

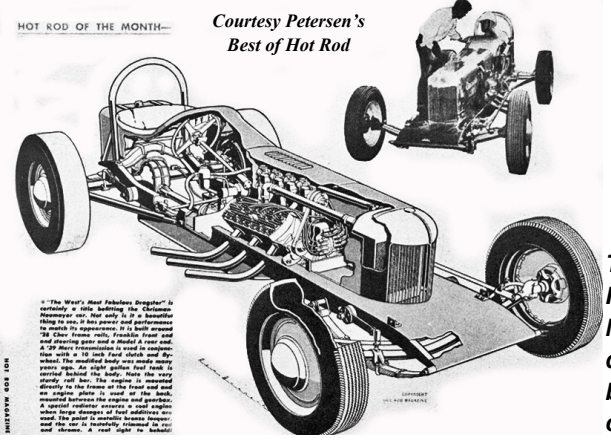
Powered by the 150hp Blue Flame six, America's first sports car, the Corvette was born in 1953, its most sporty part was crossed flags on the hood, but its chrome grille was out of this world. As was the '53 Eldorado Special Sport convertible, only 532 were built. a certified Milestone - a true dream car indeed

words & photos
Mike Collins



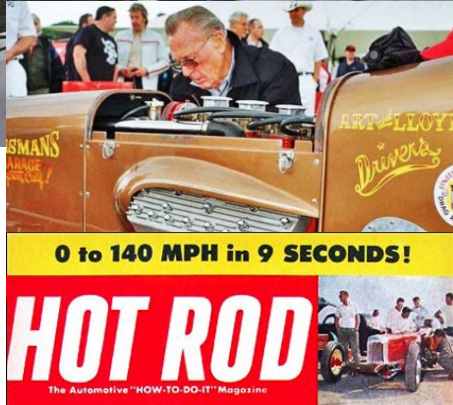
Meanwhile back home we'd Al's Gasser – oops sorry folks, guess I hit a time warp, but you know what I mean – a Ford Pop! Talking of time warps, Art Chrisman's gorgeous #25 dragster began life as a short-wheelbase dry lakes racer in the 1930s. In 1952 he was one of [five charter members in Bonneville's 200-mph Club](#) driving Chet Herbert's "Beast" and in '53 he was the first to break the quarter mile, 140mph barrier in #25! Bannered with "0-140mph in 9 SECONDS," the cover of May's Hot Rod magazine called the #25 "the West's Most Fabulous Dragster" a month before the first Corvette rolled off the production line!

Goodwood
FoS 2008



Courtesy Petersen's
Best of Hot Rod

The Hot Rod of the Month feature used one of Rex Burnett's beautiful cutaway drawings; the May 1953 issue had Art Chrisman's 140-mph dragster. A few weeks later I was sat on a wall between a pair of schoolgirls in a crowd of chattering south London kids awaiting the



Royal carriage - suddenly it was right in front of us, our newly crowned Queen Elizabeth waving at the crowds, a strange silence descending to leave my words "Good luck Your Majesty!" ringing loud and proud as she turned and said "Thank you." And then was gone, leaving me bathing in the afterglow of a truly fabulous Royal smile, one of the girls squeezed my arm, "Michael, the Queen just thanked you!" Both cuddling up close, their sparkling eyes suggesting there'd be no homework that afternoon! And talking of rude, some folks suggested that the outrageous tail fins on 1959 Cadillac were just that, and even today there are some who have to stop and look twice! The '59 Corvette also looked better, and its fuel injected 283 V8 gave it some grunt with 290hp.



The Queen became my boss in 1957 and by 1959 I was driving a destroyer,

very first time, albeit in a Bedford 3-ton Army truck - after we'd spent a couple days learning the ropes on a race track in Singapore. As readers know, I won my first drag race a few days later thanks to having a really cool instructor, but didn't get so lucky when it came time for my driving test as a new Sergeant made it known in no uncertain terms that he didn't like the Navy. But that was his problem, mine was his opening line "Roight lad, you don't do anything 'less I tell you too, then you do it roight away," adding "'ave y'got that laddie!" it was definitely not a question, but I answered, "Yes Sarge," as he slammed the door and said "Let's go then." More than just cool, my instructor had been good and I drove well, feeling like I was on the way to getting a licence, then the tester said "Take the next left roight," so I did – it was less than 20feet away and I'd absolutely no idea that 30mph was w-a-y to fast to even attempt making such a turn and took out a pair of "Keep Left" bollards! "What'd y'do that for?" he screamed. "You told me to take the next left Sarge" "But I didn't mean that next one..." leaving his words hanging as I threw some coal on the fire by adding, "But there's only one 'next left turn' Sarge," that led to a verbal assault strong enough to almost push me out of the truck without his shoving! Needless to say there was no driving licence that day – at least he didn't make me walk back to the barracks, although my ears suffered a battering as he unleashed his anger at "Stupid sailors..." all the way – but that was his problem 'cos I was laughing inside, making sure to keep looking straight ahead whilst thinking of the fun I'd have retelling the tale once back onboard. But let's get back to the track for some NitroAction, something that was banned in 1957, the tale told in the opening paragraph of the late Chris Martin's excellent "Top Fuel Handbook" where he answers the question "When did Top Fuel begin?" with "February 3, 1957 at Lions drag Strip, near Long Beach, California."

On that day Emery Cook "wheeled the Cook & Bedwell dragster to an aggregate 9.28 seconds at 166.97mph. Cook's runs set both ends of the track record and sent seismic waves through the drag-racing community."

Emery Cook Takes Quarter Mile Speed Crown At Record 166.97

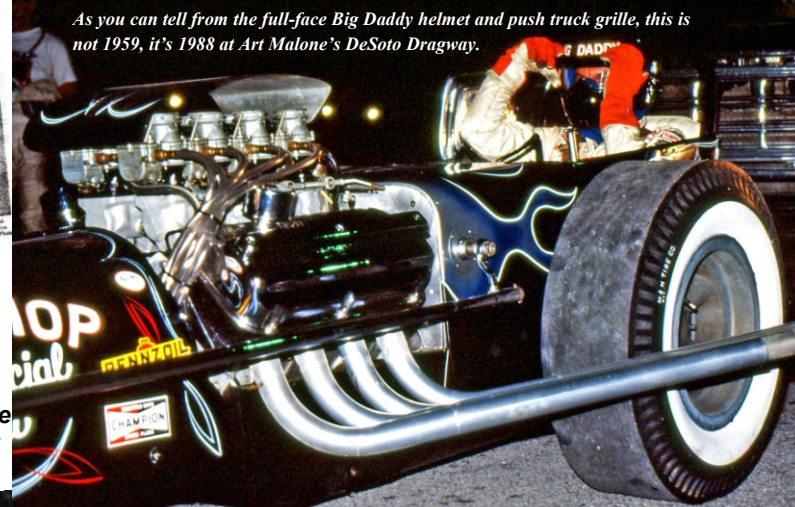


Despite Tony Waters' huge final round hole shot below, his roadster had problems, Art Chrisman's 9.36, 140.50 won what was essentially the first March Meet in 1959 and set low ET at 8.70

Other tracks soon followed, and then the NHRA let it be known that Nitro was outlawed - but folks still felt the need and this ultimately led to the first US Fuel & Gas Championship. Legend has it this race came about because of the big number being claimed by the Swamp Rat, Don Garlits over in Florida and so he was lured west to Famoso with some big bucks. Although he ran close to 180mph, the unblown Swamp Rat 1 was no match for the supercharged Californian cars.

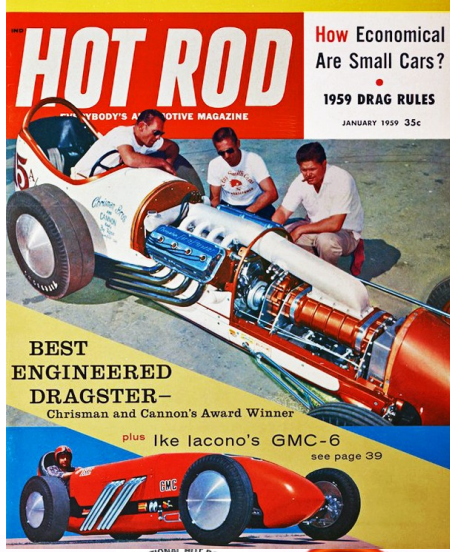
Santa Ana Places Immediate Ban On Any Fuel But Straight Gasoline

Drag News, February 9, 1957



As you can tell from the full-face Big Daddy helmet and push truck grille, this is not 1959, it's 1988 at Art Malone's DeSoto Dragway.

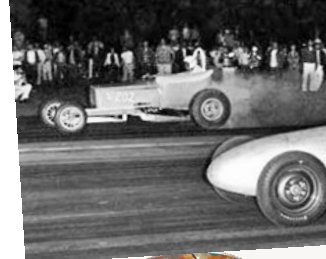
STUDEBAKER'S NEW LARK V8



BEST ENGINEERED DRAGSTER - Chrisman and Cannon's Award Winner



Don Prieto photo courtesy nhra.com



Art Chrisman was back on the cover of Hot Rod with an outrageous induction system on the new Chrisman and Cannon Hustler that won a "Best Engineered" award. It was still drop dead gorgeous when I shot it at Famoso a couple years back even though it was wearing tie-down straps on the rear slicks!



At Goodwood, after telling Art the #25 was the best looking dragster I'd ever seen, he smiled, "It still makes me feel good too." Sadly Art passed away in 2016; his old pal Steve Gibbs tells his tale in 2013, and a photo intro used before NHRA Museum's Celebration of Life for Art in 2016



mcSnip courtesy NHRA YouTube



Just love the Nitro laden peace sign! The March Meet legend grew stronger every year, with many 32 car fields, and in 1965 a 64 car Saturday eliminator was won by Don Garlits, who also took the title on Sunday. Last time I used Don Prieto's 1959 shot it was to add colour to Adam Sorokin's giant hole shot that was also eaten when he blew up at the 2012 CHRR! Adam told me that much inspiration for his beautiful canopied Champion Speed Shop 'liner came from the Glass Slipper, hence its inclusion here. Adam also suggested that he enjoyed its added safety factor too. And it looks super cool as well. Art's son Mike is getting ready to cackle Hustler with members of the 1979 US Nat's winning Over the Hill Gang chillin' left of Art below next to the Glass Slipper,



Ed Cortopassi's methanol burning rail, the world's first streamliner, the oldest and first dragster to fire up at the Goodwood Festival of Speed's now legendary CackleFest in 2008. The unique canopied cockpit and slippery glass body along with the Moon disc wheel covers helped Ed hit 181mph on the dry lakes in his heyday! But methinks it's time to go back to the future - how far depends on my time machine's fuel load...



Pour a beverage, click and enjoy Nick Pettitt's view of the CackleFest cars and the 2008 Goodwood Festival of Speed

Out of courtesy to my ol' pal Nitro Nostrils I won't be telling 'out about the four days of Inder at the magnificent March Meet we both just visited, saving it for a double dose of FamosoFunder next time that'll make for a fine cocktail! Andy's probably getting ready to fly home after the Gatornats where [the winning Fuel Coupe](#) had an average speed during eliminations of 331.40mph Most of the race I missed, not just because of our deadline, but NHRA.TV was having transmitting problems! Although I've only had the good fortune to visit Famoso five times now, each visit was enjoyed to the max, even the debacle that was the 25th anniversary CHRR gig in 2016, when the NHRA totally messed it up big time, with many folks saying they weren't coming back, and as you can see on the shot across the page, the bleachers are virtually empty, so it seems they really did stay away! My first CHRR was in 2010 and it was totally awesome, and not just because there were more than 30 Fuel Coupes trying to make the elite 16 car field (it seems to be close to the norm most years!), but the moment you walked into the track it's the atmosphere, the fans, the racers and the staff – not to mention the California weather, babes and the price of admission! However I do recall standing on the start line from the moment they fired the first pair until the session ended seemingly days later! Once the ground shook I went all zombie, looking towards pit lanes where all I could see was, as legendary announcer Steve Evans said back in the day, a fibreglass forest – and the cars they just kept on coming! Today Famoso announcers still talk about the funny cars being "Backed up all the way to the 99 Freeway!" The best race for me was the 2015 gig, the last of the truly great California Hot Rod Reunions, and happily I brought my daughter Sarah with me to celebrate our 50years as racers (she drove me up the track while sat on my lap in an altered before her birthday - tell you 'bout it one day!), but the tale of that amazing race is told in a story called [NitroFever!](#)



Click for 96 stunning seconds filled with NitroFire from the 2010 CHRR Cacklefest!



Pour a beverage, click it, scroll down an' enjoy my tale of real [Fuel Coupe NitroThunder!](#) More copse than forest, but there are nine different fuel coupes down there!

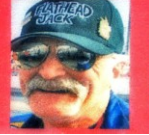


MARCH MEET MEDIA



FUNNY CARS DRAGSTERS ALTEREDS GASSERS

MARCH 7th-10th 2019



Took a delightful young lady named Mona for a ride on the Ferris wheel; it had a long line so we shared a Bud, then we got aboard and had to wait while the track was cleaned after an oil down, but then we got a couple bitchin' AA Fuel Altered races, the Nitro wafting up high, the ground shaking and we loved every wild moment up there. Talking of delightful young ladies, at the 50th annual Gators [Brittany Force's 3.680 at 326.32 took Top Fuel pole](#) and Leah Pritchett's 3.724 at 325.22 was 4th. Across the page it's, a Heidi, new back up babe on the scene with Austin & O'Brien



Heidi started walkin' back-up in 2018, and learned the [victory jump](#) too! The Fuel Coupe thunder's kinda cool too!

Heidi walks not run, it's way cool...



LEAH PRITCHETT



mcSnip courtesy NHRA.TV

One of the first things I did on the March Meet weekend at Famoso was to kick it off with a smile and a few words from Hot Gossip's latest fan, Nitro Kitty – now the quickest and fastest AA Fuel Dragster pilot on the planet! Actually, after strolling into Mendy's pit area on the Thursday and seeing this image at right I just said "Wow, that some shot." Mendy smiled and said "It's a blower explosion."



Wayne Lederer photography



Click it to see Mendy Fry in hot AAFD action en route to becoming NHRA's 2018 Nostalgia Top Fuel Champion

On the run above Mendy's fueler shook so hard (you can see the slick's off the ground!), it tore the rear end out of the car, happily she backed off as it "took the brakes with it" and Nitro Kitty ended up "on the beach" as Famoso's sand-pit landing is known! Later I asked if she'd sign Street Machine for me, "Is that me in the funny car?" she asked. "Yep." "And the dragster too," smiling as she added, "That's really cool, which one should I sign?" "Underneath you please." Her eyes opened wide, and then her smile lit up like I said it would and she began reading the paragraph and loved it... Later the High Speed team came back out and "It was just like those issues never existed," she wrote on her Facebook page, "We laid down the quickest and fastest run in AAFD history, with a 5.51 at 265. Then we backed it up with a 5.49 -- the first pass in the '40's for one of these beasts." You gotta admit this is one powerful young lady and we wish her team all the very best for a great season in search of a repeat NHRA Hot Rod Heritage Series Championship title

Notice the almost subtle glow from my AA Fuel Zippo, that's 'cos it's running a 98% load of California's finest fuel with input from both the finalists at this year's magic March Meet! How lucky can a guy get!

Now something completely different, Street Machine on location in the mud!
 "Where's the racing going on?" I asked
 "Over there sir but it'll be better if you park your car and walk up the hill."
 "Why?" I asked.
 "If you go that way your car will get dirty sir!"
 "Okay, thank you," I grinned, chuckling as I added, "But it's not a car, it's a Jeep," powering off into the thick black mud – you can see their reactions behind me thanks to Powerful Peter Robain being on hand. However, I don't think Street Machine decals have ever seen mud like this before or since...

