

Salty racers, fast cars at Utah's World of Speed | The Salt Lake Tribune



Wendover • Lindon's Jeff Strasburg remembers driving in the first Utah Salt Flats Racing Association's World of Speed in 1976, not so much because it was the first time the event was held but because he was 12 years old.

"I didn't have a license," he smiled Sunday after completing the first run in a two-run attempt to set a record in the AA blown fuel Lakester class. "But I was big for my age."

He and the crew from B & J Racing worked on the Lakester in the World of Speed impound area after making a first run of 341 miles per hour in the mile with an exit speed of 346 miles per hour, on the second of four days of land speed racing at the Bonneville Salt Flats.

He will have to back that up with a similar time Monday to break the old record of 329 miles per hour.

That, as any Salt Flats racer knows, isn't always a given.

"We haven't done it yet," said Strasburg, who owns a machine and transmission shop in Lindon with his brothers that produces many of the transmissions used in the faster land speed racing cars. "A million

things can go wrong."

Their late father, Alan, raced in the 1930s on the Bonneville Salt Flats and Strasburg's entire family is in the business. They are known more for funny car dragsters but they dabble in a bit of everything. For example, a few years ago, they helped a pedal bicyclist from the Netherlands set a land speed record of 166 miles per hour.

Strasburg and his three brothers are proud members of the [200 MPH Club](#), but he would love to sport a hat making him part of the [300 MPH Club](#).

Team Vesco's famed Turbinator was still waiting to make its first run late Sunday afternoon. Driver Dave Spangler and designer Rick Vesco feel it's capable of being the first piston-driven vehicle to hit 500 miles per hour. Spangler said he hoped to go over 400 miles per hour in what was envisioned as a test run.

The fastest car on the salt as of 3:30 p.m. Sunday was Californian Danny Thompson's Challenger II. In perhaps the most exciting run of the day, the car driven by the son of the legendary Mickey Thompson hit a top speed of 397 miles per hour at the exit, with the timed mile speed of 390 miles per hour, just short of the 392-mile-per-hour record.

Salt Lake City's Nish family had hopes of taking their unlimited AA non-turbo-charged, Hemi-powered car over 400 miles per hour Sunday, but driver Mike Nish popped the parachute early. Chances are, they will be out again Monday when racing begins at 8 a.m.

Nish's 16-year-old son Andy wants to be a third-generation Salt Flats racer. To get a license to become a land speed record driver, the teen hoped to use a roadster that his grandfather Terry said was purchased for \$5 from George Poteet as a gesture of friendship. Poteet, whose Speed Demon did not come to Utah for this event, is one of the top Bonneville drivers year in and year out.

The first two days of racing did not come off without several accidents. USFRA officials said two drivers were sent to a hospital Saturday. Their names were not released. One was a woman who drove a motorcycle and the other was a man who drove a steam-powered streamliner.

The accidents delayed racing for several hours Saturday.

On Sunday, a Texas driver flipped a Corvette near the end of the course going 220 miles per hour but walked away from the mishap.

Racing continues Monday and Tuesday in this Utah-sponsored event that drew hundreds of spectators over the weekend. The entry fee is \$20 per person, with discounts for seniors, military members and students.

The racing and an air show Saturday in Wendover drew plenty of people to western Utah and eastern Nevada. Because the traditional August Speed Week was cancelled [because of water on the course](#), this was one of the larger World of Speed events in recent years; this event was canceled last year because of rain.

Because of heavy interest in the wake of the cancellation of Speed Week, the Southern California Timing Association has expanded its World Finals event this year. It is scheduled September 27 through October 3.

There was some water near the entrance to the Salt Flats Sunday but it was negotiable by passenger vehicles. The courses were dry, though Strasburg described conditions as a bit loose when he completed one of the day's best runs.

As a pair of vintage airplanes buzzed the racing crowd Sunday morning, hundreds of people created a colorful scene by using umbrellas to provide shade while strange racing cars of all types and canopies passed by on a near-perfect windless day.

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