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HOT ROD WHERE IT ALL BEGAN

GEARHEAD LIFE



WELL, THAT DIDN'T GO AS PLANNED

In 2004, we had a spectacular year racing the HOT ROD Spl. Camaro. Since then, not so much. Sure, we've knocked down a couple more records and run faster than ever with a 261.602-mph speed at Bonneville, but we've also had some reality checks.

To back you up a bit, check out the January '05 story "Project Red Hat." We took Keith and Tonya Turk's '80 Camaro land speed car, stuffed in an 820hp, 408ci, Vortech-blown Dart small-block, and set records at the Texas Mile and the Bonneville Salt Flats, earning membership into the Bonneville 200 MPH Club at 243.015 mph. We later stepped up the boost, whacked it with nitrous, made 1,030 hp to the wheels, and had visions of 260 mph. But at Speed Week '05, we made two passes, lost two blower belts, overheated the wee outta the

engine, then went home when the meet was cancelled due to rain.

For 2006 we'd been so busy making magazines that we hadn't fixed the small-block, but we spotted a GM Performance Parts ZZ572/720R crate engine that had been stagnant in our shop since we tested it in the June '04 issue. Keith Turk and Ed Van Scoy stabbed it in the car with a new Quarter Master three-disc clutch and a fresh loaner four-speed trans from Tex Racing, and then we sent the car to the A2 Wind Tunnel in North Carolina for an aero story in the March '07 issue. We were ready for speed.

Our first passes with the 572 engine were at Maxton, North Carolina, where we were nonplussed by the 194-mph performance in the standing mile. We later discovered that we had the wrong spur gears in the quick-change rearend, giving us

a 2.18:1 final drive ratio. At 194 mph the engine lugged at just 5,000 rpm. With 2.42s in the back, it might have run around 215 mph.

We didn't discover our gear glitch until we got to Bonneville. We added a 150hp shot of NOS nitrous, and on my first pass I ran 244.447 mph at the fourth mile of the five-mile-long course, then turned out due to another overheating issue: We'd wired the water pump backward. The speed qualified for a record in AA/Classic Fuel Altered, but records must be backed up by a second pass over the same timed mile. The next morning I went 254.834 at the fourth mile, which averaged with the qualifying for a new record of 249.640. However, I legged it to the end of the track, blasting an exit speed of 261.602 (go to www.youtube.com and search "HOT ROD Magazine Special" to see



a video of the run). That's an unreal speed for an '80 Camaro, and those 2.18 gears really had the 572 showing its grunt. But the way the rules work, the 260-plus speeds on the backup pass did not qualify for another record attempt.

Next, we pulled the NOS bottle out of the car, installed 2.25 gears, and signed up for the Gas class with Steve Atwell driving. He ran 246.106 mph to qualify and backed it up with a 246.211 for a new AA/Classic Gas Altered record of 246.158 and entry into the Bonneville 200 MPH Club.

Finally, I requalified for the Fuel record with a 259.942 pass on nitrous. We hoped for a 260-plus backup run, but the right rear tire exploded at 215 mph, sending the car into a spin that was timed a quarter-mile later at 184 mph. The Camaro stayed on its feet, but record hopes were dashed.

By November we were racing at El Mirage Dry Lake in California, where cars must earn points throughout the year to move ahead in line. The dirt surface of the track gets badly torn up, so the first cars to run have the best chances at records. As newbies, we were behind 151 other entries. We only hoped to squeak 200 mph for permission to run out of the lane that's just for 200-plus-mph cars. Alas, I ran a very loose 193.767 on the first pass. On the second attempt I should never have tagged the nitrous button. It zinged the wheels loose and I didn't gather it up in time, sending me on another 189-mph spin through the lights. To see that escapade, hit www.landspeedracingvideo.com and buy the DVD of the November '06 El Mirage meet.

Finally, the big deal: We cleaned up the Camaro and loaded it on a ship to the other side of the world for the Dry Lakes Racers Australia (www.dlra.org.au) meet at the salt flats of remote Lake Gairdner. The ship arrived at the wrong port, so the car was sent by rail to Adelaide, where racer Rod Hadfield fetched it for us and delivered it to the event. After the Camaro had gone nearly 10,000 miles, and after eight of us had flown down and driven 100 miles on a dirt road to the middle of kangaroo-riddled nowhere to get to Lake Gairdner, the meet was cancelled due to a wet lakebed. With all the prep, shipping, and travel, that was about \$30,000 down the drain. But that's racing, and we'll try to make it back next year. Meanwhile, the car is coming back home so we can reconfigure it for Bonneville in August.

Now you know the continuing saga of the HOT ROD Magazine Special. —DAVID FREIBURGER



> **Previous page top:** Even with the 'chute out, at 215 mph sideways, the Camaro slid a loooong way when the tire blew at Bonneville. The parachute riser wrapped around the axle 20 times, a Heim joint on the four-link broke, and the quarter-panel got well pounded. Our team signed the wrecked Moon disc, which later sold for \$315 at an auction to support the DRLA. > **Previous page bottom:** Despite accusations otherwise, the engine is a bone-stock GM Performance Parts ZZ572/720R. The first time we ever had a valve cover off the thing was during record certification. It ran 246 mph naturally aspirated and 260 with a 150hp shot of nitrous, which it swallowed for about 110 seconds in Third and Fourth at Bonneville. > **Above:** You'd be impressed at how much El Mirage dirt you can load into a car when it's doing 189 mph sideways. We've since added another 300 pounds for traction. Race weight is 4,280 pounds. > **Below:** Rod Hadfield was the first to run 200 mph at Lake Gairdner, and he built a Merlin V-12-powered '55 Chevy that was all over the Web a few years back. He's the former operator of Castlemaine Rod Shop in Australia and a current DRLA board member. His neat rollback truck delivered the HOT ROD Spl. to Lake Gairdner, where it was never even unloaded.

