

Porsche Carrera Cup GB Junior finalists revealed

# AUTOSPORT NATIONAL

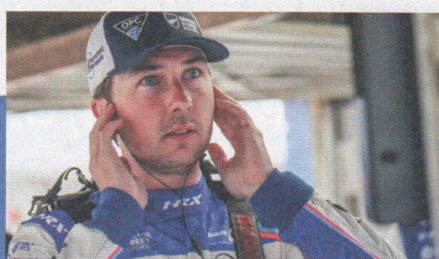
CLUB RACING • HISTORICS • FEATURES

## THE CREWS BRAVING BONNEVILLE

Remarkable cars tackle the Utah salt for Speed Week



Ward to race restored  
Ralt RT3 F3 car



Ingram to enter  
British GT finale



Priaulx's debut  
Spa Six Hours success

Racing has taken place on the Bonneville Salt Flats for over 100 years



# THE REMARKABLE MACHINES PEPPERING THE UTAH SALT

*A diverse range of cars and characters flock to the States for Bonneville Speed Week, even including a Jensen C-V8 from Britain*

CHRIS TARLING

PHOTOGRAPHY CHRIS TARLING

In early August each year, Bonneville Salt Flats in the extreme north-west of Utah provide the stage for a spectacular, otherworldly meeting of people and machines. Racing on the vast, blindingly white plain first took place in 1914, with something akin to an auto-racing exhibition. What is now known as the Bonneville Speed Week, held under the auspices of the Southern California Timing Association (SCTA), first took place in 1949. The event has been run (weather and pandemic-affected years excepted) annually ever since.

It has become the mecca for the curious art of land speed trials; the challenge of making a wheel-driven vehicle go as fast as budget, rules and ingenuity will allow. Located on an area at the western edge of the salt flats christened the Bonneville Speedway, it is uniquely suited to the task. Here, there's enough space to set out an arrow-straight nine-mile course; the surface is flat and hard, but retains enough moisture that tyres run much cooler than on mud, Tarmac or concrete.

This year featured the 75th running of the Bonneville Nationals Speed Trials. Typically excellent preparation by the SCTA had resulted in the creation of two high-quality courses, and everything looked set for a classic meeting. Mother Nature had other ideas, though, and sent a thunderstorm to dump a significant amount of rain on the area over the night of 1 August. By the following morning, the 'end of the road' (literally where the access road finishes and the salt begins) was under 1-1.5 inches of water, with a depth of 0.5 inches in the pits. While not at the level of

rainfall that forced the complete cancellation of the 2022 running, this was enough water to cause a serious setback.

Fortunately, no further rain fell and this, along with some hot and sunny weather, meant the water level subsided. Access to the salt was finally granted by the SCTA on 7 August and racing got under way on a single shortened three-mile course the next day. While not the situation anyone present had hoped for, there was very real relief that racing was able to go ahead at all.

*“Thirty-two records were broken, the fastest a 236.882mph by Jim Hoogerhyde in his electric streamliner”*

With proceedings under way, the sun shone, cars ran and records fell. In fact, 32 records were broken, the fastest of which was a 236.882mph average set by Jim Hoogerhyde in his on-trend electric-powered streamliner. Fastest speed of the event was set by Speed Demon, a blown fuel streamliner, at 333.360mph.

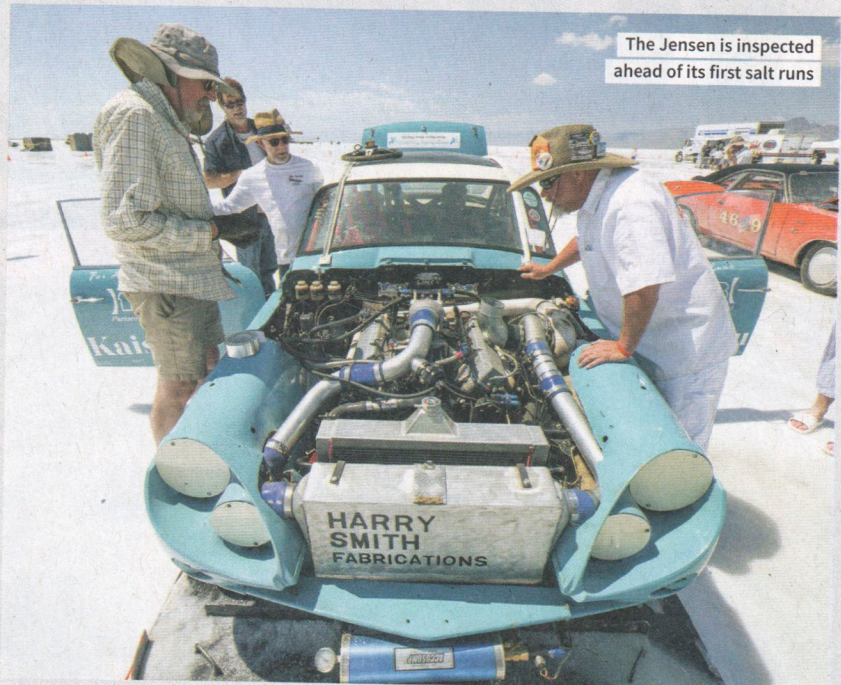
Racers come from all over the world to test themselves and their machines on the salt. The experiences of three teams at this year's event illustrate their diverse approaches, fortunes and backgrounds. But all three had the same aim: to go as fast as they could on this magical crystalline plain.



## IAN NORTHEAST AND THE WORLD'S FASTEST JENSEN

Ian Northeast and his 1965 Jensen C-V8 are no strangers to the salt or land speed racing. Northeast was involved in the Bloodhound SSC project and last ran his Jensen at Bonneville in 2018, achieving a maximum velocity of 148mph and learning much in the process. Bought for a 'bargain' £5000 as a 250,000-mile classic, the inspiration to make it the world's fastest Jensen originated over a pint in his local pub in 2016.

The list of modifications over the seven years Northeast has been working on this project is extensive. With a nominal goal of achieving 200mph in mind, both the engine and aerodynamics have received serious work. The original block is retained but the stroked engine now has a capacity of 496ci (8.1 litres), runs modified heads and cams, features multi-point electronic fuel injection, a strengthened bottom end to hold it all together, and a large single turbocharger complete with ice-cooled intercooler. The transmission proved to be an Achilles' heel in 2018 so, in its 2023 guise, a Tremec T56 manual transmission is mated to the engine via a ballistic bell-housing and NASCAR clutch package. Aerodynamically, the car sports a completely revised front end with no cooling apertures, side skirts, a flat floor, front splitter and rear wing. The front



The Jensen is inspected ahead of its first salt runs

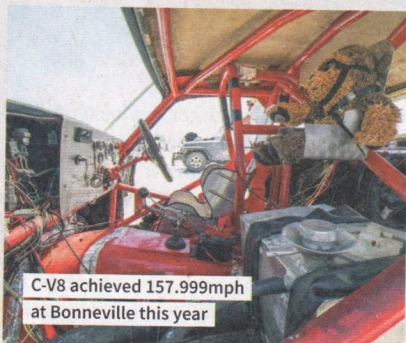
suspension configuration and geometry is of Northeast's own design, while the rear now consists of a four-link arrangement and coil-over dampers. Much of the rest of the modifications are concerned with meeting the SCTA's rigorous safety rules.

Indeed this year the SCTA inspectors found several (relatively minor) safety items they wanted to see improved before signing the car off. Although there was nothing major that needed rectifying, it did mean the team lost running time while searching around for parts and undertaking the work. A further complication was the expiry of Northeast's 150mph+ 'C' licence, meaning he had to complete fresh qualifying runs. With only one course available, there were long wait times for competitors. As a result, the team only managed two runs on the Thursday. The good news is that these were trouble free – a huge contrast to the trying problems that

plagued their last visit in 2018, and a vindication of the modifications made since.

Northeast achieved 136.876mph on his first run, but experienced a near-150mph sideways moment on his second, leading him to pull the parachute early and abort. The soft salt course had deteriorated significantly at this time. Back on the startline the next day, he completed another successful run to qualify for his 'C' licence, the car clocking 157.999mph at its fastest. Unfortunately, the event was now out of time.

"By any measure, it was a successful Speed Week for us, much more so than 2018," he says. "Within what was a very curtailed event due to weather we achieved two successful licensing runs, three runs in all with absolutely no running issues, we ran in a brand-new engine, and our aero and cooling designs worked well." Buoyed by this, he plans to run at El Mirage in November.



C-V8 achieved 157.999mph at Bonneville this year



Heideman has largely created Hemi-powered car himself over seven years



Stilwell achieved the event's fourth-fastest time, reaching 223.362mph



Valve gear checks are conducted in the pits

### GEOFF STILWELL AND TEAM 7707

Geoff Stilwell is an affable Briton who owns and drives '7707' – in SCTA terms, a blown-fuel rear-engined modified roadster. Officially listed as a 1927 Ford Model T base, it looks anything but as it sits in its pit area resplendent in gorgeous red paint. The car, running a 496ci BAE supercharged V8 on nitro fuel and putting out in the region of 5000bhp, requires top-class preparation and handling if it's to give its best. Stilwell has a workshop in Pomona (LA), which is the car's permanent home; adjacent to his shop is Mick's

Paint, which built the car and looks after it.

Last time out at Bonneville in 2018, Stilwell set the record for his class at 258.569mph. Since then, the car has run at El Mirage (an SCTA land speed event on a dry desert lakebed), where earlier this year it clocked two sub-200mph runs that highlighted several areas needing attention. There has now been further fettling. Additional lead ballast has been added in the nose, an issue limiting throttle travel has been fixed, and the rear-wing mounting has been stabilised.

## RANDY HEIDEMAN AND THE WORLD'S FASTEST INDUSTRIAL HEMI

Randy Heideman and his car #5151 are both new to the salt. Heideman has visited before, but this year he was in Utah with a car he has built himself over the past seven years, with the sole aim of fulfilling his ambition of competing on the salt at Speed Week. A long-time motorcycle racer (he won the Pikes Peak Hill Climb Vintage class in 2004), the dream to race at Bonneville first took hold when he was a freshman just into high school. His seven-year build typifies the stories of many who come to the salt.

"I've put the car together myself over the last seven years – what you see here is largely the result of my own sweat," he explains. "The motor came first. It's a 1953 industrial 33ci Hemi made by Chrysler, and this particular one was used to pump irrigation on a farm. At first, I didn't want to spend much money on it but, when I sent it in for a look-see, I realised that if I was serious about running at Bonneville, I had to commit to a full rebuild, and give the motor the best of everything I could.

"Next came the body. I knew I wanted to build an old Coupe. I found this 1934 Chevy 3-Window Coupe rotting in a farmer's fence line. When I got it out, I realised that actually I didn't have much left to work with, especially as the Chevys have a wooden frame. But my background is in



autobody and paint so I was able to slowly bring it up to what you see. The frame was the biggest challenge and not something I could do myself. Riley's Frame in Denver made a new frame for it.

"The body has Ford patches in it, the trunk lid is Ford, the trunk lid hinges are 1938 Buick. So it's a kind of Chevy mongrel with suicide doors, a bunch of Ford stuff to make the body look good, and it's got a complete Mopar driveline."

Tech inspection highlighted several areas where the car needed to be modified before it

could get to the startline. Parts were needed but, most significantly, the rollcage had to be modified, requiring a welder and welding gear that Heideman didn't have. This is where the community that is land speed racing really came together. Hearing about this need, another team quickly lent their welder and equipment. Serendipity played a further part when, quite by chance, 'Bonneville Dave' parked his rig, with its four-post vehicle lift, behind Heideman's 'pit'. As soon as introductions were made, the Coupe was up in the air, greatly easing the work.

Onto the salt and Heideman was ready to make his licensing runs. "It was an awesome experience feeling the car accelerate on the loose surface, feeling the slight drifting under acceleration," he says. "It was a cool but yet controllable feeling as a newbie. The first run was a little intimidating combined with the first-time nerves but, as the speedo approached 140, the carburetors popped a bit, which caused me to let off the gas, until I remembered I was on my 150 licensing run! I hit the throttle again just before the timed area to get me qualified for my first licence. On my second licence run for 175mph, the door somehow popped open and I had to abort! All in all, I'm still considering my rookie attempt a personal success."



In essence a detuned dragster engine, it's not a simple case of brimming the fuel tank and heading for the startline. Prior to each run, the team works through a list of checks: valve lash, spark plugs and data-logger output are all scrutinised. At least once during a race day, a leakdown test is performed to monitor engine health. After a full engine oil change, the motor is started and carefully warmed through in the pit. Only then is the car ready to tackle the salt.

Pushed smartly off the startline by the F450 rig

truck up to 60mph or so, there is a spinetingling crack as Stilwell accelerates down the blindingly white track. A solid 223.362mph speed at the three-mile marker is the result. In understated fashion, he summarises: "7707 is actually a remarkably easy car to drive. The key challenge is staying focused and maintaining the high level of concentration needed to drive on the salt at over 220mph. I just make sure I don't do anything stupid and hit my shift points – it's critical I don't over-rev the engine."

But this was the last Bonneville pass that Stilwell was able to complete in 7707 as the aluminium fuel tank had ruptured during the run – fortunately, the fuel did not find its way onto the hot exhausts. Fourth fastest time of the event was some consolation. Now back in the LA workshop, the team has wasted no time in starting work on a new 45-gallon stainless steel tank in preparation for an attempt on the mile record at the SCTA's final meeting of 2023 at El Mirage in November.