

The winter of 1967 was wet, windy and cold, especially for those of us working deep into the night in the wide-open spaces of Ernie Braddick's farm. And I do recall digging Half a Min out of the snow on the hilly outskirts south of London at least once before driving up to join other crazy volunteers helping to refurbish the Pod after the track had been moved back (to where it is today), and re-laid. Some received the princely sum of £2 per day, for many a King's ransom (seemingly paid back in spades!), to others peanuts, but we all worked harder than monkeys through that long, extremely cold winter into 1968, yet there were no complaints, to us it was a labour of love - and a case of the wild eyed and windswept blues...



Santa Pod Monkeys posing for peanuts...
...and we loved 'em!

words and photos
Mike Collins



We installed overhead electric cables late at night and got more than just cold trying to connect 'em to the new lighting and audio system in the face of a vicious wind ripping across vast acres of empty farmland to make our ladders sway like crazy!



Check out the monster puddles, large as anything seen in 2018!

But we had fun - JB asked me to sing in the rain so I leapt onto the guard rail and did a high-kick. He missed, but it was not tried again!



THE NEW LOOK
SANTA POD RACEWAY
with the
SEVEN SECOND SURFACE!!
Rod Alonso's Mercury Comet leaves
on Doug Harlar's 440 Charger



Spy photo of the Pod's new fuel car...
...we didn't believe it either!

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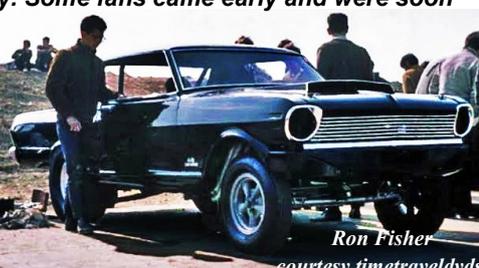
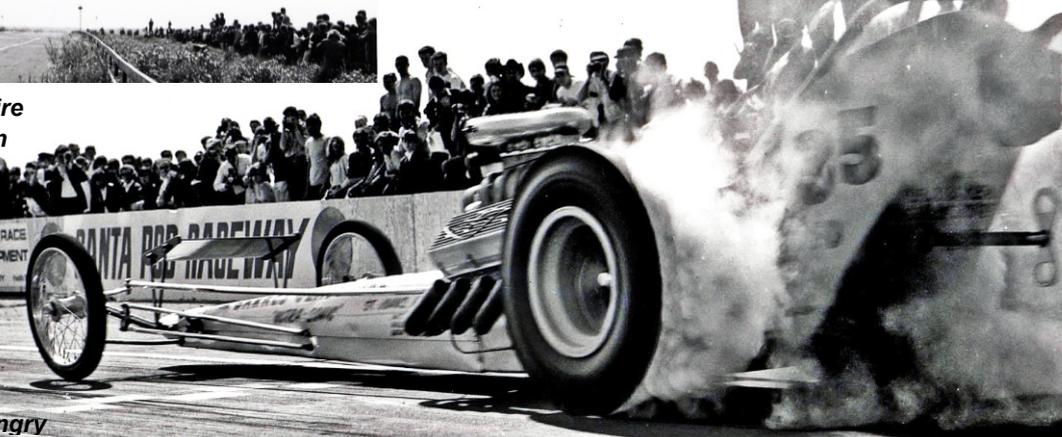


Out with the old, in with the new...



Juggernaut Model Y went through a blender - came out a swoopy Renault!

Even today my first taste of NitroThunder comes easily to mind, stood next to JB when he shot Bud Barnes, my eyes an' nostrils afire with NitroPower as Ultra Sonic smoked to an 8.47, 189mph record. Way off DragFest's 7.9s, for neophytes like me it was nirvana! Things could only get better, and through the winter we were hard at it promoting our first race, filling the powerful image with advertising copy but I thought you'd like it naked too! The Exchange and Mart (20th century eBay, kinda!), launched a new Drag Racing & Hot Rod section and fans were hungry for mind-blowing, gut-wrenching fuel cars racing side-by-side. Sh*t we'd seen the movies, read the books, even worn the tee shirts! Now we were promised the ultimate reality of live (Yeah-yeah!), fuel cars due to match race on Santa Pod's "new seven second surface!!" At lunchtime Sunday the pits were alive as teams began to unload cars and prepare for the big day. Some fans came early and were soon busy with paint pots and brooms! Six month's starvation meant a pair of slicks turned heads! But then a trailered Chevy II stopped us dead, its tube headers, skinny front wheels, huge rear slicks and altered wheelbase screaming "FX match racer!" Built to boogie, it was here to compete, and as time trials had started, fans began to cajole the crew to get her out on the strip - they had problems, but when the beast fired fans went nuts 'cos it was a sound we'd been waiting for all winter, the rumble of an uncapped 427 runnin' angry! As it lurched down the fire up road folks all downed tools, fans rushed forward, craning their necks to see - and even Bernie stopped working to watch and what a sight it was...

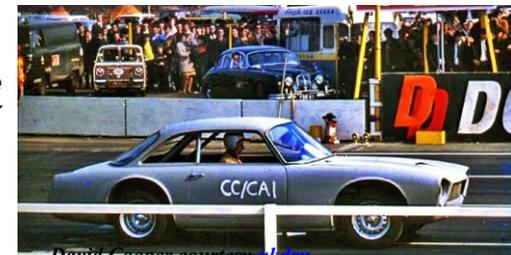


Ron Fisher
courtesy timetraveldvd

Dave East courtesy [timetravel4vds](#)

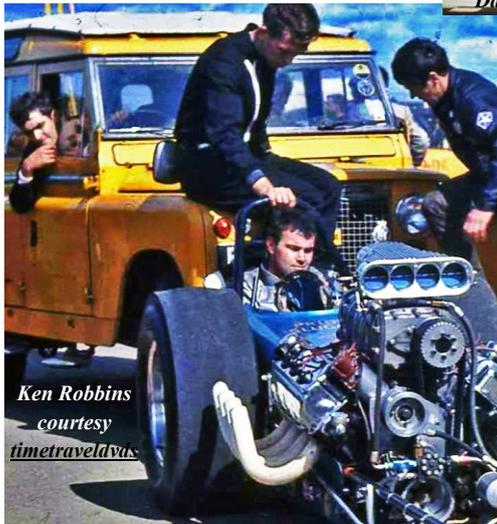


...better yet, my freshly built commentator's booth gave a new thrill, shaking to the roar of race cars, especially USAF's Bill Satterly uncapped 427 as he power launched his ex-Dick Harrell/Bill Thomas FX Chevy II Mean Machine. With its nose lifting, the Chevy was sideways off the line and at every shift as it sped to a 12.3 at 118mph, the sights and sounds making me want to get closer....

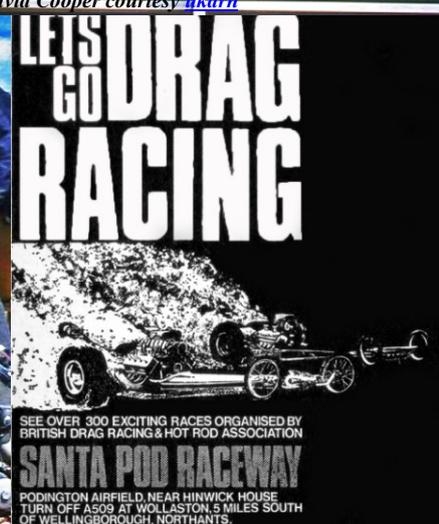


David Cooper courtesy [ukarn](#)

Then it was back to work - we were still hard at it deep into the night before the Pod's Easter Monday race day. By 10.30 the pits slept save some mechanics (as usual working through the night to get their cars ready to race!), and we all shared a first glimpse of the winter's most appetizing rumour. Fans would soon be familiar with it, but at first sight, being towed past by a yellow Land Rover, the Sluggett & Priddle Tudor Rose was too much, lights catching its chromed front end, its huge blown an' injected Keith Black hemi positively gleaming between fat Goodyear slicks, my thoughts at that time were "Santa Pod is Go!" Came the dawn, the few were now hundreds, and soon fans were packed deep along the fire-up lane with cars ready to race, held in line by the Race Control's staging sheriff Nobby Clark.



Ken Robbins courtesy [timetravel4vds](#)



All the hard work of sending out a barrage of press releases, making personal phone calls to national and local media along with wide spread placement of our "Let's Go Drag Racing" posters seemed to have worked as shortly later there were thousands more fans thronging the pits that now lined the track, causing problems in getting race cars out...



David Cooper courtesy [ukarn](#)

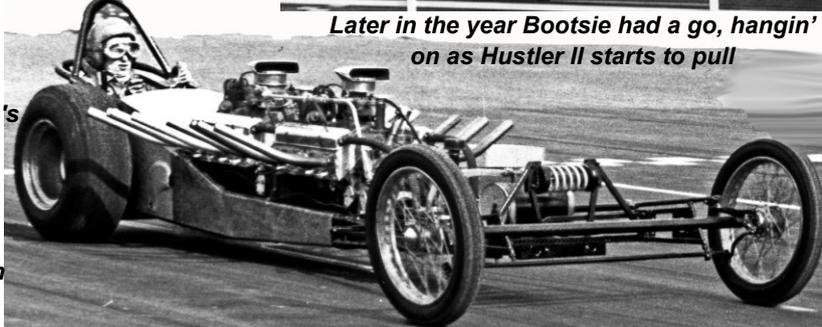


Dave East photos courtesy [tdvds](#)

At right the Church brothers V8 Pop Gold Rush, Gary Goggin's Mustang taking out John Whitmore's baby rail and Joe Copp's '57 being eaten by Tom Faulkner's custom SP250.

And the track took its toll too - John Harrison's new Borg & Beck clutch (good for 600hp!), lasted two runs and lunched - his trans too! Bazooka II, Ken Cooper's flathead rail qualified at 12.01 and 'lost' his clutch! Colin Saunders made two passes in Mark Stratton's new twin engine Chevy Hustler II (chassis by Owen, Hicks & Lingard), and the super-traction ate his clutch also... Ken Robbins' colour shot is an all-time favourite image from this race (and not just because I'm in it!), the push cars and front motored rails capture a golden moment in time from those halcyon days - today it's evocative of California, except of course it's not!

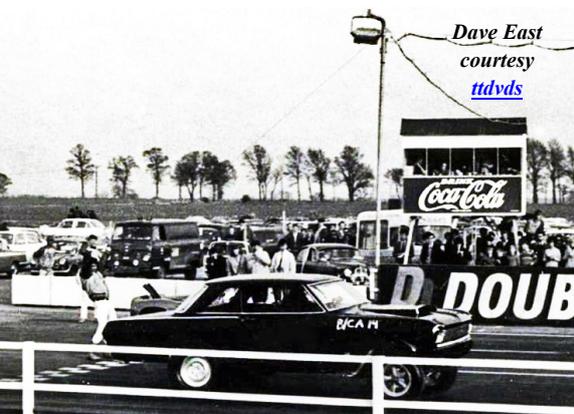
Later in the year Bootsie had a go, hangin' on as Hustler II starts to pull



Alan Allard offers advice to Clive Skilton before his first fuel car race.



Bob Brown's blown Ford Banshee uses a conventional but cool push-truck with Walt Ithell's blown 283 Chevy Poltergeist using a rare and luxurious Ford Sunliner - now that would be super-cool today, and is definitely more So-Cal than Bedfordshire!



Dave East
courtesy
ttdvds

Here you can see just how high the lighting towers were – now imagine hooking up those power lines atop a ladder with a cold strong wind blowing! Bill Satterly's hole shot on Bob Rose's street legal McLaren could've been a great Chevy/Ford battle, but Mean Machine's trans lunched as the McLaren ran its best of the day, a rapid 12.02. It was about then I felt happy to be driving a mic and not racing Half a Min, now parked quietly behind my booth, 'cos it's for sure my power shiftn' (even with a Mini engine!), mighta caused some problems given the superb traction coming with the new track surface. But we had plenty of great racing, although new comers amongst the 10,552 fans learned of the drag racers lament "would've, could've and should've" on that sunny Easter Monday. Shortly after two pm they were being stoked up by yours truly for the first round of the big match race between Tony Densham's World Record holding 427 Ford powered Commuter AA/FD and hot shoe Clive Skilton's Chrysler hemi-powered Allard/Skilton running nitro with an ol' school front-mounted blower.

10,552 WATCH EASTER MONDAY SEASONS OPENER

MECHANICAL FAILURES SLOW THE ACTION

DENSHAM-BILLINGTON-PHELPS

COMMUTER

RUNS BEST ELAPSED TIME
9.052 secs. 147.93 mph

ALLARD-SKILTON

CHRYSLER RAIL

RUNS BEST TERMINAL SPEED
9.138 secs. 163.40 mph.

SLUGGETT-PRIDDLE

TUDOR ROSE

FIRST TIME/OUT RUNS
9.409 secs. 161.29 mph.

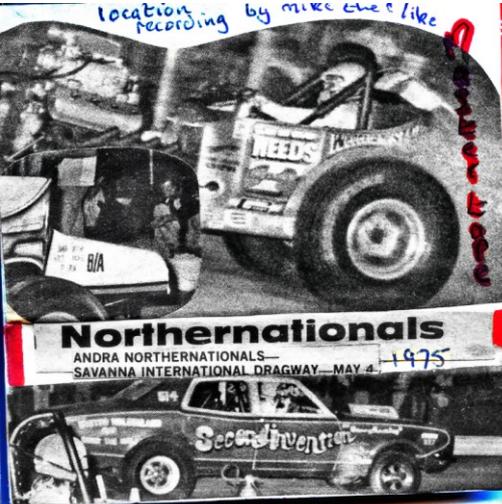


Tony Densham drove Commuter to an 8.811 and 9.08 for an 8.91 FIA Record in 1967 – our only eight second racer

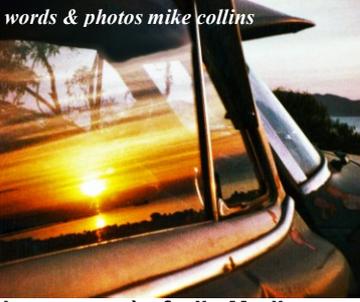


The Chrysler fired like a street machine, Commuter fired and suddenly died. Clive stilled the Chrysler's tongue, watching with us as Peter Billinton and Roy Phelps leapt into action. Moments later they gave the thumbs up, and the Chrysler fired first and rolled to the line as did the Ford, but again its engine died. Robbed of a race, fans roared in disapproval as Skilton gets a bye, hazing his slicks to a 9.13 and 163.4mph, top speed of the meet. Then his brakes locked, the car's stainless steel chassis flexing so badly it cracked! Tudor Rose took to the track, cruising through clean and easy to a 10.25 at 154mph. On the two final runs by the big rails Rex turned on some of the Keith Black Magic, Tudor Rose hazing down the quarter to a 9.1 at 162 mph, keeping Rex and the fans happy, not to mention Dennis Priddle who was over the moon with their first outing. Commuter's crew had obviously 'tipped' the can, launching off the line like a double A fueler should, ran a 9.05 low ET - and blew both head gaskets! At the Big Go (now the Main Event), Clive became our first blown nitro racer, won and set low ET at 9.005! Tudor Rose and Commuter made solo passes; Tony Densham still had problems in Mickey T's ol' Ford, but Sluggett set a new top speed of 179.53mph! Back at the Easter race, we all knew they had given us their all but, as ever, we wanted more! Sure the ground shook, and (thanks to the relativity of our old pal Albert Einstein!), some kinda thunder filled the air, and happily fans had seen good racing from other classes, any hunger being eased by 9-second solo runs with 9-zero scorched through our minds. But when the Big Go attendance was down to 6,000 (car count was up to 95 with better ET's and speeds!), something was obviously missing from our diet! At Easter my hunger was well and truly sated after the fans left, getting more than just close to the Mean Machine, climbing in through its window with a huge smile, a Hasselblad strapped to my body, wrapped myself slowly around its hefty roll cage and took a deep breath. This was a ride I'd taken at the '64 US Nationals with Dave Strickler, vicariously on film, many times, but as the 427 roared the beast came alive and angry, totally unlike any cinema seat! Awesome indeed, the shaking came more violent as Bill stabbed the gas pedal the throttles opening wide, its rear twitched, my peripheral vision acres of bare aluminium panels flexing under the power, a few dials, Bill Satterly filling a small bucket seat and a huge roll cage. Adrenalin pumping, the floor panel shaking beneath me, I couldn't see down track, just the top of the pulsating hood of an FX match racer but what a buzz! And fear - come on this was a photo shoot, but it'd be just point, shoot - and enjoy! Nodding to my driver and preparing my body for a violent torque twisting launch, smiling and relaxed, feeling good, ready for the ride of my life as we moved into stage. Moments later the engine began to scream, Bill yelled "Hang on Mike," over his shoulder and unleashed 427 cubic inches of GM rat-motored thunder! Instantly the world grabbed my guts and squashed them against the rear panel with such force it almost buckled round my body. Then the clutch hooked up, front end yanked high, filling my view with cloudy sky as the huge M&H slicks grabbed traction to power blast us off the start line. The black car hurtled across the track, a cacophony of power sounds rising to match the rapidly climbing rpm until it was max'd out. Then Bill hit the shifter, powering back through the gate - the reality far more awesome than any vicarious viewing of the Indy Nationals movie. However, unlike vicarious thrills, reality bites hard - it did just that. The awesome power and traction combination, (aided perhaps by my excess baggage wrapped round the roll cage), was too much for the trans - it let go with a mighty roar. Milliseconds later Bill fought to control the effect of the explosion ahead of the firewall and beneath the scatter shield. My ears heard the pain of screeching metal - an evil zinging an' pinging sounding far too close for comfort, the unforgettable sound of odd bits of shrapnel penetrating safety regulations! The incident shook the sh*t out of me, not the ride itself, that'd been pure heaven for those awesome seconds, but my introduction to the factual reality of horsepower unleashed, not fully realised until later when I found a hole in the leg of new [14oz] Levi's. Putting two fingers in one side and out the other I'd winced; the tear was about the size of a pre-decimal penny - that's large! And dangerous, even for racers dedicated to safety - I dread to think of the damage it could cause to a body. But that's pure retrospective bullsh*t, at that moment in time it was my most radical ride, with no thoughts other than a max'd power launch down a quarter mile highway paved with dreams of speed, sadly all too short! Now, 50 years down the road, sometimes comes a thought – what would it have been like as we hit the top end bumps! Today I relive that thrill with ease, and perhaps a slight twinge at how naive such an endeavour was, but what a wild ride, and I'd take it again in a heartbeat! But there's more chance of winning the lottery than getting a ride like that again...





The first time I lived close to paradise was after driving across Australia to Townsville NQ, spending a few days on the beach the way you do, renting an apartment less than 10 minutes from the Pacific and five from where I'd got a job, an' that was pretty cool. It's the only place on the planet where I'd often enjoy sunrise over the Pacific before breakfast - then go to work! But that first week I recall going to bed early Saturday night feeling frisky, sounds of animal power wafting through our open window, soon becoming four speed, power shiftn' cars blasting down Savanna International Dragway – truly making our après frolic Marlboro taste better than ever! Totally awesome for me and my lady, and it seems, not so much a problem for folks living close to Long Marston airfield (even with NitroFueled monsters), more it seems it was a case of mega buck\$ being made with a new town, leaseways, that's what I've heard - but the ride's over for Shakespeare County Raceway. Sure it's sad, but at least we had time to prepare for losing the track, so rather than get cranky bemoaning the fact, let's savour magic years of power-filled memories – but one last farewell race would've been real cool...



words & photos mike collins

For me the track's name, Long Marston, Avon Park or Shaky County never came to mind, our visits were always about good times, fun people, fresh air, space to move - and when the sun shone bright it was glorious being amongst great country views with some of the finest drag racing machines around. My memories stretch through the 2017 Hot Rod Drags from Street Machine's 1980 visit for a media gig when I hit the track in style - not in the fueler, that's Andy Craddock in the Steve Young prepped Frontline Top Fuel car. Later I was let loose in their wild V8 Rover altered - a real blast...



Frontline altered photos by Steve Saunders



Here's Andy set to race the Hit Man Tony Boden, a true NDRC legend, - his first ride was a Top Fuel Car at Long Marston and he won the NDRC title as a rookie! Love the gold anodised wheels!



The Hugger was blue back then, a cool Street Machine location car, and my daughter Sarah learned to drive in it at Long Marston from our 1980 visit where she drove a lady racer to the loo on only her second time behind the wheel! It was more fun than Steve's Chrysler, and he drove it back to town (at speed!), while I lounged across the back seat reading, and loved it much as I did the limo style treat! Talking of style, my number one 21st century memory from the track goes to Rockin' Ramon and back-up babe Kirsten. After a best ever 8.22 at the 2012 Mopar Nats, the rookie Alcohol funny car driver ran his first seven the following day, a bitchin' 7.01 - and beat a fuel coupe! Then he came to the Hot Rod Drags, laid down a stormin' first-ever six, a 6.73 at 206 and a 6.53 to beat the Nostalgia Fuel Coupe mark! Kirsten's performance was stunning too, as was her wheels up launch in Suzy Q at SCR's last Hot Rod Drags

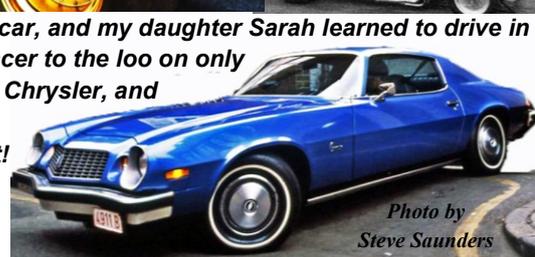


Photo by Steve Saunders



Ian Demaine, 1967 BHR Street Champion – Hot Rod Drags 2009



20th century Street Machine pin from Dave Smith 21st century Street Machine Editor



Photo by Sarah