



Along with 50 years of side-by-side NitroThunder, there's another Golden anniversary being celebrated at the Pod this year - a couple of clues in the image below might help you guess what it is, but I bet you'll never guess why! This is a classic muscle car race for Class eliminator between US serviceman, Rod Alonso who'd become known as the hole-shot king soon after he hit the track in 1967, and relative newcomer Doug Harler known for easy leaves and a top end charges - but not this time! Rod's Mercury Cyclone 390 GT put more than a car length on the mighty Mopar 440 R/T for a stunning 14.7 win over Doug's far quicker 14.2 and fans went nuts. But earlier those same fans had a few issues at the Drag Rod Trophy meeting rain date race...



DragRod photo
John Bennett

Driver Tony Densham had been delayed on a business and the Commuter was nowhere to be seen with large numbers of fans already lining the banking, many a tad miffed that Tudor Rose was in Sweden not here, and things were starting to get unsettled - they'd seen the Pod's first side-by-side blown an injected fuel car race and come back to feel some NitroThunder! Something needed to be done...

DRAG RACING &



HORSEPOWER UNLIMITED!!!

HOT ROD The only magazine on Britain's fastest growing motor sport

To Santa Pod fans in those halcyon days, the Commuter AAFD was a thing of beauty (and perhaps even more so at its 1996 comeback at the Pod World Finals), but in '68 the needle nose'd Commuter was also a truly awesome sight blasting off the line with a rooster tail of billowing smoke as it chased high speed glory. An 8-second FIA record holder in 1967, it'd won the Pod's first side-by-side AAFD race and many fans lusted after it - me too, so it was easy to say "Yes please," when offered the ride and was soon sliding down into the driver's seat, wearing big grin and looking up with a silent "Thank you."



mcPix 1996
jbPix 1968



Needle nose 1968

Having been with Commuter many times at the start line, feeling the ground shake as it launched down the asphalt aisle was little or nothing compared to the thrill of being at the helm of this blown an' injected fueler. The car started to shake as I was pushed out over the bumpy surface, the close confines of the cockpit allowing my Zen powers to slow motion the ride and fill it with the almost virtual reality of a max'd out quarter mile blast in an AA Fuel Dragster. Bright sunshine filled the red paintwork with radiance, slender spoked wire wheels gleaming as their skinny front tyres twitched skittishly, each minute movement transmitted through the custom built wood rimmed butterfly steering wheel. Nirvana indeed - and a true case of HorsePower UnLimited. My forward peripheral vision of jutting headers stretched by a gold lanced red needle nose floating on its skeletal front end was filled with the fat blown and injected 427 Ford screaming a couple of feet ahead of my face, the wind blasting me back in time - into a fine mist of oil clouding my forward vision! Being a fuel dragster pilot meant having the power of almost instant analysis, even more so when the engine you could destroy was not yours! Within a milli second, as a possibly lethal spray splashed over my face, a quick check was made to see that I was way ahead of my opponent before clicking off the power - but too late it seemed. Through the haze now covering my eyes came a violent burst of colour, then my ears filled with an explosion of screaming metal as a loud voice entered my private universe, "Oi, turn the bleedin' wheels Mike," the push bar rasping close behind my head adding strength to the words which snapped me back to reality - and the fact that the car was only being pushed down to the pits! Being in the driver's seat of the Densham, Billinton, Phelps' World Record holding AA/FD Commuter was a fantasy of speed and power with little more than a few bumps starting the chassis flexing, freeing my wild mind to screen a slow motion mind-movie producing Karmic energy that carried me back to my first power race against a Olds V8 powered Model A sedan while driving a wicked, power-twitchin' short wheelbase altered filled with small block Chevy for a few wild moments in space and time... Unlike my short ride in the Commuter that had been a balls out drag race. Shortly later Tony Densham flew in, fans entertained when his plane landed on the track, and again when it took off moments later as he was driven to his fuel car now ready and waiting surrounded by fans eager for their dose of NitroNirvana. As readers know, they got more than expected, with Tony recording the new track's first eight, an 8.89, 173.61 backed up with an 8.459, 180.83mph blast. This shot of Peter Billinton's son Antony wearing my crash helmet was taken before the car was put on the trailer to leave which I thought was cool. Many years later film surfaced from that day with the fueler



mcPix

being towed through the pits in 1969 and he too was "driving" the car, but at his age he needed no excuse! Trouble was, he'd "driven" the Commuter further and faster than me! Lucky trucker - to this day I can recall with ease the chassis flexing as we moved off and my mind still goes slo-mo as I just slide back into another world. But enough fantasy, let's rejoin those muscle cars in the Comp Eliminator final where Rod Alonso got another hole shot over Doug Harler, held it through first gear only to have Doug blast past the Cyclone with a consistent 14.25 win. Okay, let's time travel back to the first night race of '68 and celebrate the spectacular debut of Doug's all-new, Dodge Charger 440 R/T, a run high on my list of magic Mopar memories ...

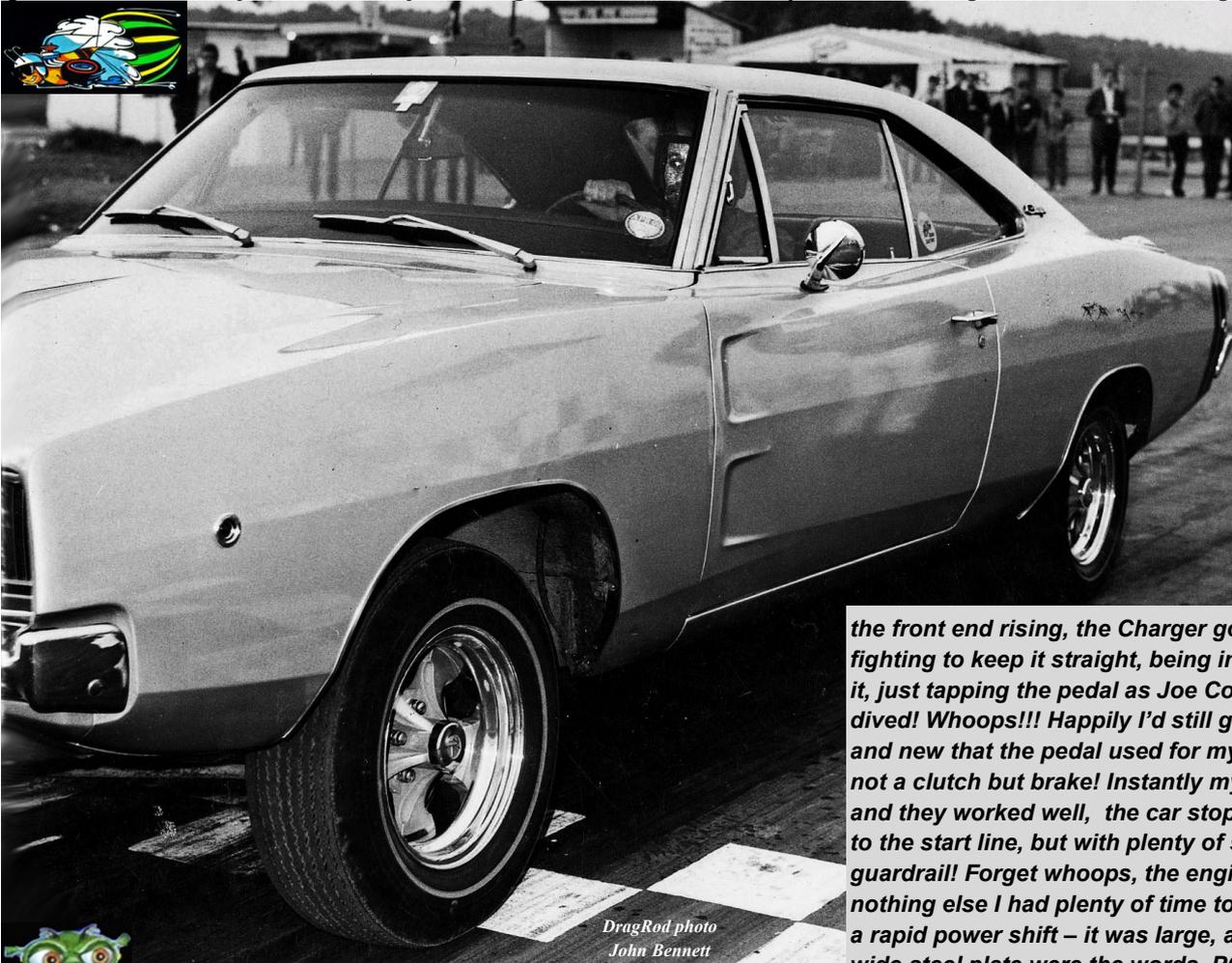


A silver Charger, made blue by the sky!



K&P Robbins courtesy TTDVDS

Wow indeed, stepping out into the sunshine as this [1968 Dodge Charger](#) rumbled slowly past beneath the commentators booth was too much – we'd all seen adverts in the mags, but in the flesh oh boy! So different to the sharp lines of the first Charger, in fact totally unlike other muscle cars and oh-so swoopy and I was blown away by the subdued sounds of power coming from its twin pipes – then I saw the R/T badge on the back and almost ran down the steps as it pulled to halt a few yards away. Its driver was Doug Harler, freshly posted into USAF Ruislip he'd met up with my old pals Rico and Copp at the hobby shop, they talked about Santa Pod, my name came up and now here we were soon deep in conversation. Many years later he wrote these (mc tuned!), words for Trakbytes "My first trip to Santa Pod I drove into the pits in a 1968 Dodge Charger R/T. It had the 440 cubic inch motor, automatic transmission and 2,000miles on the odometer. The fellow who was the announcer was so impressed he ran out of the timing tower to look at the car. I had no competition license so couldn't drive it, but he said he'd be more than happy to take it for a test run." We made small talk for awhile, with Doug chuckling as he added, "Just let her roll for about ten feet then punch it!" Not wanting to run alone, I hunted for someone to match race with, but they were all tied up in eliminations – except for my nemesis, fuel car driver Clive Skilton who, after a blistering 9.04 at 167.5 (low ET and top speed for competition cars), had lunched the clutch on the Allard/Skilton fuel car and was busy bench racing, while waiting to checkout a hot 16-second Viva GT! Normally a match race is heads up, but being the Pod's PR man, commentator and DragRod writer gave me some leeway, so it was easy to arrange a two second handicap that we both agreed was cool, although Clive smiled as he said,



DragRod photo John Bennett

"You'll need more than that to beat this little baby Mike!" Pulling on my helmet I fired the mighty Mopar, Doug's words on my mind like a mantra as I eased into stage, Doug also wrote "I was a bit hesitant but stood by the guard rail as he pulled it to the line." The lights ran, Clive was greased lightning and cut a great light – two seconds was so l-o-n-g – by the time my lights ran I was so hyped it was banzai! Whoops! Input malfunction – forget letting her roll, I drove the sucker off the line hard,

the front end rising, the Charger got sideways. While fighting to keep it straight, being in power shifting mode I hit it, just tapping the pedal as Joe Copp taught me - the nose dived! Whoops!!! Happily I'd still got gunfighter reactions and new that the pedal used for my rapid power shift was not a clutch but brake! Instantly my foot mashed down on it, and they worked well, the car stopped – albeit at 90degrees to the start line, but with plenty of space between me and the guardrail! Forget whoops, the engine wouldn't fire – if nothing else I had plenty of time to study the pedal I used for a rapid power shift – it was large, and writ boldly across a wide steel plate were the words, POWER Disc Brakes!

Here's how Doug saw it, "Cloud of smoke as the Dodge clawed the track for traction. First gear had the front end high in the air as he shifted to second. Unfortunately he was not too familiar with the automatic transmission and slammed his foot on the brake and threw it in reverse. The big Dodge did a 360 degree spin in the middle of the track, stopped then headed for the finish line. The time wasn't good but the crowd were pleased." Meanwhile, back in the car I recalled it was still in gear, one fitted to an auto box and that meant a neutral safety switch. Wow, thank f*ck for that, if I'd lunched the motor or trans I'd have been paying off forever! With a wry grin, turning my head towards the heavens to give thanks, I selected neutral, fired the big 440 and headed off down track at an easy lope, revelling in the sound of the mighty Magnum 440, until the realisation came that now, having crossed into Clive's lane, the number one no-no on dragstrip I had to face the sh*t! Oh my, but thank God I made it a handicapped match race and not heads up! There again, with two green lights you know I would've let it roll those oh-so-important ten feet before turning loose almost 500ftlbs of torque, and maybe even have beaten Clive at last! Eventually I returned to the start area where Doug was cool enough to say, "Get back out there an' do it right." So I did, and this time JB got the shot-almost! He was rushing back from his tea break after hearing the ruckus, ran onto the line and missed the nose – but I'm not complaining John, you and that Hasselblad caught the front wheel comin' up and captured my eye as I cut a real light, and got a decent time ticket too! So thanks for the re-run Doug, without that who knows what might have become of the Stovebolt Kid, he j'st might never have driven again!! Yeah right, and just how do you spell bollox? Giving thanks once more for our good fortune, I vowed never again to let any such trans problems arise, and they never did - for starters just tucking my left foot under the seat when power punchin automatic horses. It worked too, then came the shift to left foot braking, not so much for the drags, more for the high winding two lane country runs and power trips with some hi-po muscle cars on real race circuits, even drivin' my ol' hugga and beatin' up on some Corvettes too! But f'r now let's go record bustin in 1968!



K&P Robbins courtesy TTDVDS

End piece by Doug "After cleaning out my underwear I got my license and raced for the next four years." And he did it in style too, winning BDR&HRA's 1969 Street Championship – then switched to an Allard Dragon!



Sarah Norkett photo

AUTUMN MATCH RACE

DAVID (Motovation) V's GOLIATH (Commuter)

ADMISSION 10/- INCLUDES CAR PARK
AND PROGRAMME: PIT PASS 5/-

It's a long way to Elvington from anywhere - especially back in 1968, even more so from Bude, way down on the west coast of Cornwall or even Yeovil, Somerset, but Sluggett and Priddle wanted Tony Densham's FIA World Record and drove oop north in a Land Rover towing their trailered AA/FD! Upon hearing about this we hastily made changes to our adverts! And then JB suggested I might enjoy going up too, "What for the weekend?" I asked, "No Michael," he'd replied, "Just the day, you'll need to be back for the race in the morning!" Sadly my Chevy ran out of brakes and tax the same weekend I ran out of money, so I asked my new USAF pal Bill Carpenter if he fancied the trip - we both had the same tastes, babes, bourbon, fast cars and Colt 45, in no particular order! "Sounds cool, but not in your car..." He'd a Triumph Herald that, some months later when we drove it to the Pod lunched its gear box! But we'd had a blast when Doug Harler picked us up shortly after, and what a ride! We'd come upon traffic while cruising about 70mph on the two lane, Doug had moved the Charger right and asked "What's it look like Mike?" "Seven cars and a couple of trucks, then it's clear through the curve and an all-the-way empty straight." "That's cool," Doug said laughing as he added, "Hang on guy's," moving into the other lane he'd stood loud, the kick down unleashing the sound and fury of the mightiest Mopar outside the USA (if anyone had a King Kong 426 hemi they too would be racing at the Pod as you just don't use one of them to go to church!), and our world went crazy! It was just like the cartoon adverts, the front end lifted and the Charger shook a tad, the rear tyres smoked, hooked up and we simply thundered, passing the traffic like it was standing still, sweeping round the curve, the trans up-shifting, blasting us deep into three figures with ease... Wow what a ride! Meanwhile, back in south London, I'd found myself with a road test car for DragRod, picked Bill up and we'd visited a late night supper club on the King's Road, the way you do when facing an overnight drive into the back of beyond! With that in mind we only ingested strong coffee, enjoyed the always fine food and inducing a pair of hot babes to join us - the idea nixed when told we'd be sleeping in the car and returning after lunch! About 25minutes into the journey I noticed the Hasselblad camera case was not on the back seat! That's what happens when your mind is ruled from below the waist! Full astern both, and happily, as I said it was a "late night" club or we'd've been doomed before the off, but the two way trip was in close to half the time then we stormed into the night. Today Google suggest 6h 58 minutes and 375miles from Rex's home in Bude and 4h 36mins and 217miles for DragRod's test car, but that's with the benefits of SatNav - we had my astral navigational instincts and Billy the Kid's map reading ability, he's California so the thought still makes me laugh to this day! Things is, I can "mind-movie" our ride in the 440 Charger at will, but can't recall anything of our drive to Elvington after the ease and comfort of the M1- apart from taking less time than Google (naturally!), and covering 220 miles with our TT's road holding while powering through many two lane bends made 'em all a sheer delight. However, logged in my mind forever is meeting Hustler's Tex Blake just after we arrived; he'd no warming coffee, but proffered a bottle of Southern Comfort. Chugging some from the neck was more than welcome and, although it'd been a relaxing ride, no doubt eased our passage from wide awake to sleep after going back to the car and winding down its leather seats for a refreshing nap!

Saturday, October 5th at 6.30am was cold, yet all ready the mist-covered pit area is bustling with life as crews make last minute preparations for their record attempts. In 1967 at Elvington Tony Densham had blitzed almost half a second off Allan Allard's year old FIA World Record of 9.36, Commuter making five quarter mile passes, the final pair giving an 8.91 ET record average and now Tudor Rose were shooting for it, but it's never that easy. Sluggett and Priddle brought the rail out for a warm up run and got a severe lack of oil pressure, a quick check over then it was back out again, this time returning with a blown oil filter! Told you it wasn't easy...



Jan Smit photo
courtesy Nick Pettitt

Became pals with Jan Smit (of Big Spender and Blue Stratos fame with bike legend Henk Vink) many years later, but when Nick Pettitt sent me Jan's great shot of the car, crew and Elvington's mist recently I was blown away as he'd caught me wearing my colours and clutching DragRod's Hasselblad 50years ago! But let's get back to Tudor Rose - they'd made hasty calls for the Wynn's man, and happily ISO officials allowed that they could come out and run when they were able. Something I'm sure Rex and Dennis will be ever grateful for. Meanwhile, drag racin' weekend warriors and wealthy speed freaks play the age ol' game of hurry up and wait at the ISO's FIA World Record meeting in this never before published shot below - what a line-up!

The Weekend Warrior team were so unlucky; Alan Blount drove the injected Chevy gasser under the record all year at the Pod, but come the big day things just went pop. John Woolfe Racing's twin Chevy Hustler II got two it seems, Colin Saunders' 110.31mph is listed at the FIA for its quarter mile standing start

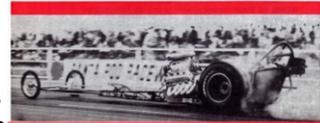


record for their class, but I read on Eurodragster John Woolfe also set a record in it that day - he's seen leaning on it with JWR co-sponsor Arnold Burton at right. Over by the Tudor Rose we find Tex Blake, the tall dude in white next to a happy Hustler II driver Colin Saunders (I think!), but that's definitely Alan Blount sitting on the push car's hood and Rex is busy working on the Tudor Rose's Keith Black. Talking of which It took nearly an hour for their Wynn's to arrive...



RECORDS WEEKEND '68

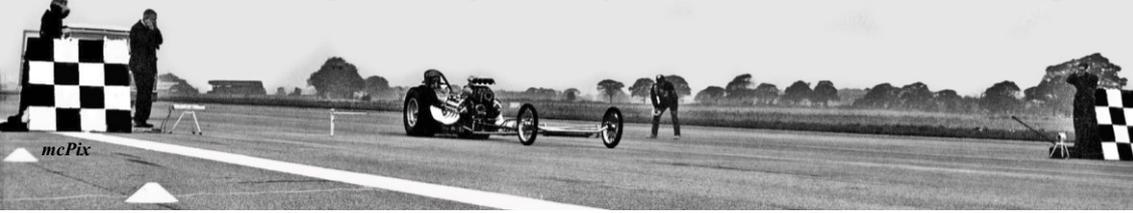
Saturday/Sunday, 5/6 October 1968
R.A.F. ELVINGTON, Yorkshire.



Courtesy ukdrn

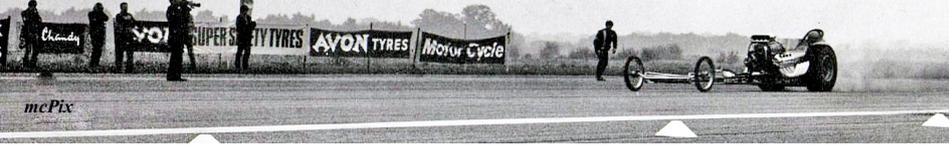


Once they'd filled the crank case Tudor Rose was ready to run—unfortunately it wasn't as simple as that. The flying quarter miles were being run, however it wasn't too long before they were called out, and with Dennis snug in the leather bound cockpit ready to have an official crack at a record they had already unofficially broken at Santa Pod. The car was staged, but there was no Christmas tree, just a signal from a guy in a suit then it was up to the driver! With only six pounds of air the huge Goodyears gave Tudor Rose instant traction when Dennis unleashed the blown an injected fuel dragster, scaring the marshals as you can see!



There wasn't a trace of smoke either, and 8.291 seconds later the car broke the timing beam – the record was truly smashed! Now they had to back it up, and wait while other cars made their return runs, giving the big Keith Black hemi time to cool down. Twenty minutes later she was back in stage for the return run, coming off the line with the slicks boiling, and a halo of smoke surrounding them the whole quarter to an 8.301, the average a new World record of 8.296! Always felt happy over this side of the track as no one got shots like these (apart from some dude who stole one when I wasn't looking!) Meanwhile back at the drags over in Tulsa Oklahoma Bernie Osborne's 7.05 at 211.76 won Top Fuel Eliminator, slower than his '67 win a 7.03 at 223. But we were catching up, and our final shoot out of 1968 was the best yet, Sluggett and Priddle were now top guns - when they

arrived back at the Pod they were loaded for bear, and they got it. Commuter had problems, managing a best of 8.75 at only 156.74 in a race against Bootsie Herridge who, with a 1/10th handicap, drove Motorvation to a best ever ET of 9.73 second at 139.28 and it was close at the top end thanks to this hole-shot leave. With Tudor Rose fresh from an engine rebuild after being torn down to ratify their new FIA record, Rex got back in the car and thrilled fans when he took out the lights and ran the new tracks fastest speed of 182.82mph in 9.42 seconds – still behind Bud Barnes' 187! Told you before that back in '68 we all knew that two cars were needed for a race! So here for the first time is kudos for Sexy Remy who, when the Commuter got a fuel leak, singled to 8.54 at only 146.63mph – but as we all now know, if the other car fails to answer the call you win – and Rex did just that! Both Tony D and Prid eclipsed Bud Barnes' 8.47 Santa Pod record by thousandth's, but Priddle's win below shaved 2/10ths off it with a blistering new track ET mark of 8.28 at 167.5 over Tony Densham's 8.77 with Commuter – a great way to end our first season of NitroThunder at the Pod!



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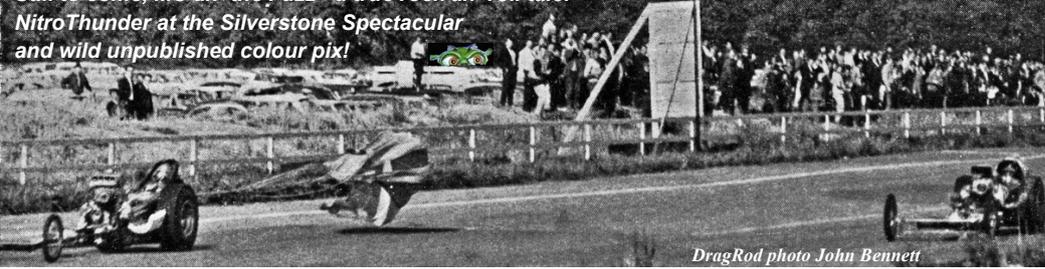


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DRAG RACING



Thrilled to hear that Ian Demaine, the guy who gave me my first power ride-and won BHRA's 1967 Street Championship, raced his Mustang Z car at the 2018 Hot Rod Drags!



Talking of records, NSU loved the TT returning with a Super Stock record-me too! Dropped the clutch at 5200, power shifted at 6700, held 3rd for a 17.89 at 73.53mph to break the F/SS mark (held by a Cortina GT at 18.66, 70.52), backed it up with a 17.93 at 73.42mph! *Cool*

Loved Gonzo since I first saw it oop North with Street Machine, and this shot of Ian's son Alan hangin' on to a wild launch at Shaky's last Hot Rod Drags in 2017 blew me away



51 years down the road, now that's what you call a Street Machine!

Alan ran a first ever - 7.87 at over 164 at the Hot Rod Drags (a speaker blocks the view on Nick P's film!)