time they didn't let us down...

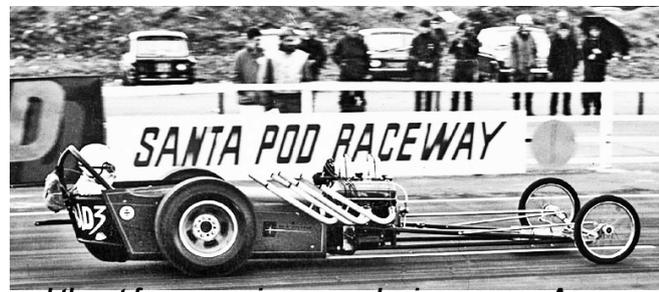
"Saturday 20th July saw the running of the second of the Night Drag meetings, without a doubt it provided the most exciting and spectacular racing ever seen at Santa Pod this year or any year." Even before the meet started the atmosphere was charged with electricity, the Sluggett and Priddle crew arrived and announced they were "bounty hunting" and wanted either Densham or Skilton come rain or snow. Clive Skilton was loaded for bear and seeking the Top Spot once again, so that left only Commuter and Tony Densham to arrive...

Soon the big fuel burning Keith Black hemi of Tudor Rose coughed into life, chief wrench Dennis Priddle swapping his tools for a big right shoe, smoking gently off the line, easing through the traps at 141.84mph in 9.34 seconds. Skilton was next and Clive really got the Allard/Skilton off the line, running straight as an arrow to cover the quarter in 9.1 at 156.74mph. Then Commuter arrived, the Tudor Rose crew made for the fire up road but Densham stayed back, so Priddle made another easy pass, 9.50 at 157.23. Then Commuter came to the line, Tony Densham showing he was ready for anyone as he powered the 427 to a 9.2 at 166.94, best speed thus far. Then they went back to the pits...

Suddenly it started to happen, the quickest, fastest rails in Europe, the 427 Ford powered Commuter and Keith Black Chrysler powered Tudor Rose - drivers all strapped in and sitting side-by-side. The call up lights beckoned, Sluggett moved out first swinging round nice and easy and onto the line, then Tony swung the big Ford round and with a final check he too rolled out to stage. It was an event we'd all waited for, two British built AA/FD's on the line waiting for the tree to go green, tension mounting as the lights ran, but young Sluggett left too soon, leaving a big red light as he smoked away.



Despite his red-light win Densham poured it on, running 9.036 and 163.93 to Sluggett's losing 9.312 at 176.68. Back to the pits to cool down, check the plugs and oil, repack the chute and 40 minutes later the crowd went wild as the pair came back down. Again Densham's experience paid off, Sluggett did it again, but he sat with the big red light shining in his face until Tony launched Commuter, then Rex nailed it, lighting the huge M&H slicks, powering around the Ford to lose at a fantastic 180.83mph! Unfortunately the Ford blew, Tony shutting off to the engine, easing through the traps in 9.82 seconds. A red-light victory maybe but the team were overjoyed—their Ford had won the first ever nine second match at Santa Pod—happiness is a win light, with an eight second ET! Unfortunately the Ford really did let go leaving Tony with a broken Isky cam, bent valves and popped pistons — however, both these machines are expected to run again on August 4th—let's hope Rex manages to hold it steady this time... More Nitro Nostalgia soon, with the racing getting far more exciting!

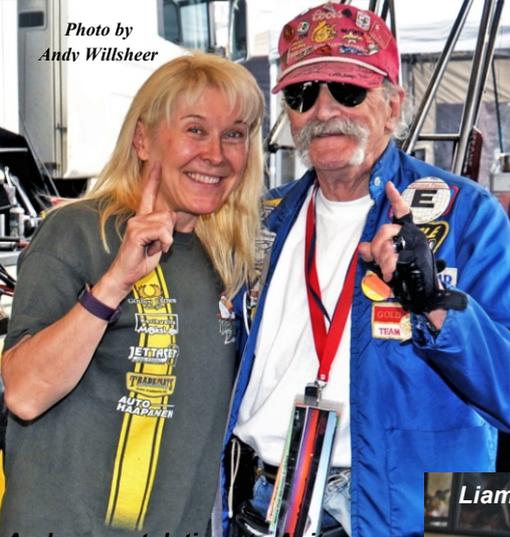


Spot the difference half-a-century makes as two NitroWarriors prepare to unleash their thunder, with Mike "Tik" Tickner blasting Geronimo into the nines at 9.973 and 143.27mph! The crew certainly look happy and with good reason, theirs was the first unblown car to run a single digit ET outside the USA!





Photo by Andy Willsheer



And congratulations to Anita Mäkelä, Tommi and the team for a stunning win at Tierp, it was a joy to see. Not only does she have the loveliest smile in Top Fuel she's a bitchin' driver, and I was kinda sad to have missed her winning the quickest and fastest side-by-side race in Europe when she hole shot Liam Jones with a 3.918 at 312.12 mph to Liam's 3.908, 313 – wow!

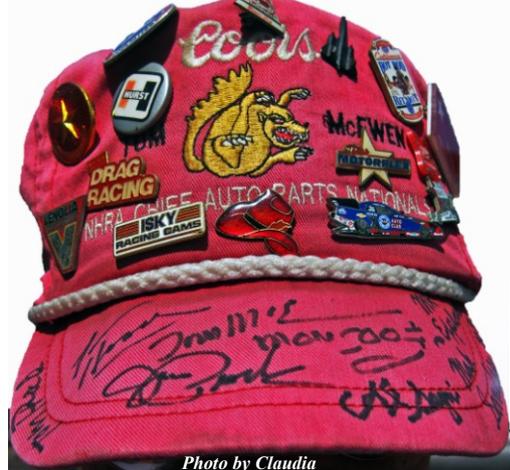


Photo by Claudia

Sad to hear of Tom McEwen's passing, a cool dude, he always made me laugh. God speed Mongoo\$e, we'll miss you



John Force Racing fuel coupes ran this tribute at the Thunder Valley Nats (4.03)



Anita Mäkelä 3.9571/295.07 Q2

I can remember Mrs Taylor's birthday cake, but these burnouts from Anita and Stefan were a cool way to end my day, and kick-start celebrating 50 years of side-by-side NitroThunder



Loved those smoke signals as RFM's Antti Horto blasts off to a 3.904, 303.58 for pole. Although it wasn't as much fun as that Saturday night back in 1968 (come on there was a bevy of babes and cake!), the Top Fuel cars at the track made me feel grateful to have enjoyed so much ground pounding NitroThunder since then – and it just keeps on getting better! Actually, when Wojtek sent me the shot below of a couple of Wild Bunch rails running on an 8.90 index it made me wonder about the amount of time and energy spent to get close to that number – but boy did we have a heap of fun, and we still do...



Liam Jones 3.905/312.20 Q3

Photo by Wojtek



Photo by Wojtek

Back in '68 a young Ron Bailey put out a clip of our Match Race at Santa Pod on Anglia TV, that night we gathered round John Bennett's desk at the Drag Rod office just down the road and listened to the broadcast on his speaker phone while our pal at the other end placed his telephone in front of the TV! Today kids watch racing live on their phones and that's kinda awesome – but being a dinosaur, my phone doesn't do smart stuff, so my vicarious racing is done on a decent size monitor. It keeps me happy, especially when I can Snip shots from No1SantaPodShooter's great clips on YouTube like Stig and Micke K's wild rides - click the links and enjoy...



Micke Kägered was lucky just a fuel line broke!

Photo by Wojtek



Congratulations to Tony Betts on his 6.03 and 6.01 runs



mcSnip courtesy No1SantaPodShooter

"More by bleedin' luck than judgement," chuckled ol' Nitro Nostrils when we spoke of Stig's Main Event win over Anita Mäkelä, "That's for sure," I agreedudged, "But what a wild ride he took in round two!" But, everything's good about getting lucky!