

Book your holidays now! Speedweek in Australia is on from 27th February until the 4th of March, 2017 and it is going to be big. The Dry Lakes Racers of Australia is preparing for what is expected to be our largest event ever. If you need more info, go to www.dlra.org.au.

Meanwhile, in the USA a few months ago, things were looking pretty grim for racers hoping to speed across the salt flats at Bonneville in Utah. The salt was in poor condition. Full credit must be given to the guys running the SCTA - their determination saw Speedweek 2016 run on all cylinders!

According to some racers the track wasn't the best, but that didn't stop some big records from being broken.

George Poteet and Ron Main's 'Speed Demon 2' (again) took out the coveted Hot Rod magazine trophy given to the fastest speed of the meeting with a pass of 429.099 mph. The Speed Demon team have won the trophy every year since 2009. The trophy is awarded to the car with the fastest flying single mile speed.

The big story of the meeting was Danny Thompson. Danny is the son of the legendary hot rodder, Mickey Thompson.

His father first raced at El Mirage, a dry lake bed near Los Angeles California at the age of 15 in a Model A ford at the speed of 79mph. At that time he almost beat the class record and got a reputation for having the fastest car at school.

Mickey Thompson became obsessed with beating England's John Cobb's 394mph record and bringing the land speed record back to America. Challenger I started as a chalk outline on the shed floor. Four Pontiac engines were chosen because of their tight V which enabled the car to be slimmer. The engines were coupled to four 1937 Cadillac gearboxes. The running gear went together well; the biggest concern

was tyres that could cope with the high speed, and parachutes that wouldn't try to turn the car when deployed.

On August 22nd 1959, Challenger I ran 351.95mph with a two way average of 345.33. This gave Mickey four world records but John Cobb was still faster. Challenger I's four Pontiac engines were then fitted with superchargers and the body got a stream lining makeover. Mickey returned with Challenger I to Bonneville on September 9th 1960, taking the car to a speed of 406.6mph, making Mickey Thompson the fastest man on the planet.

Mickey was determined to go faster and began planning, and in 1968 Challenger II was born. The car was powered by twin 427 Ford engines mounted into a hand formed aluminium body. Challenger II was built in just 5 months.

Lack of funds saw the Challenger II project shelved. Mickey, still firmly believing Challenger II was the fastest vehicle ever built, contacted his son Danny in 1987. Danny was, and still is today, a successful racer in his own right. Mickey offered to finance the resurrection of Challenger II if Danny was willing to drive. In January 1988, Challenger 2 was taken out of storage and plans made for a 1989 attempt at the land speed record.

On March 16, 1988, Mickey and his wife Trudy were killed by two gunmen at their home in California (It wasn't until 2007 that someone

was found guilty of their murders). Grief stricken Danny packed up Challenger II and placed it in storage where it stayed for another 15 years.

And now, Challenger II has come out of storage. Danny Thompson has made some changes - the 427 Fords have been replaced by a pair of Nitro fuelled 500ci Hemis that burn 50 gallons of Nitro Methane producing 2,500 horsepower each. Danny sits in between the two Hemis he said, "He feels like a 5,000 horsepower sandwich." After a run, the car weighs 200kgs less as the fuel is burnt.

The new Challenger II is four wheel drive, one Hemi drives the front wheels and the other drives the back. The engines are mirrored so the front engine is mounted backwards in the chassis, coupled to twin three speed gearboxes. Danny says, "I have spent my life savings to get the record for my family and honour my Father's memory."

This year at Bonneville Speedweek, Danny Thompson, now 66 years old, managed to break the AA/Fuel Streamliner record. To obtain the record, you must qualify (the qualifying run) by running faster than the previous record. Then your car is impounded overnight. You are allowed into the impound area to perform minor work for a short time. The fuel tank is sealed and you are not allowed to return until the following morning.

The first runs of the day are the cars from impound, all trying to backup their previous day's run, hoping to take a record. The speed of the morning run (the record run if successful) is added to the qualifying run, then averaged. Danny's average speed was 406.769 mph beating the previous class record of 392.503 mph and just beating his Dad's record. Danny has now fulfilled a 48 year old dream. His next goal is an FIA world speed record attempt in September 2016.

See you at the salt.
Norm Hardinge



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Henry's
KEITH & GLENYS EASTWOOD
129 BALLANEE ROAD BALLAN 3342 VICTORIA, AUSTRALIA
PH: (03) 5368 1088 FAX: (03) 5368 1007 MOBILE: 0402 194 723
EMAIL: kg@henryspares.com.au WEB: www.henryspares.com.au

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RIGHT: Mickey and Danny Thompson with the original Challenger II. Mickey's first car, Challenger I (above) resides in the NHRA Museum in California.



“I have spent my life savings to get the record for my family and honour my Father’s memory...”



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