

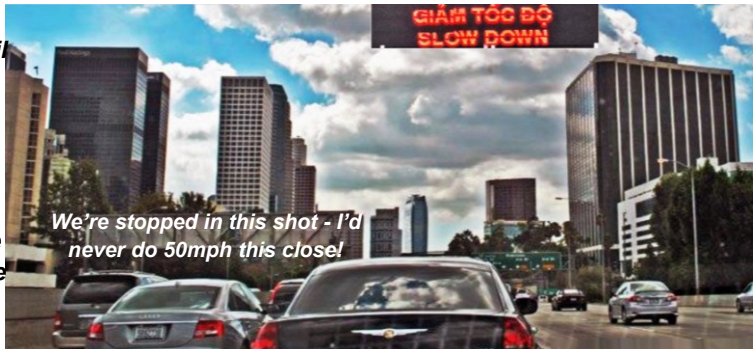


After seeing last month's alligator rasslin' shot a pal asked "When d'you first start wearing Ray Bans?" as I was leaving his store, "Well I was wearing 'em in Saigon before the Ho Chi Minh trail reached there, so it's been a long time!" Chuckling and stepping into the sunshine, my mind's eye filling with multiple Vietnamese visions seen through Bausch & Lomb green, riding in tri-shaws, Cadillacs, late '50s station wagons with rearward facing seats that were great for sightseeing, and back to Saigon in 1963 during an outlaw tour in the midst of the city's great rock an' roll ban, getting down to business with a Georgia peach at the US Embassy, dallying with a China Doll, memories that had me laughing happily out loud, a couple of young ladies gifting me with warm smiles in passing as I recalled a third visit (as a tourist in 2012!), being paddled into the Mekong Delta for the first time, laughing again as the thought came that Ray Bans often helped me through tight bright spots on highways of this planet and beyond, casting my eyes towards the heavens, giving thanks on recalling it was only recently I'd found out we'd had the good fortune to leave Saigon just days before things turned ugly back in June '63! So it seems like I've been wearing 'em a long time, but let's get back to the future – and cut to the chase as they say..

words & photos
mike collins



It was crazy out there, but being stuck in LA traffic was no problem, just kicked back getting the feel on my ride, a late model Cadillac, nose-to-tail around 50mph in 8-lane traffic when the dude ahead stopped suddenly and his brake lights didn't work! Being in A for Alert mode, I'd seen stop lights of cars ahead glow red, hit the brakes and "stopped on a dime" as they say! Leaving my Alert meter high I was soon cruising easy in the seemingly endless slow an' go madness of LA's Interstate rush hour traffic as the night grew darker. No problem, the Eagles sounded j'st fine on the factory sound system, I was comfortable, and when I did tickle the throttle, was aware of more horsepower than my right foot was used to.



Darkness came and shortly later a sign for the Grapevine, a legendary name in the truckers' world known to me from Convoy, a thought given no credence in passing as, soon after coming down the other side, traffic thinned, the road went straight - my right leg too, yeehaw! The Cadillac boogied on down the road in fine ol' style, so I decided to kick it again; the gentle roar of its Northstar moved me on rapidly once more, a pair of lights coming swiftly but dimly into my mirror, still set on anti-dazzle from all the traffic, so naturally I moved out of the way, the lights following me back to the inside lane! Thinking perhaps it was some LA nutter, I moved back into the fast lane and, as the Eagles were suggesting, took it to the limit one more time, my darkened mirror soon filled again with the crazy dude, so it was back into the traffic – and he followed! "Oh sh*t! It's gotta be a California crazy, I'm outta here," trying to chuckle at the thought, stomping on the gas pedal and thundering into the darkness ahead, my mirror filled by the same car and the night lit up with flashing blues, reds, and a screaming siren but with cars to my right I couldn't move over so I just kicked it down, accelerating yet again to move past them, the Interceptor glued to my bumper, busted! Couldn't believe that after it'd taken more than 35 high speed state line crossings before being captured back in the 1980s, I'd been hit less than 2-hours out of LA! With the Cadillac slowed on the hard shoulder ahead of the California Highway Patrol, I switched off the motor, awaiting my fate. A tap on the passenger window saw me click open the door to a smiling visage speaking with a soft California accent, "Good evening sir..." he was polite and I listened without really hearing until he said "...you took off like a rocket," smiling again as he asked why, After hearing the tale above, he walked back to his Interceptor, returning seemingly many long minutes later, handing back my license with an even bigger smile along with "I don't want to ruin your day Michael, so I won't give you a ticket, just get up to speed on the shoulder and rejoin the traffic," his grin going wide before adding, "but not too quickly," nodding his head with, "and enjoy the racing." "Yes sir, will do, and thank you Officer," firing up, moving onto the highway, accelerating hard, laughing and backing off at 75mph, waving my hand high out the widow once again nodding silent thanks to the good Lord, wow, how lucky can you get! And boy did I enjoy the race, the 2010 CHRR having the quickest, fastest fuel coupe field ever, better yet it was also the first time I met Roland Leong, a true legend I'd "known" since my rookie race years, writing about him and his Hawaiian fuel coupes often during the 20th century, but this weekend he was tuning Tim Boychuk's Trans Am, second in the prestigious NHRA Hot Rod Heritage Series and Roland said he was still having fun and enjoying making power (whether burnin' out or wide open!), as you can see, a 5.83 qualified 'em 10th and he was all smiles after a round one win, but not Sunday!

Tim's .021 red light wasted a 5.78 race low ET, and Leah was NHRA's first female Heritage Series AAFC Champ; in 2019 a 3.631 at 332.84 made her the [quickest babe on the planet](#) at Pomona's Auto Club finals!

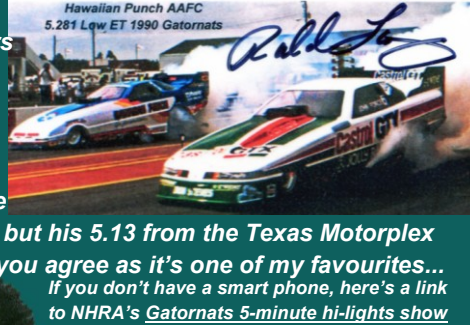


At the Mile-High Nats 2019 Leah ran 3.761 clicked off to 315.19mph



Courtesy NHRA.TV

Upon hearing Roland was coming over to help on the new Venom fuel coupe mind movies filled my head, Jim White's 5.281 putting the Hawaiian Punch Dodge Daytona on pole at the 1990 Gators the quickest Fuel Coupe pass I've seen to this day, instantly moving to this mind-blowing vision of Ace McCulloch's 5.33, 267 ahead of Hollywood Spurlock 5.40, 273, Ace's Miller car so close its awesome NitroPower left my body shaking inside, its NitroFire warming my very soul, the sweet scent of blown an' injected fuel rolling over me like a warm Pacific wave to set me trembling with excitement – wipe out! John Force's Castrol Olds won 7-events that year with Austin Coil, and the first of his 16 championships! Ace's 5.27 from the Winternats was the 1990 Pomona track record, but his 5.13 from the Texas Motorplex in 1989 was still the quickest fuel coupe pass! Later Ace said this shot was "...really cool." Hope you agree as it's one of my favourites...



If you don't have a smart phone, here's a link to NHRA's [Gatornats 5-minute hi-lights show](#)



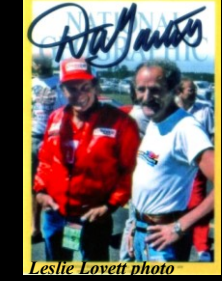
Here y'go folks, now you too can re-live this amazing race (but maybe not get quite as close!), so crack a cold one, address the QR code with your phone and enjoy NHRA's well-wicked re-mastered clip and even see the Golden Greek take out the Bud King in a pedal fest, and also the side-by-side 5-zero Top Fuel final 'tween Darrell Gwynn and Texan Eddie Hill. Sadly what you won't see is our own Rune Fjeld in action, his team bust their buns to prepare their new fuel coupe, making a round trip up to Joe Amato's place for a new motor, rebuilt the sucker then worked late into the next night with super tuner Tim Richards from Joe's Team Valvoline helping out! Then I learned they'd not eaten since forever, so I hit the NHRA Safety Safari's food fest amongst others, explained the problem and soon the team were enjoying good food, better yet Rune, Eric Otley and Tim Richards tuned their Mobil 1/Pepsi Trans Am to the quickest ever pass for EuroRacers, a stout 5.58, 257mph!



In round one Rune got the hole shot but hit tyre shake, and clicked it off as KC Spurlock sped to 5.39 at 266 for the win. It was my last NHRA Big Show gig, but having spent time with Big Daddy over the weekend decided to visit his Museum and it was really cool to bump into Don and beloved wife Pat (who sadly passed away in 2014), in his '39 Ford, stopping alongside with a big grin "Hi Mike, d'you enjoy the races?" After a lengthy chat Don chuckled and said, "Better be goin'



t'work or I might get the sack! as he shook my hand, the Ford leaving a throaty burble behind as it left, with good reason too, take a look at what's behind that gleaming radiator in the Museum shot, and how about that shine!



Leslie Lovetti photo



Courtesy Don Garlits' Museum of Drag Racing

More than just fully restored, Don's 1939 Ford Coupe has been given a gleam befitting an original hot rod, and the 331 Chrysler Hemi with a '41 Lincoln OD trans along with duel quads gave a tremendous top speed around 135 mph." Those words took me back to 1970, but a chuckle put that thought on hold at 1976, recalling time spent with the family before they flew home, and Don's "Ah jest had a good time and enjoyed it but ah couldn't get my wife to drive though 'cos she was afraid..." "What, wrong side..." I began before Pat's "Wrong side of the road," adding with chuckle, "An' too narrow!" Laughing out loud as my mind's eye replayed the big question to Don that



Monday morning magic ranking right up there with seeing Don driving his original Swamp Rat...

Remember your qualifying run against Uncle Clive, were you hesitant at all or were you racing?" His drawl was deep an definite, "Ah wuz racin' him, tell you ah would've beat him too," pausing with a familiar drag racers "win come lose some" shrug as he chuckled. "It's jest that mah enjun wasn't going on eight cylinders, it was on six on that particular run, 'n' we got down the end there we had two pipes dead cold and wet, but it was a good start." "Yeah, Clive said you strapped one on him but..."



"He drove straight by me," Don added with a smile that said it all, honking horns snapping me back to a deadline chasing reality in 2019, with Roland Leong coming to the fore, and thoughts of something we have in common...





Good to see Tre K for the first time since CHRR 2010, but Erik and the team had problems with a new set-up. Robin Read's baby fuel car blew a motor, but ran 6.88, 197 in Q1, Rob Elsom's Dirty Deeds problems continued, and Rob Loaring tuned Apache to a 6.15, DQ'd for taking out the lights in Q2!



Andy Raw had problems, but the Nitro Bug team were happy their cool lookin' beast hit the track at last. Didn't mean



6.38, 216.87 got pole for Tim Garlick

to chop it's nose off! Above is an actual Highway Patrol car, its driver waving me to "speed up" while passing a HazMat spill, even smiling when I kicked it down, so it was a buzz to use it behind the lead page tale of being captured by a California Interceptor, with Robert High's incredible piston powered 1000 foot Highway Patrol speed record at Sonoma on the scoreboards, awesome numbers for a Fuel Coupe...

In our 21st century western world it's easy to get anywhere quick and fast, with most folks thinking little of climbing into a metal tube and zooming off for a some sunshine squashed amongst hundreds of folks they don't know - most of 'em can't recall their last flight let alone their first! Happily I can, but today you'd need to be a millionaire to recreate it! About a dozen of us took off on a cold, snow swept night from Stansted in a DC3 Dakota courtesy of our sovereign lady Queen Elizabeth, shortly later swooping down low over Paris (the closest I ever got!), making a few turns around the Eiffel Tower on a circuitous route to the Orient that began with a touchdown in the mountains of Switzerland, an ice black runway 'tween the mountains about 10 feet high kissing close either side of us! We made a few spins round the mythical Blue Mosque, flew down and around the Taj Mahal a couple of times (no one had a f*ckin' camera!), and Rangoon's iconic Buddhist shrine, the Shwedagon Pagoda, flying at an extremely low altitude around the gem-encrusted upper reaches of its gold spire, before flying on towards the Far East. A brief stop in Bangkok saw me being introduced to the world of barter; my body for her Bausch & Lomb Ray Bans - not my idea! After four wonderful low, slow days we landed in Singapore. My last flight was outta LAX après the March Meet when Air New Zealand's Alice in Wonderland gave me the flight of a lifetime, hitting an all time high of 710mph thanks to a huge following wind! By the time I'd got the camera up it'd dropped a tad, but still fast! Neither came close to the journey made by another dude named Michael Collins, a decade after my first, and 50 years before



Altitude 34003 ft / Ground Speed 705 mph / Outside Air Temperature -74 °F

On this day in 1969, Apollo II was launched into space, and in 4 short days with my namesake Michael Collins at the helm, Buzz Aldrin and Neal Armstrong travelled close to 230,000miles further than my Dakota, thousands of mph faster. The Saturn V rocket made 7.6 million lbs of thrust to launch our ultra-cool dudes free of Earth orbit to the moon, was 363ft tall and fully fueled for lift off weighed 6.2 million lbs (about 400 elephants!), so it 's not much of an acceleration machine! For outright get-up and go there's never been anyone like our Slam'n Sam who, from launch (on this run), hit 60mph in 0.28 seconds, 100 in 0.36, 109mph in 32 feet! And when it comes to G forces, no astronaut (except in error!), felt near the 13G's that hit the late great Slam'n Sam on this pass! The B&W blur is Sam launching on an awesome three-second pass!



Apollo II Logo and data courtesy nasa.gov

Our heroes reached the Moon on my birthday, July 20, celebrated in a salubrious suburb just north of the River Thames where three babes abducted me after suggesting going home before Neal Armstrong walked on the moon, tying me up with strands of Colt 45 ring pulls, laughing out loud as one said, "It'll stop you doing anything, let alone leaving!" "Oh yeah," I chuckled, they knew not of my flexibility, a left foot sweeping back over my body to jiggle her boobs and then the party really got going! Oops, better stop before we get put on the top shelf at Tesco!



Courtesy nasa.gov



mcSnip courtesy Motors TV

On this day in 1970, BBCTV was at Santa Pod raceway to learn more about drag racing... My unexpected exposure to a TV crew led to "You've got an animal; you're just sitting there ready to let it loose." Mr BBCTV introduced me on National TV as "the Guru, Mike Collins..." It was a wild birthday party that night, especially as my foxy "wardrobe mistress," who dressed me in a tabard over a sun tan and trendy (Elvis style!), shades that she thought would be cool for a day at the races with no idea of the TV gig, said "Your tan still looks great Michael, now get your kit off and say thank you..." Yeehaw; ride 'em cowboy! On screen you'll enjoy a big grin and "It's an unusual form of excitement," from Bootsie, so pour a beverage, address the QR code and enjoy the show, then tell us what you think of the truncated film shown almost 50 years ago... O! Nitro nostrils wrote an unsolicited, but gratefully received, "Thanks for this, Mike; I found your distinctive off-the-cuff commentary in the Beeb footage succinctly encapsulated the straight-line sport as it was some 50 years ago. As for criticism at the end of the written piece, well it's hard to please everybody... as you can certainly attest." And here's the line that Andy mentions, an "Official" crit' written by Mr NoName; "Talk of flying bedsteads didn't please us - we didn't think the objects of the sport were very well explained. Never the less, it was all very gratifying to see." Even though it was written in a hand-printed newsletter, it's the type of thing a TV executive enjoys reading; then saves his company money by not returning!

Kudos and congratulations to our favourite NitroFueled chicken farmer on her induction to the BDRHoF - what a great season for the Levin Iglut team! They set a new FIA ET record at the Pod in May and returned to dominate the FIA Finals for Anita's 4th win of 2019 along with her 4th FIA Top Fuel Championship, the last two back-to-back! Best wishes to Anita, Tommi, Hanna, Heikki an' their crew and all of our readers for a very Merry Christmas!

