

Hot Gossip

words & photos
mike collins



Mongoo\$e and Scott, gone but not forgotten...

California dreaming...

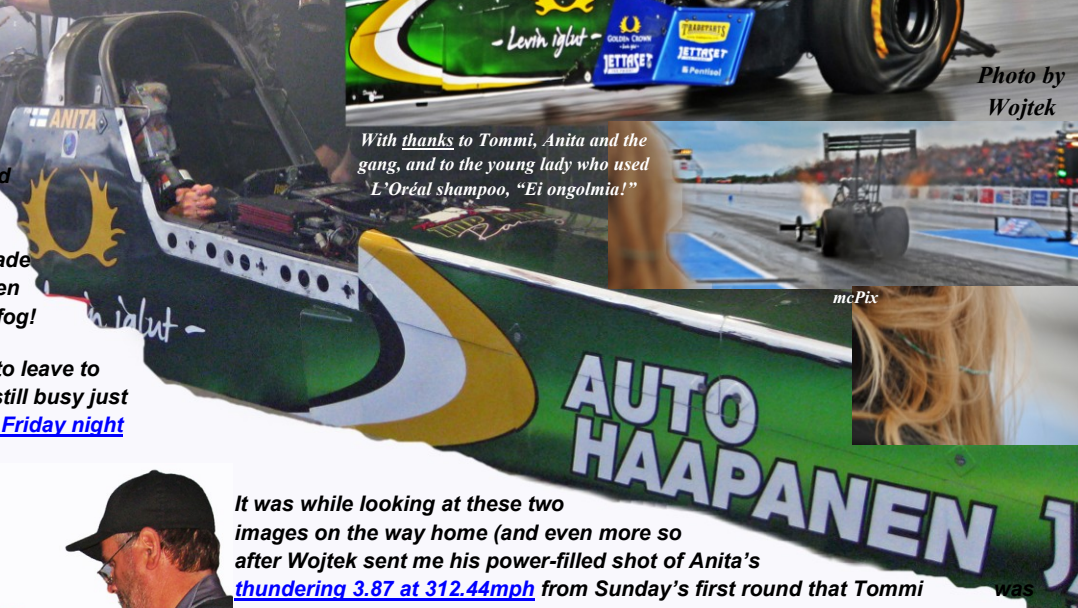


Photo by
Wojtek

With thanks to Tommi, Anita and the gang, and to the young lady who used L'Oréal shampoo, "Ei ongolmia!"

Being privy to this powerful Saturday afternoon warm-up on at the 2018 FIA Finals made me realise just how powerful today's Top Fuel cars are, especially when I noticed Anita's two-handed grip on the brake lever, recalling many times in earlier days, when far less potent fuelers jumped off jack stands! The sweet taste of NitroPower made me realise just how lucky I was to be here and then thought you might enjoy a peek behind the nitro fog!

And also see my last shot before having to leave to catch my spaceship, with Tommi and crew still busy just prior to [Anita's stunning 4.004 half pass on Friday night](#)



mcPix

It was while looking at these two images on the way home (and even more so after Wojtek sent me his power-filled shot of Anita's [thundering 3.87 at 312.44mph](#) from Sunday's first round that Tommi tuning for at left!), that I began to think about going to Pomona! In fact later while chillin' with a cold Bud, my mind took me back in time to my first personal Pomona memories from 1967 when Billy the Kid's pal Hawaiian Henry gifted me some photos he'd taken there the year before, including these rare shots of Big Daddy's only red fueler, the Snake's B&M Torkmaster Special and the [legendary Hemi Cuda](#) - great clip, replay from the start! Notice there's [Mongoo\\$e missing from Tom McEwen's name on the door](#) - soon to be repainted!



Big went to California and during an open race at Pomona had "a bad experience with the car being red, so we painted it black," and he beat Norm Weekly for the coveted Drag News 1320 #1 spot.

[Pomona's Winternats in 1966](#) - the first NHRA national event Mongoo\$e and Snake raced at - Don Prudhomme's first win as an AAFD owner driver with a 7.59 to a 7.69. An awesome clip for NitroNostalgia fans!



20-years on, having written many thousands of words on US racing, a repeat invitation from NHRA PR man Joe Sherk saw me decide to check things out in person - you'll never believe what happened! For starters I drove f-a-s-t into the dark of night... So buckle up, we're going for a ride, from sea to shining sea and beyond, in less than a page!

Lost and then found, the original SR 6-A was restored and is now on display in [Don's Drag Racing Museum](#).

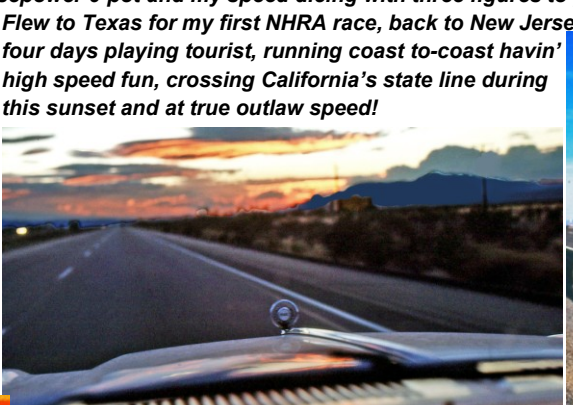


Photo courtesy Don Garlits
Museum of Drag Racing

But first I rode Boris, a one-time racing camel, to get the feel of really tight turns, and my Mum took a photo 'cos even then she knew you'd never believe it! Next came some high speed thunder back across Europe with the ol' Huggy running a "new" hi-horsepower 6-pot and my speed dicing with three figures to prepare for the USA's super highways.



14 hours later I drove off into the night!



Flew to Texas for my first NHRA race, back to New Jersey, then drove from sea-to-shining-sea, four days playing tourist, running coast-to-coast havin' high speed fun, crossing California's state line during this sunset and at true outlaw speed!

Which woke up the Highway Patrol! But ridin' Boris paid off as I j'st turned into the desert and vanished! Made it to Pomona for the race - then it rained!



Actually he stopped to check I was okay!



Luckily ol' pal Bo Bertilsson (Swedish hot rod writer, photographer), said I could stay at his Costa Mesa condo while waiting for the next weekend's rain date and he showed me the town in fine style. Didn't see a sunset for a couple of days, but this stunning Pacific coast image was worth the wait and a total contrast to my last Atlantic sunrise on New Jersey's Belmar Beach, close to 3,000 miles away. We went to the legendary Ascot Speedway for some classic short-track racing in the dirt and a rodeo where I fell in love with a cowgirl taking a nap. Her horse asked me not to wake her, so I didn't! Boyd Coddington and Lil' John Buttera's stance had a similar suggestion as we walked in on them. My "Pardon the intrusion," after I got this shot was met with a shrug - not a smile in sight! The number of young Swedish hot rodders at work there was really a surprise - livin' the dream!



Then we went to Chino's Planes of Fame Museum, but I forgot my credit card and we didn't have cash enough for me to grab a ride in the world's fastest P51 Mustang with record bustin' pilot [Steve Hinton](#) at the helm, but being there as it took off was a blast - it sounded awesome!



For Mopar fans...



Next we went surfing! I got wiped out, but being back at Pomona next day made up f'r it, as did the dude below who saw me shooting and said, "You should take a photo of this young lady, she's goin' t'be famous one day." So I did. Lo and behold, next time we met she was [driving an AA/FD](#) at CHRR 2012, then a [Fuel Coupe](#) (below), and 31years after this Newport Beach image she's the first babe to win the NHRA Hot Rod Heritage Top Fuel Championship (and the [legendary March Meet](#) in 2017!), [awesome feats in a macho world](#) of always explosive AA/FD's - so the dude was right! For a short spell in October 4-babes owned* the world's Top Fuel titles! Mendy's a delightful young lady, her smile is to be treasured, she's never seen this shot, and it'll light up when she does! Mendy also set low ET at NHRA's Las Vegas All-American Fuel Dragsters' invitational with a 5.61 (below left), at only 241.84 over Adam Sorokin.

Wouldn't you love to ride that wave!



mcSnip courtesy NHRA All Access Wipe out photo Bo Bertilsson



Brittany Force (USA), Kelley Bettes (Aus), Anita Mäkelä (FIA Europe) and Nitro Kitty (USA). Steve T won the 2018 NHRA title at Vegas, now there're just 3-hot NitroFueled Champs - awesome!



mcSnip courtesy NHRA All Access

Silverstone Spectacular part one the journey



Photo courtesy
Foxsports Lotus

"Would've, should've and could've" has long been the racer's lament, but in 1968 I was involved with arguably one of the strongest ever uses of that statement in our sport's history, and often wonder "What if..." With my regular columns in MoNews and Autosport and ongoing exposure in the media, folks were beginning to sit up and take notice, and our tale began with a phone call from a PR company. To my dismay the guy's name eludes me, but we became quite good pals - he was with the PR team taking care of John Player's Gold Leaf brand recently involved with circuit racing and was interested in a static display and a short demonstration down the pit straight at Silverstone. And when it came to the budget, "Just don't be greedy," was said with a chuckle before explaining I'd arranged a gig earlier in the year, was told my costing was acceptable only to have the voice at the end of the phone double the price and it never happened. "Don't worry Mike, just tell me what you've got in mind." So I did, suggesting we should double the expenses of folks coming so they had beer money, with everything free at the track and was told there'd be no problem, especially as "You're not bringing anyone from Mars or Venus..." "Funny you should say that," I cut him short with a laugh. But there were no such problems, in fact folks like the Hustler crew who lived pretty close said they'd do it for free - no way I'd told them, like everyone else they were offered a fair price for what they were doing, Everyone thought this was cool, the Gold Leaf team agreed with my maths, and were thrilled that everything was firmed up so quickly, loved the list of cars I'd given 'em, and told me it'd all be taken care of from marshalling the show cars to feeding the participants. They also asked if I'd handle the PA during the display and, once that was agreed said they were all looking forward to the show. Me too, but it was way off in October, so after telling folks when I'd like the cars on display at the track, and talking briefly with demo drivers about the programme, I returned to enjoying some high speed living. Oops, suddenly it was October 19 and after a wild party in town we were sort of running late, but no problem really, there was little traffic on the M1, Ric slept in the passenger seat, I was cruising easy until making the turn off the motorway and finding myself powering round a bend towards the tail end of a long line of cars going very, very slowly. No problem, the brakes worked, but the halt woke Ric who sat up saw the traffic, asking with a chuckle "Where are we Mike?" In truth I didn't know, so he just laughed around "Cool, let's have a cold one and talk about it," laughing out loud as he leaned over the rear seat, pulled its back down, reached into the ice box and offered me cold Bud which I declined, so strapping in again, he cracked it, took a long sip and said "Boy that's tastes good, now pull out and let's get around this traffic you've got a show to put on," punching me on the shoulder as he took another sip, adding "Okay, there's five cars and a gap - go f'r it," so I did, the Mustang responding well, moments later we filled that gap, then I eased out to the right, and he yelled, "Ten cars at least, go," so I did, really nailing the sucker the pipes roaring with power with its new cam courtesy Uncle Sam moving us out strongly, backing off as we reached the gap down the road, sliding in just as my ears filled



Brian Sutton photo
courtesy TTDVDS

the sounds of a siren. "They got y' Mike," Ric laughed as a Police bike moved along side, its rider's hand suggesting we pulled over. No problem, then I heard a tap on the window which Ric opened as the officer said "What's the rush sir?" Rick laughed, "Don't know officer, perhaps you should ask the driver," leaning back so I was really visible. Moving his bike around us, he did and I explained we were late for a show I was putting on for Silverstone, adding with a straight face "They can't get started without us and I don't really want to dissappoint all these fans officer so I was.." "Driving fast," he finished for me. "Yes, sir, but not too fast," which at least made him smile as he said, "No, I've seen some of the cars you've got there and they look really fast, but then so does this," as he stood back and admired its lines. "Yes it does," I responded, "But did you see the long skinny red red one?" "Not really sir, it was inside a lorry."



David Cooper photo @ ukdrn

"Well you should come watch the show 'cos the ground shakes when it fires up, and it moves like lightning..." Again he laughed, "Yeah, I've heard about dragsters but never seen one," adding with a chuckle, "Okay sir, just follow me, we'll get you there quickly and safely," pausing for a brief second before lowering his head and adding "Ask your colleauge to please keep his hand beneath the dash 'til we arrive at the track," touching his helmet with his finger, turning and climbing onto his motorcycle, firing it up, waving us out to join him, switched on the sirens and moved off down the road.

Ric was now laughing loud, my smile was a mile wide as he chuckled around "Yes sir, but not too fast - are you kidding me," again with the punch on the shoulder, laughing as I showed him we were over the speed limit, "Cool," he chuckled, "And with a Police escort too!" Shortly later, the officer pulled up on the bridge over the track, pointing as he said, "Your cars are over there sir," adding with a grin, "By the way, this is a really good looking machine," lowering his head, looking over at Ric and said "You can enjoy your beverage now sir," turning back to me and adding, "Perhaps you might try getting up a bit earlier next time sir," again touching a finger to his helmet, smiled and rode off into the circuit. Reaching over I took the can and went to take a sip, making a face as I said "Whoa Ric it's warm, crack me a coldy please," as I lit one up and he leaned back into the ice box and pulled out two cans. We both cracked 'em at the same time, taking refereshing sips, laughing together while I shook my head around "Boy, that was fun," as Ric added, "Yep, now let's go get this show on the road." Press releases billed it as "One of the high lights" of the annual BRDC Gold Leaf Clubman's Championship "a display and demonstration with 12 of Britain's most powerful and spectacular cars." It was indeed - we'll tell you all about it next month. But here's an unpublished shot of one of our feature cars that, like all of our drag racers, performed to perfection while our star car had John Player's Mister Big begging for more so we gave him and thousands of fans what they wanted-NitroThunder!



BBLF photographer unknown



Ric laughing with the, as yet unseen, Gold Leaf girls

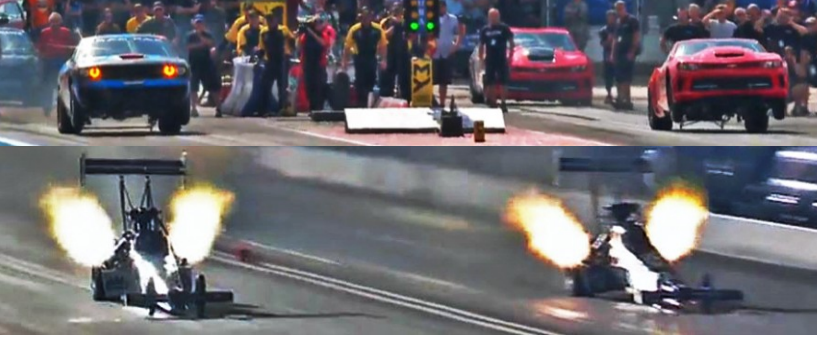
Here's a page of fun, kicking off a DragRod cartoon by Rick Goodale, moving to Leah Page winning the FS Showdown at St Louis' [MidwestNats](#) where she ran an 8.001. At Ennis, Texas she became the NHRA's first female SAM Tech [Factory Stock Showdown Champion](#), with a best ET of 8.079, 169.64mph in her DSR Dodge Challenger Drag Pak – the fuzz'd need more than that blower and slicks to catch her!



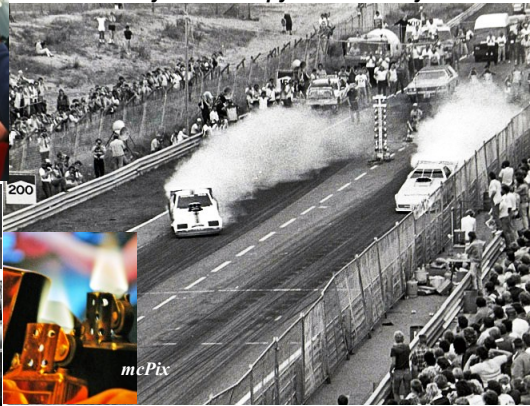
mcSnips courtesy NHRA All Access



Hang on Bert if he doesn't notice the slicks I reckon we've got 'im this time
Fuel coupe thunder at Zandvoort 1987! Gary Page's ol' school Panic didn't cross the line but he thinks Al Bates in Nobby Hills swoopy new Hounday won!



Ice cream with Ian Demaine at SCR's Hot Rod Drags 2009
samPix



Leah was #1 qualifier both days with a [3.64 @332.84 on Friday](#) and won the final Q race at NHRA's Pomona Finals with a blistering 3.631 for pole at 332.84 over new TF champ Steve Torrence's 3.661 at 330.96. Her crew chief Todd Okuhara was asked, "How d'y do it," "J'st stepped on it," he chuckled. 2017 TF Champ Brittany Force took top speed with a 3.667 at 333.58! Leah was the first woman to run 250mph in an NFC, and she won the triple crown - the 32 car March Meet fuel coupe race in 2010, the California Hot Rod Reunion and became the first babe to win NHRA's Heritage Fuel Coupe title-wow! Click this link to enjoy 5-minutes with Leah, from Jr Dragster through AAFC and Pro Mod to Top Fuel – [it's really cool!](#)



1967 BRITISH HOT ROD ASSOCIATION RACING CHAMPION SANTA POD RACEWAY
Ian Demaine
jbPix

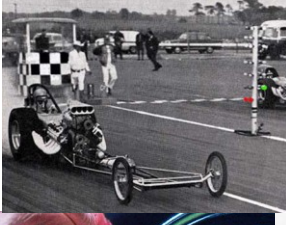


Rex Sluggett funded Tudor Rose, our first state of the art AA Fuel Dragster. He was our first King of Speed, running our first home grown 180mph pass, albeit with a red light. He ended 1968 with a 182mph speed record – a good reason to smile!



mcPix

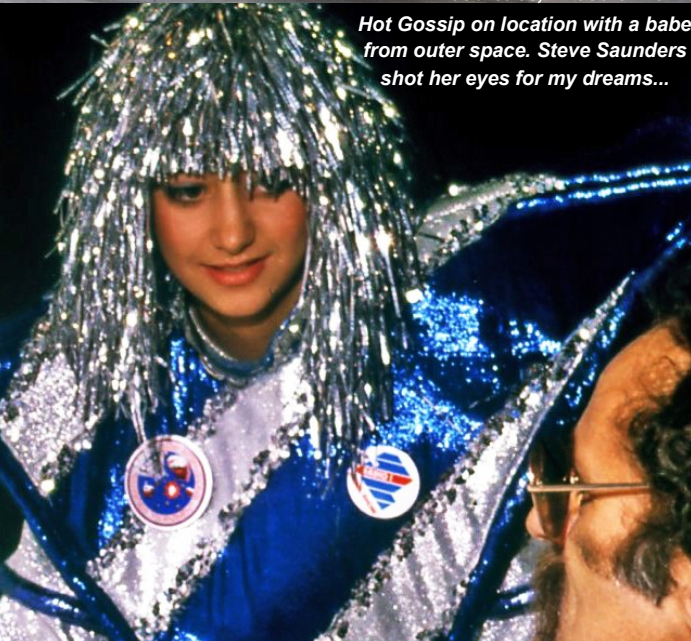
What a babe, what a driver!



jbPix DragRod



jbPix DragRod



Hot Gossip on location with a babe from outer space. Steve Saunders shot her eyes for my dreams...



mcPix



mcPix

Des Taylor and Ian Tubb at Fishburns International Raceway, while I ponder the wisdom of being that close. Them, not me! Actually Ian waited 'til Des left...