



# Fuel For Thought

*LandSpeed Louise*

## Terminal Salt Fever

"The devil is in the details" the old saying goes. Even the most elaborate project depends on the success of the smallest components. I am beginning to wonder if the devil ever met racing partners Ron Main and George Poteet who are anything but moss-gathering racers.

Where most land speed racecar projects easily take two to three years, these two executed a six-month build cycle that not only included the design and build of a new body using exotic methods and

block just so it can hold itself together. We might be able to get 1,000HP out of it, but wondered if it would last for six hard miles."

The naturally aspirated engine list price starts at \$30,000. Poteet's Blowfish uses a Mopar midjet racing-engine built specifically for competition. George had a spare.

Mopar has agreed to supply spare parts and the duo now runs under the "Destination 400MPH" banner looking

Poteet's a damn good driver too, possibly due to his "hero" haircut. He idolized Mickey Thompson and figured if it was good the Mick it was a good luck charm for him.

How many senior citizens do you know that can say they EVER drove in excess of 150MPH let alone more than twice that speed? Oh yeah, and its "just for fun." That's the point. Fun. Poteet brought a real-live camel to the '07 Speedweek event and Main has often drug along his motorized bar stool. See what I mean?

This is land speed racing folks, not an over-regulated motor sport with dagnabbit, pain in the patootie rules and regulations that change with political whimsy and caprice. Here, in this sport, what you can dream, you can do. Safely, of course.

Speed Demon's body evolved by using a time-saving, stunningly accurate way to make the mold out of high density, medium-weight foam using CAD drawings. Next fiberglass material called "pre-preg" is put into

the foam mold lined with thin Teflon sheets to provide a glass-like surface.

"The term 'foam' is misleading," said Main, "The stuff is like a brick. There were no plugs for anything. When you pop out a part there is very little sanding, it's almost paint-ready."

Nemesis Air Racing in Mojave, CA developed all the CAD drawings. These folks have their air racer hanging in the Smithsonian. THX, a film industry prop shop in Moorpark, California built the body using a five-axis gantry router.

Will Speed Demon reach 400MPH in 2008? "Absolutely!" replies Poteet with nary a moment's hesitation flashing a wide grin topped with electrified "go get 'em" eyes when I asked him about four bills in '08. Calculating Main knows they need a good course and weather; he has confidence in the car, including the "creams and oils," but everything has to work in concert, right down to the push truck

"Speedweek is an escape for Ron and I," confessed Poteet, "It is a privilege for me to do this. We are up and out at 5am every day. On the salt I get to watch the most beautiful sunset and sunrise in the world. Some folks like Hawaii, but this is what does it for me."

Main figures once he achieves his 400MPH goal it's back to being a volunteer.

"I'll help out where I can," Main stated with uncharacteristic humility in his voice, "I want to give back what folks have been giving to me over the years. We have a lofty goal, the salt's deteriorating, getting dangerously thin, and we know we are running on prayer. It used to take hours to drill through the salt, now one hit of the hammer and the stake is in."

Pressing them both a bit I discovered that both of them grew up in rather meager circumstances. As teenagers they didn't have the opportunities like others their age and had to put their dreams on hold – however vivid yet enduring.

"When I got into the "two" Club and then the 300MPH Chapter," Poteet revealed, "It was very emotional for me. Few people ever get to meet their heroes, even less get to become their peer and here I was, in a room surrounded by my heroes."

The partnership fomented one day while Poteet was in the staging lanes with his little street roadster and Main with the streamliner. The two got to talking and Main sold Poteet on the idea of being able to drive something else.

Poteet chipped-in, buying a couple engines, but was initially afraid to drive the 'liner bursting with overwhelming modern technologies, parachutes, nitrous buttons and data acquisition.

"I got started so late and had so much to learn," confessed Poteet who 15 years earlier drove out to the salt in his



materials, but they also abandoned their known engine architecture because they were greedy for more speed.

Poteet has been amusing himself immensely with his Camel Toe Racing stable. The Memphis, Tennessee businessman started with drag racing, followed by three land speed roadsters that gave way to the gorgeous golden 1969 Plymouth Barracuda called "Blowfish" that he drove to a national record in the Blown Fuel Competition Coupe F at 255 MPH in 2006

Main also started racing a roadster, followed by a lakester that morphed into the Flatfire streamliner – the fastest (+300MPH) flathead-powered car in the world which became Ecofire when he dropped in a GM Ecotec engine. Ecofire was the last racecar Steve Fossett drove before he vanished into thin air last September.

Even though Poteet and Main have now switched to a Dodge 4-hole Hemi mated to a Liberty 5-speed gearbox that sends 1,300 HP screaming through the driveline, they don't want folks to think the Ecotec production car engine wasn't a nice bullet; it simply wasn't designed to take the unmerciful beating dished out in high performance racing scenarios.

"The Ecotec is great for what it is," noted Main, "But it is not a racing engine. The head bolts go all the way through the

to claim the "World's Fastest 4-Cylinder" title later this year.

Ken Duttweiler added the Turbonetics custom turbo (situated behind the engine to satisfy aerodynamic packaging concerns) followed by a variety of his special little changes – little o-rings in the head, porting, different cams, etc.

"The Hemi gives us a sturdier foundation to reach our goal," noted Main, "The 5 1/2-inch head bolts per cylinder can withstand the turbo boost we push into it. We need a minimum of 1,300 reliable horsepower. With Mopar's help, we believe we can get to 400MPH."

Operating at that pace you either have a large supply of pain medication, a fat wallet, and/or a genie in your personal bottle because a few miracles are required. Ok, so the guys have a few nickels. So what. It's a delight that they choose to invest in land speed racing.

These two past-their-prime mischievous boys have figured out how to mix-up an invigorating elixir of youth from which they drink every chance they get. Good for them.

Main, 65, and Poteet 60, not only debuted the new car, "Speed Demon" at last year's Speedweek, but managed to run at a private world record meet in October where the car exceeded 350MPH. Not bad for a new car with less than a dozen runs on the axles.



'32 roadster and when the Kenz & Leslie team let him sit in their car the speed bug bit, "I was comfortable in the background listening and learning. Nobody is with you in the car, you have to get in and get the job done."

It's more than money with me. My life is at stake. I have confidence in Ron and the team to keep me alive. I can die



doing this if someone is pissed off with me. We all have flaws that we have to overlook and forgive - don't ever go to bed mad at each other.

This is a team effort - whether you agree or not - you have to put forth 100% effort, and if you do, there will be plenty of things that come back to you."



Every partnership has tense moments and while they now laugh about it, Poteet ignored Main's warning not to drive into the sun. Poteet needed to scratch his speed itch before the daylight burned out

and dismissed Main as a baby, vigorously proclaiming, "I can see! I can do it!"

Experience is an irrefutable teacher. Blinded by the fading rays as promised, Poteet took out all the timing lights and flags on both sides on that historic run. Lucky duck he, the speed was recorded before he trashed the timing light and got a record.

"I thought, 'they will never let me drive out here again'," recalled Poteet, "I did learn not to push off the starting line at 5pm." Note, he never said Main was right.

"The car drives real well," reveals a now wiser Poteet who believes he can drive Speed Demon as fast as Main and company can make it go, "It is comfortable and dependable. There is nobody out there better prepared than Ron - some equal,

but nobody better. Ron is so good at delegating to a reliable crew of people that we have had very few instances of car failure, most of our problems come from the computer."

Poteet and Main are notorious for being the first out on the salt and the last to leave. They have a core crew of nine people: Russell Russ, John Aiken, Steve Burke, Danny Burrow, Paul Green, Ed Horton, Mark McCaw, Gary Robison and Gary Thomas. These are the guys who show up and work on the car for three hours before they turn it over to Poteet who gets to drive for 90 seconds

"My job starts when I pull away from the truck," Poteet noted, "I have a job to remember everything that happens, to control the car, to drive it the way I was instructed. I can't lie because there is data acquisition on the throttle."

I have to memorize the shift points and there are things the car does the computer can't record, so I have to remember what's going on and when it's going on. If I don't determine the bad spots in advance and prepare for the bumps I'll drive the nose into salt."

Interestingly, Poteet noted that how much feedback a driver can provide depends in part on who is conducting the debriefing. Still, he endures an inordinate amount of grief about his push truck

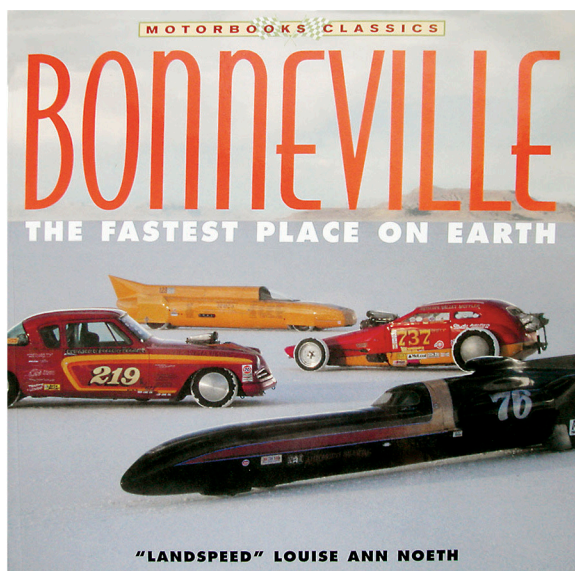
launches: pulling away too quick, too late, too slow, too soon, because "it is the only part of the run the crew gets to see so that's what they can criticize most."

Poteet, who over the winter often sits in his office reliving the last run he made on the salt, savors every tach reading and shift, every bump and tracking nudge, summed up the Speed Demon team in such a way that it could easily be said of most every team that comes to Bonneville. He said, "All of our crew volunteer, they want to be there, nobody has to be there."

That, dear readers, is what makes Bonneville the Mecca of Speed incarnate.

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*Note:* Photojournalist Louise Ann Noeth is the authoress of the award-winning book, "Bonneville: The Fastest Place on Earth," a complete historical review of the first 50 years of land speed racing now in its 7th printing. For more details and to order, go to: [www.landspeedproductions.biz](http://www.landspeedproductions.biz).



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