



In 2011 **Clare Sanders'** first AAFC win at NHRA's 1969 Winternats was one of "60 Great Moments" during NHRA's 60<sup>th</sup> anniversary as the "Introduction of Funny Car" in Pomona's California-dreaming weather. "Must've been a wild ride" I said to Clare when we met, "They all were," he replied, chuckling while tapping the car's rump! Meanwhile, in not-so-sunny South London, a phone jangled on my DragRod desk, picked it up and one of Her Majesty's Customs and Excise officers asked "Would someone bring a Chevy Camaro here just to go drag racing?"

Click it for a classic [Jungle Jim tale](#) from [Jungle Clare Sanders...](#)



words & photo  
mike collins

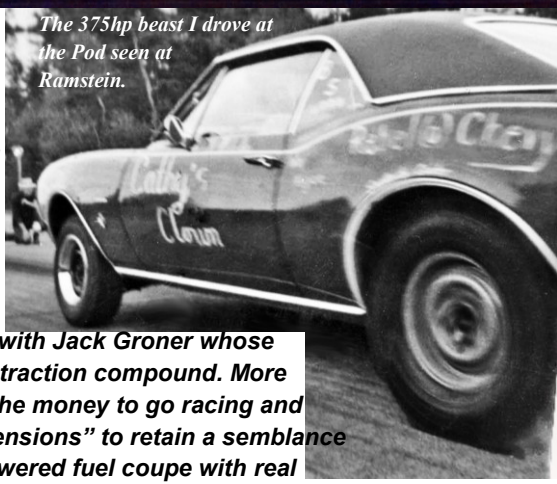


Hit the QR code or clock the link [Jungle Clare's AA awesome1969 "Match race madness!"](#)

Jim Kelly photo courtesy SS&DI

"Depends on what sort it is," seemed the right answer, "Told you, a Chevrolet Camaro..." "Yes sir, but what sort of Camaro?" There was almost a chuckle on the line before, "Hold the line please," his voice positive when he spoke again "A 375hp, SS396..." as was mine when I replied "Oh yeah, Chevy builds 'em to go racing." This time a definite laugh was followed by "Really?" "Oh my yes, quick, an' fast, drove one in '67," chuckling, "Heck of a wild ride," my mind's eye power shifting 375hp through a large puddle, getting way out of shape before adding "Please tell the person we look forward to seeing it at the track..." "Okay, thank you very much." The call was soon forgotten, but Clare Sanders' first funny car was in '67 too, having started racing in 1960

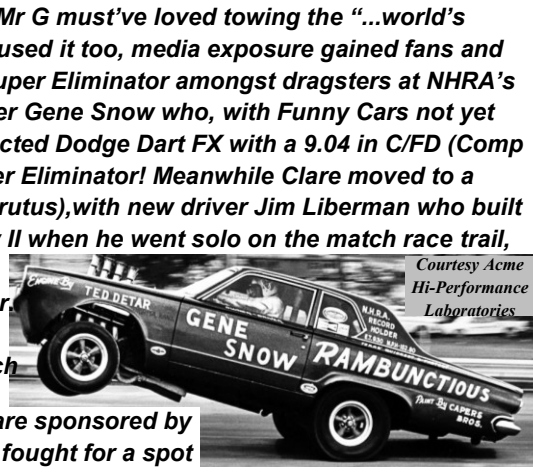
The 375hp beast I drove at the Pod seen at Ramstein.



**SUPER STOCK NATIONALS**



out of school with mechanic Jim St. Clair in the north west, moving south to California, teaming with Jack Groner whose funding helped launch Boss Bite, the first liquid traction compound. More than good, it was so popular they'd soon made the money to go racing and at Mr G's insistence built [Limefire](#) to "stock dimensions" to retain a semblance of 'Cuda street-car, fitting the blown 392hemi powered fuel coupe with real chrome trim! It sure looks cool on SS&DI's cover; Mr G must've loved towing the "...world's most beautiful funny car" in his Cadillac! Hot Rod used it too, media exposure gained fans and race bookings, Limefire winning first time out in Super Eliminator amongst dragsters at NHRA's Carlsbad divisional race, just like AAFC's Godfather Gene Snow who, with Funny Cars not yet NHRA approved won the '66 US Nats in a nitro injected Dodge Dart FX with a 9.04 in C/FD (Comp Eliminator) and again in '67 with a 8.67 to win Super Eliminator! Meanwhile Clare moved to a shop used by Funny Car pioneer Lew Arrington (Brutus), with new driver Jim Liberman who built headers at Goodie's Speed Shop, backing a Chevy II when he went solo on the match race trail, soon known as "Jungle Jim" for wild, outrageous on-track action; they became pals, touring together. However, although Limefire was good still good lookin' it wasn't tough enough for heavy duty match racing. "Jungle Jim's" popularity was booming so



Courtesy Acme Hi-Performance Laboratories

he added a second car offering it to Clare in late '68! After a few match races with Jungle Clare sponsored by Steve Kanuika speed shops, the Jungle Jim team hit Pomona where close to 40 fuel coupes fought for a spot in NHRA's 16 car field; Clare's 427 Chevy placed 3rd, his 8.03, 191 behind hemi-powered Don Schumacher's 8.02, 193.65 and Mongoo\$e's sizzling 7.79 on pole. Larry Reyes' 8.33 had the bump spot in Roland Leong's Hawaiian, an 8.14, 181 first-round win leading to a fuel coupe altitude record of 200ft when it took off in the lights! Jungle Jim was one of many stars who failed to make the cut, tuning Clare to a 7.80, and 7.88 to win the final and \$5,000; during his year with JJ's team they had an 86% win record! NHRA held three AAFC races in '69; Danny Ongais won two in Mickey Thompson's Mustang. No shots of it, but here's Harry Schmidt's original Blue Max eating the Mr Chevrolet Camaro in the AHRA that year, a far cry from Bob

Photographer unknown courtesy MercHouseBLLF



**WINTERNATIONALS**



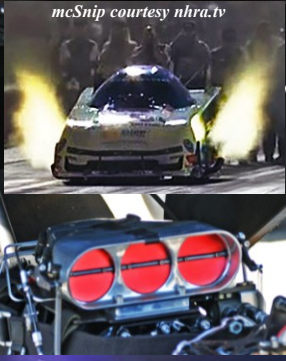
1969 FUNNYCAR CHAMPION



Clare Sanders data courtesy Phil Burgess' [NHRA Dragster Insider](#)



mcSnip courtesy nhra.tv



mcSnip courtesy nhra.tv

This fine looking Z28 is one of a dozen '69 Camaro fuel coupes at this year's March Meet, with Happy Hour sounding less like cheap brews than 45 minutes rebuilding an engine, 12 minutes waiting-in-line and then three minutes readying the car to run before the final awesome 45 seconds that kicked off with this cool launch that put a 5.88 at 232mph on the board in Q3 before swinging into the return road for the tow back to the pits to start all over again! Tim Boychuck's best ET was 5.86 and 232.23, 100mph slower than John Force's latest Camaro (above left), qualified 3<sup>rd</sup> at Indy with a 3.876 at 332.67! Not really a fan of modern FC's that look like 1960s slot cars, but their NitroFire is AA awesome and five Q sessions at Indy's US Nats had me glued to the screen deep into the night with rain delays an' a 5-hour time shift, but just kept on getting better! DSR's Fast Jack Beckman's Infinite Hero Dodge Hellcat led from Q1, a string of 3-second thunder runs from 3.87



Auto Imagery photo courtesy FJB/DSR Facebook

in Friday' Prime Time Nitro Show to 3.861 in Q4 and Q5's 335.23mph US Nats' Top Speed! 15-cars ran in the three second zone with a new NHRA record bump 4.005! Jack also led race day, a .072 light to a .079 in the final but John Force drove by to a 3.91, 324 over 3.94, 325.92 for his 151st win by .0014 seconds and tying Ace McCulloch with a 5<sup>th</sup> US Nats title. Rookie fuel coupe racer Ray Martin (12 NHRA licenses including Pro Mod, TAD, TAFC and Nostalgia Fuel Coupe), down from Alaska to drive the Worsham's Lucas Oil backed Camry, a 3.96 at 325.22 was 13<sup>th</sup> for his 2nd AAFC start, both against Ron Capps; last time his car didn't start, this time it did, Capp's DSR Charger



mcSnip courtesy nhra.tv

got loose and rookie Ray drove on by to a 3.97, 323 win, but that's drag racing! NHRA.TV kept on talking about the "quickest ever" during the show and my mind's eye flashed back to when Street Machine sent me surfing and Santa Pod fans experienced the greatest display of NitroThunder this side of the Atlantic at 1979's September Showdown. "Wow, what a shot," my first thought on seeing this back in the day, the quickest side-by-side Fuel Coupe race on the planet, and won by a 6-inch holeshot and that's just what Eric Sawyer captured! Check out his rear slick distortion, Snowman's off and gone, blasting into the night, roof high flames captured on a Colin & Paul video, Gene

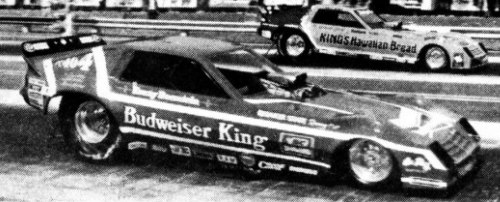


A last ride

Snow's NitroFire clicked off at 6.04 seconds, just ahead of Ray Beadles' 6.00! This race record wasn't beaten until 1981's Gatornationals where Kenny Bernstein (the 7<sup>th</sup> member of the Cragar



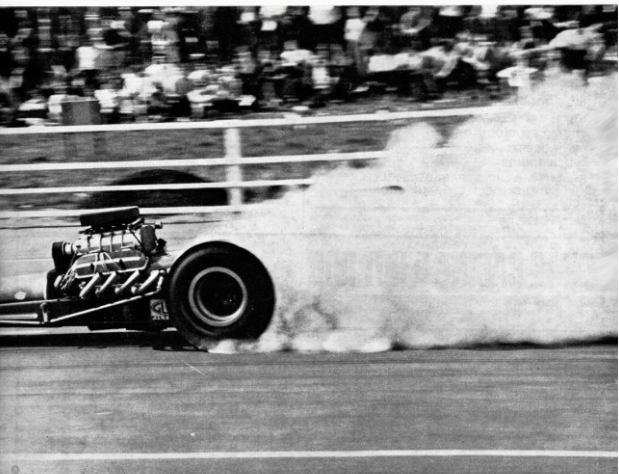
Eric Sawyer photo courtesy Hot Rod & Custom UK



5-Second Club), whose first five was in round one, a 5.99 that "just got by" Mike Dunn's 6.06 in Roland Leong's King's Hawaiian Bread car! The previous "quickest" was at the '79 Fallnationals where Roland's car, this time with Ron Colson driving, was part of the previous quickest-race-ever when the late, great Raymond Beadle's "Blue Max" ran a 6.05 to the Hawaiian car's 6.11 and that a fact folks! Data and Gatornats image courtesy NHRA's National Dragster. Okay it's time to head back to '69 for some previously undisclosed Hot Gossip as we catch up with that freshly imported 375hp, SS396 at the Pod's new Spring Match Race...

This is DragRod's lead for that event's 4-pages; the BS begins on page two, but first let's go racing...

# DRAG RACING '69



As you can see the banking was packed, but my DragRod tenure was seemingly coming to an end as some folks didn't like the idea of me having so much fun but, as ever, that was their problem! To this day my life's always been lived to the full and on that sunny day at the Pod, despite efforts to rain on my parade, it was life in the fast lane all the way, especially after being stopped by soft spoken Bill Jaynes, who'd had problems getting his Competition licence and been told by a USAF pal I might like to race his car – obviously I agreed and was soon ensconced behind “a perforated leather covered wheel of the very latest Plymouth Barracuda, powered by a 340S motor equipped with twin four barrels.” This I know as DragRod scribe Brian Sparrow wrote this in his “Scene in the Pits” column along with “The car rides on Cragar SS simulated mags and US Air Force owner Bill Jaynes has a set of tuned headers on the way over from the States; interior equipment includes a column mounted electronic tach with smooth action stubby selector lever for the effective auto-transmission.” Not only that, it was quick, my first pass a low 14 in the mid 90s, and Bill was over the moon when I told him it was just right for setting a new record in B Modified! Shortly later a tall dude introduced himself as Ken Giffen, offering thanks for helping him get his Camaro into the country – yep, this was Mr 395, SS396, who added, “And I owe you one.” This brought a smile to my face as I replied with a chuckle, “That's cool Ken 'cos I need a favour...” letting the words hang as I chuckled again at his kinda bemused look,” No big deal, but you can run 13s all day long right?” “Oh yeah,” he agreed, so I jumped in with both feet, “Thing is I'd like to get the Class record for the guy who owns the 'Cuda I'm racing, so if you'd hang on until the next race we'd be square, or maybe I'd owe you one!” “No problem Mike, you go for it and I'll sit the session out...” Then I said “You talk kinda funny for a Californian.” “Maybe that's 'cos I'm Canadian,” he laughed. Just like

## COMMUTER QUICKEST YET IN EUROPE 8.228 secs 181.82 mph

Happy Hour's Tim Boychuck, I add, as Canada figures big at the tale's end, as does Ryan Hodgson's father too! Come the official Record Session I came off the line like a bear with all 400torks and 300hp setting a new mark that I think was a 14.3 and 98mph. A short time after they'd said the session was closed, the lumpy 375 horsepower SS396 muscle car rumbled to a halt alongside, Ken saying “Great run Mike, now I can let this sucker loose,” brapping the throttle, idling off towards the line where he kicked out the jams, thundering down track, the PA coming alive “And we've got a new B Modified record of 13.97 at 101mph...” Ken hadn't heard this, telling me it was slow as the power was too much for the clutch, but couldn't believe it when told he got the new record – me neither, but they'd only just begun! Can't recall who I beat in the first round, but felt good about my chances in the semi's as I was set to race Doug Harler's 440 Charger and he was having problems – me too when they announced I'd be racing Dave Render's 13second Buick powered Fiat - with the bye run going to Doug's slow ET as it seemed there'd been a rule change! “Making up close to a second'll take more than a hole-shot Bill.” “Don't worry 'bout it Mike y'can try a neutral start...” “Beg your pardon?” Seemed the correct thing to say, my mind's eye filled with visions of blown trans and rear ends that stories of such endeavours had left behind... Bill thought I'd not understood and chuckled, “Aw shit, y' j'st wind her up an' stay in neutral until the lights run, then throw it in low on the last amber, it'll probably go like sh\*t off a shovel,” he'd said thumping me on the back and laughing out loud! “Yeah right, but my luck it'd blow itself to bits, and I'd get the blame. Thanks, but no thanks, I'll take a chance on the tree,” cutting a great light, staying ahead for awhile to be beaten by the rule change – and they still hadn't finished playing their games! Here's the DragRod report as writ underneath the image at right “THE Street Eliminations get better at each meeting. Top Street at this event qualified with six cars, one at 13secs, four in the 14s and one on a 15.1 ET. Bill Jaynes, US Air Force man from Upper Heyford, made it to second round loser spot at his first meeting with this '68 Plymouth Barracuda running mid 14's, 98 mph. Dave Render's Buick-powered Ginetta won the final at 13.39 and 100mph from Doug Harler who red-lighted trying to keep up with the very quick Ginetta.” They couldn't change official results “TOP STREET: Winner £15, C/SA4, D. Render. Ginetta 13.39, 99.80, 13.28. Runner-up £6 10, B/M2, D Harler 2<sup>nd</sup> round losers £5, B/M4, M. T Collins. 1<sup>st</sup> round losers £4, CC/SA1, M. Kent; E/MSP1, K. Obee; B/SP5, C. Jones.”



Ken & Pete's photo  
courtesy ttdvds



jbPix DragRod

A few months later Ken's new Hays clutch put him 2<sup>nd</sup> in Top Street at 13.68, took out the wicked lil' Lotus-Ford Fiat of Dave Render (who passed away in May 2017 - UKDRN), and a 13.48, 105.15 to beat Bill Jaynes' 'Cuda in Top Street seen in the fire up road. At '69s BDR&HRA Championship Bill Jaynes 14.22, 101.73mph also won Top Street!



jbPix DragRod

Oops! Little space left for Canada's renowned horror film maker David Cronenberg; [240 Gordie Bonin](#), stunt double for our hero told me he loved crashing out the door in a [loaded fuel coupe](#), blazing NitroFire later launching from stoplight! Methinks Mr Cronenberg, a big drag race fan, whose 1979 Fast Company's full of fuel coupe action, was at the Pod in 1969 and get its rule change punch line “Slow ET gets lane choice!” from mine! It makes for a pure Hollywood fuel coupe finale that Gordie said was also [fun to shoot!](#) He won the 1999 FIA Top Fuel title, and sadly passed away in 2013. Here's a fine [photographic tribute](#) from a friend...



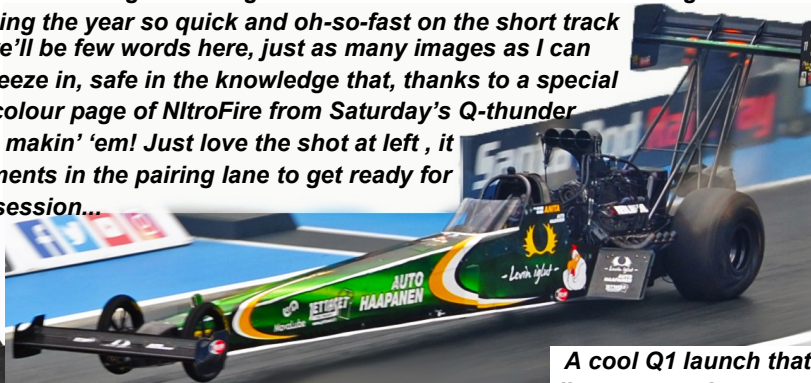
TO MIKE WITH LOVE  
*Anita Mäkelä*



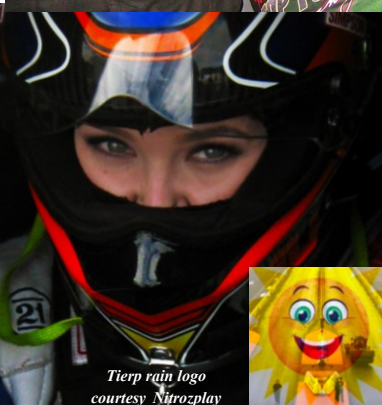
For years my big buzz on visiting Santa Pod is the warm greetings always given by Anita Mäkelä, her wonderful hubby Tommi Haapanen and for the past few years their kids Hanna, Heikki, and the team who make everything more than worthwhile, and when the turn their NitroPower loose on track we all enjoy some NitroThunder! And the Pod's FIA Euro Finals was a real winner in every way as, although they appeared busier than ever, their pits were filled with positive energy; with good reason too having already won three out of 5-races and looking set to earn a fourth FIA Top Fuel title. Anita was very pleased with her 2018 "Go get 'em Champ!" mix at left, and her greeting earlier was one of the happiest ever. In fact even when she spoke of the carnage caused during Saturday's Q1 she was completely upbeat and, for once, I wished a Sunday trip was on the menu, but then this would've never 've been mixed by deadline time; yes it would, but without this tribute to all the gals and guys who made 2019's FIA Top Fuel trail so damned exciting with congratulations to our three record-busting babes for making the year so quick and oh-so-fast on the short track There'll be few words here, just as many images as I can



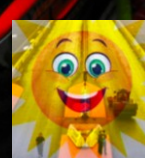
dispensation from Editor Dave, Hot Gossip should have the first colour page of NitroFire from Saturday's Q-thunder in any monthly magazine - hope you enjoy these as much as I did makin' 'em! Just love the shot at left, it was the last one before leaving of Tommi and crew's final adjustments in the pairing lane to get ready for Anita's stunning 4.004 half-pass in the Pods 2018 Friday night Q session...



A cool Q1 launch that all went sour down track However, even though she's busy, I feel my first Finals shot of Anita is super. My warped sense of humour's okay too, thinking the dude's sticking a syringe in Power Chicken's head and checking for steroids! Its FIA's Fuel check...



Maja Udtian's stunning rookie year gave her three runners-up, Main Event, [NitrOlympX](#) and Kauhava Nitro Nationals; she's the FIA's 3<sup>rd</sup> quickest at 315.34 during Tierp's Internationals and won their Summit Internationals, set a new 3.816 ET record and her 3.88 defeated Anita's 3.91 to [win her first FIA event!](#) At the Pod's Euro Finals she became our quickest racer with a 3.806, 315.52 on this awesome Q2 pass then taken out by tyre shake and RFM team mate



Tierp rain logo courtesy Nitrozplay

Liam Jones in E1!



Sadly Patrik Pers final Top Fuel race before switching to AAFC was fine for roasting marshmallows, not his budget!



4-in a row then 3-out-of-5 for Anita Mäkelä; 2019 a 3.90 beat Stig's 4.06, a 3.82, and 312.52 ate India's smoker and her 3.85 over Liam topped a 2<sup>nd</sup> straight FIA Championship!



Fastest gals in Europe, FIA's Queen of Speed India Erbacher in the Monster Energy car's 318.95mph, 3.817 and 4-time FIA Top Fuel Queen Anita Mäkelä's 315.66 and 3.842



Thanks to all the race teams for trying so hard to thrill us!