

# Danny Thompson looks to fulfill the speed dreams of his father

*By Larry Edsall*

In 1960, Mickey Thompson, a racing pioneer and innovative genius who built cars for Indy, for the drag racing, and for off-road competition, set out to become the first American to exceed 400 miles per hour in a piston-driven vehicle.

He built a Bonneville-style streamliner, the Challenger I, and used its quartet of supercharged Pontiac engines to cover a measured mile at 406.6 mph, nearly 100 mph faster than the 22-year-old world record.

Unfortunately, Thompson was denied the record because his car could not complete the second half of the required two-way run on the Utah salt flats.

Five years later, that record was broken, by the Summers Brothers and their four-engined Goldenrod racer, which completed the necessary two-way run and boosted the wheel-driven record to 409.189 mph.

Undaunted but even more determined, Thompson built a new car. Officially known as the Ford Autolite Special because of its pair of supercharged Ford engines, Thompson's Challenger 2 was rained out of its bid for a record run in 1968 and the entire effort was put on hold in 1969 when Detroit automakers withdrew their financial support of such motorsports programs.

Thompson went on to other racing endeavors, but early in 1988 he approached his son, Danny, and suggested they revive the quest with Mickey preparing the car and Danny doing the driving.

"A month later, my father was killed," Danny recalls, tears still filling his eyes these 23 years later as he announces his plan to update his father's car and to make an attempt late next summer "to finish my dad's dream and to fulfill my dream."

Remarkably, the official wheel-driven land speed record has climbed only to 417.020 mph, though cars recently have exceeded 440 on one-way runs at Bonneville.

With financial backing from Mickey Thompson Performance Tires & Wheels and, he hopes, additional sponsors, a 63-year-old but remarkably fit and trim Danny Thompson will equip Challenger 2.5 with a pair of nitro-fueled 500-cubic-inch engines he expects to provide 3000 horsepower to a set of M/T tires that already have been "spun" to 590 mph.

Thompson's eyes brighten as he pronounces such speed -- "five-hundred ninety miles per hour!!" He says he'd love to hit 500, but his realistic goal, he adds, is to push the record to at least 420.

In addition to updating the car to modern mechanical and safety standards, Danny Thompson plans to simplify some things.

For example, his father had equipped Challenger 2 with a split gas pedal so he could modulate power delivery from each Ford engine -- one of which was supercharged while the other was normally aspirated.

Danny Thompson may be an amazingly capable mechanic and fabricator, but he knows his father also was one of the world's best drivers as well.

“You don't want to make any mistakes,” Danny says. At such speeds, he adds, “mistakes are unacceptable.”

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