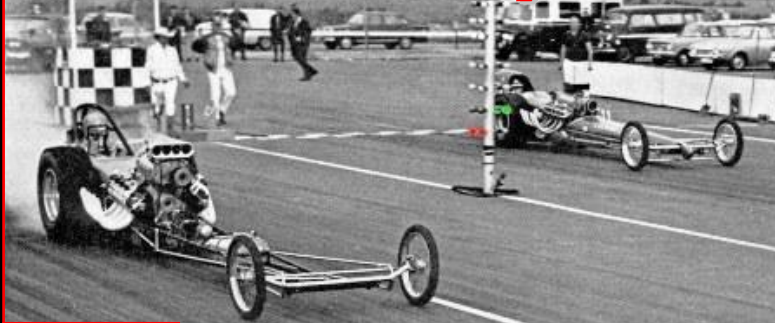


# Anniversary blues Part one



Mono photos John Bennett Drag Racing & Hot Rod magazine

**DENSHAM  
DOWNS  
SLUGGETT  
IN FIRST  
FUEL MATCH  
BASH**

Saturday July 20<sup>th</sup> 1968 - now that really was a birthday celebration, which kicked off when Commuter and Tudor Rose stormed down track together for the first time! Mrs T of the famed Taylor's Tea Bar made me a cake complete with a hot rod and chequered flag, and then the Colt 45 flowed freely as we partied deep into the night. With Dragstalgia falling on virtually the same date, this seemed reason enough to visit the track.

Still no press passes from the track mind, or even a reason for their refusal of my request. I guess this time they didn't like my response to being yelled at like an oick during the Main Event! But I'd once again been encouraged to "visit as a spectator" by a representative from Santa Pod's front office.



Sunday morning blues

## And they called it Dragstalgia!

No Problem. Although it seems that in the 21st century the Pod's media members' are verboten from writing anything at all critical concerning Santa Pod, cash customers have paid for the right to complain! So here goes...

Despite the fact that Commuter (the first British dragster to run an eight second ET), was in the house, there was nary a mention of that magic nostalgia-laden race. All the knowledgeable folks on the Santa Pod PA waffled about was the evening Cacklefest which, despite what you read in Santa-Pod-friendly media, was a real bummer as alcohol cars **do not** cackle!



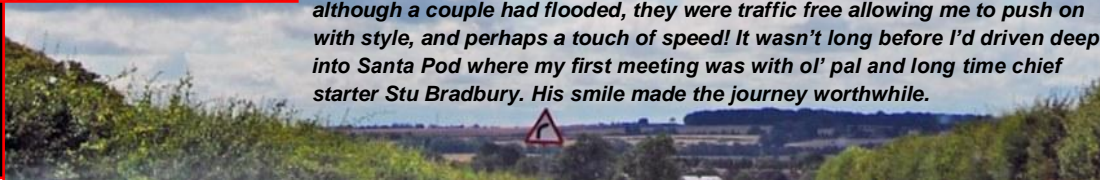
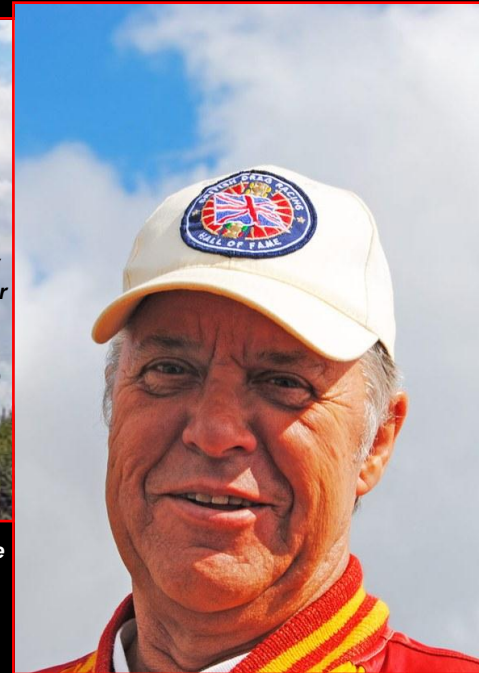
You can just see nitro fire dancing on the header tips as Time Warp finally adds some CACKLE to Saturday night!

And man, you could really tell the difference when Wendy Baker idled down track, yet announcers didn't seem to notice, waffling on about what a great Cacklefest it had been - talk about bullsh\*t! My Zippo produced more nitro fire than the other cars on the track - a fact which more than a few fans who'd paid cash money like me can attest to! And having stayed behind in the cold for an advertised Cacklefest that is a major bitch!

But let's get back to the beginning of the day...

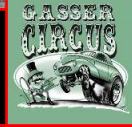
I'd been warned it'd little more than a "sportsman" meeting, and others had suggested a glorified run what y' brung! No problem, I wasn't really going for the racing, my main reason was to visit with friends, and then I was going to celebrate no matter what! However, being spurred on with thoughts that just maybe there'd be some nitro excitement I headed off into the storm-laden morning with a smile on my face and a full load of G Max nitro in my Zippo! One of the many light moments during a lengthy and wet traffic-laden journey through London was that colourful umbrella which carried a bikini clad dancer on the front! Happily the rain abated as I reached open country lanes and, although a couple had flooded, they were traffic free allowing me to push on with style, and perhaps a touch of speed! It wasn't long before I'd driven deep into Santa Pod where my first meeting was with ol' pal and long time chief starter Stu Bradbury. His smile made the journey worthwhile.

Now the BDR Hall of Fame chairman, Stu got his start back in the day with Brian Holmes leading the start line crew a couple years before the two machines below had been born - what a pair of classy classics! And the cars were too! A mighty Mopar winged warrior dressed for the King and a tough-lookin' Chevelle...





Our sport has always been full of extremes, especially when it comes to run what y' brung! At left there's a freshly rebuilt fuel injected slingshot dragster out for some first time "fun!" Then there's a 440 Mopar which'd towed a caravan to the track and needed a tyre change to go racing, and finally a full tilt AA/FA that had recently run a six twenty at more than 230mph being prepared for a test run following a complete rebuild after an even more recent "racing incident." Ah the joys of drag racing!



Those were the days – or some such bullsh\*t. The cars of the Gasser Circus have been a star turn on the Run What y' Brung circuit for some time. Their fine-looking machines also make a great display for nostalgia freaks and I've heard that some of 'em can run the numbers! It's nice to see a pair of blown '57s parked close



Mr G Max Antony Billinton and Mr AAP ML were too busy talking business so I just grabbed a snapshot

Nose jobs on a pair of very different gassers, and more detail from Ian Turbuville's new ride

AAP's resident blown 57s - now a push car and its award winning tow truck!



Met up with old pal Des Taylor of Revell Rebel fame, now drivin' a blown Chevy powered Mopar. And how about this wild looking Ford



Having noticed the aged stock cars parked over by the stream, I'd walked round the fence to spend some time chatting with the ol' roundy round guys who were more than a little entertaining. "Trouble is," one said with a grin, "we started off banging into each other back in the fifties and we're still doing the same thing today," laughing out loud before adding, "but in the States the stockers became NASCAR!" After awhile I noticed a few cars moving out and thought they were going to race down the track so I moved on. I'd only just cleared the fence when I realised they were lining up to race on the small oval without spectators! Talk about crazy! So I climbed back inside the "arena" and moved up tight to the track to enjoy a nostalgia stock car race – all alone!



My memory of stock cars was always dirt covered, but being on asphalt these cars stayed clean. Although the Ranchero wasn't racing, that logo looks tough enough! They were running hard and fast with more than few cars being spun out.

All of which made me want to chase some nitro from that AA/FA, or at least a small amount of ground pounding from those blower cars I'd seen! Junior Dragsters have never done much for me, but on the way down to the start line then I tripped over this good looking machine wearing a Don Garlits style mono strut rear wing and stopped to take a look. Driven by Paige Wheeler, she was happy to do the driving and leave the tuning up to her family and crew! That's cool; there'll be plenty of time for her to learn about changing spark plugs in later years!

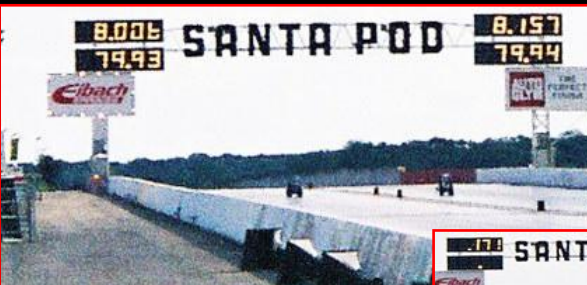


These two coupes put a grin on my face – didn't matter that one was nitro powered and t'other wore a four barrel. Knowing the She Devil TAFK was also on site put thoughts of a match race in my head. Yeah right, chance, as they say, would be a fine thing!



There was side-by-side action aplenty in a £1,000 heads up Run What Y' Brung shoot out. Leastways that's what I heard. About that time there was an oil down, Andy Willsheer went to enjoy his lunch, not his usual freebie style, but a 25p special deal sandwich - close enough for rock an' roll!

Not hungry, I went to talk nostalgia with Stu Bradbury. Santa Pod's first JD did not come up in conversation! Next thing you know, Paige was booted an' suited, ready to race - heads up!



Having got the holeshot, Paige powered to the eighth-mile finish line to take her first win with the new car over Jacob Kopasz

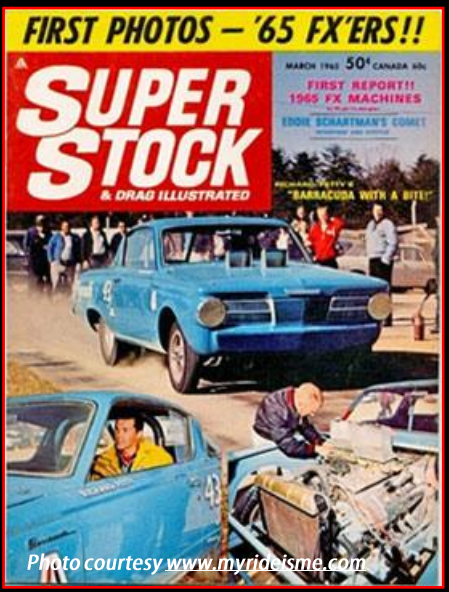
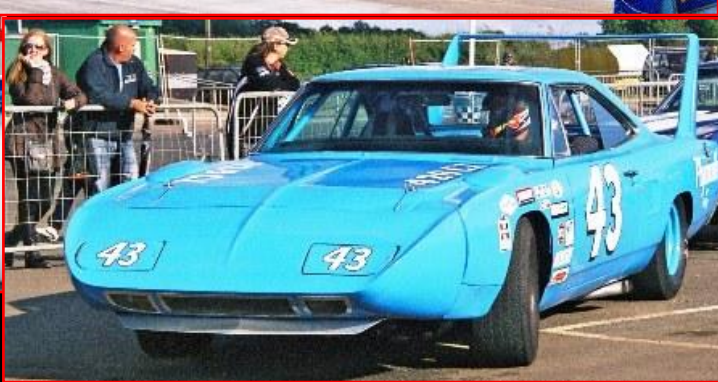


"Heads up drag racing," I thought with a chuckle, "can't ask for more than that." Didn't ask, but got lucky...

Turning to head on back into the pits I stopped as the Richard Petty winged warrior tribute car fired into life, It rumbled slowly towards the startline, made a smoky burnout then trundled on down the track



Photo by Martin



Before he became the King on the NASCAR circuit, Richard Petty actually did give drag racing a try.

It was 1964, Petty had won the Championship, NASCAR had banned the hemi and Chrysler boycotted the series. So Richard and his gang took a Barracuda, stuffed it full of mighty Mopar and joined the match race circuit. The car, 43Jr, bore the legend "Outlawed" on the doors!



Meanwhile, back at the Pod, a pair of blown and injected fuel altereds was being prepared to make a pass. This one with the flames and its driver climbing in through a hole put a grin on my face, but it was the sight of Gary Page strapped into his AA/FA which grabbed my attention. Especially when they fired the sucker into life a few moments later and the air came alive to the sound of nitro power. Yeehaw!



Chaos idled across the start area, nitro fumes filling my nostrils, and then Gary Page stood loud, rear slicks growing tall as he made a smoky burnout, backing up rapidly and moving into stage. The lights ran and the ground shook as a short sharp blast of AA power was unleashed to launch the car hard down track. Instant nitro nirvana! My daughter used to call the guy holding his ears "Uncle Roy" back in the day. Today, long-time Santa Pod track promoter Roy Phelps keeps his hand in along with another ol' pal Wild Bill Sherratt helping out on Lawrie Gatehouse's Chaos. It was fun chatting with them for awhile, and then I took my leave but once again didn't get very far



Great burnout, then the drive shaft connections broke when Des Taylor hit the nitrous, but didn't cause much damage



About then I was asked to leave the area. No problem, it just brought this John Bennett shot to mind of. Stu Bradbury "throwing" me out back in 1968! Not much change there then? Except that was a posed shot taken to make folks aware of new start area rules. Although I'd stayed back out of the way, I guess someone thought I looked out of place compared to others lounging on the crash barrier who were definitely not authorized! There y'go. No problem at all, I'd had my taste of nitro thunder, got the shot and was happy to move on



Dave Raper's Lil' blue Corvette Super Comp racer was taking part in another £1,000 to win drag race. My ol' pal Dick Sharp's being doing it almost forever in the long time fan favourite Dorset Horn flip-top altered which was out racing with the Wild Bunch



Must admit I was quite impressed with the wide variety of machines lining up to race when I moved back to pit lane. There was some real nostalgia with the C&C Backdraft injected Chevy, originally built in 1969 as Malibu Express. The Ballbreaker Chevy tow truck looked huge even though it was sat almost on the ground!



With a fuel injected big block Chevy for power, second generation racer Spencer Tidswell's Problem Child has more goodies than Henry Ford could ever imagine inside his sit up and beg Pop. Problem Child indeed, as you can see from its wild start line antics below. His smiling Mum Jean is seen at left, back in the day with yours truly oop north at York. She famously drove Tiddy's T, the family's wild big block Chevy altered



New to the Wild Bunch and making check out passes was Ian Turbuville's Mr Spokehead II injected big block Chevy slingshot



Courtesy santapod.co.uk



Sky high, flamed or faux patina'd - drag racers just love their Ford Pops

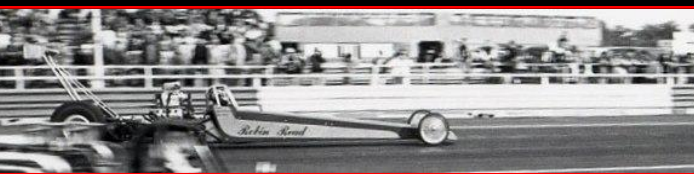


Don't know if this ground-hugging '57 went down track as I only saw it sat alongside the road all day, but it certainly looked the part. Completely different to the high-riding Chevy Gassers at right, who were heading for the start line as I was leaving



Would you believe one of the Pod's refreshment spots wanted a pound sterling for a cup of hot water? Me neither, so I beat 'em down to 50p, added my special Burmese tea and headed back to the Hall of Fame tent. Talk about getting lucky, it was about that time that the ACAG's Syd McDonald appeared with a plate full of pigs in a bacon blanket and then a Danish pastry which hit the spot and tasted good.

Also got to spend some time chatting about the good ol' days with Hall of Famer Robin Read, whose awesome Daimler-powered baby fueler ran six-second elapsed times back in the eighties (below)



An eight-second pass on Sunday made 1968 British Drag Racing Champion John Hobbs smile, but he wasn't too happy Saturday when, after waiting an hour and a half in the staging area, he was told to "come back tomorrow"! Great way to treat a Hall of Fame racing legend who was invited to participate!

Also Miss Phoenix never did get to make the promised flag starts, and Rocket Ronnie Picardo's wheelie Sting Ray never went down track on Saturday! Oh well, here are couple of smiles as JB gives John his trophy in 1968.



Photo by Martin

If Paige was match racing then she won as her opponent didn't leave the line! The number of blower cars racing was amazing

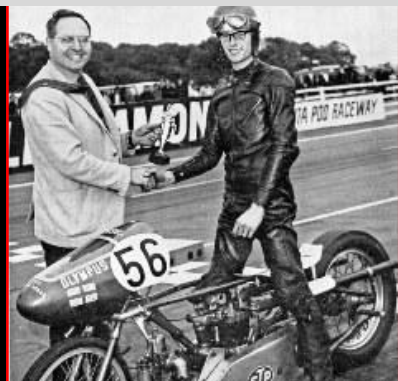


Photo by Martin



Photo by Martin



I was chatting with ol' pal Barry Dufty and his wife Wendy when I heard the sound of power and finally saw a drag race! Could this be an image of sibling race track rivalry? Brian Gibson's '64 Dart doing it to John Gibson's '55 Chevy in classic Gasser Circus action. A fine looking flathead powered slingshot dragster puts a cap on our story from Dragstalgia – almost...



Courtesy santapod.co.uk

Steph Milam set low ET of the weekend with a fine 6.11 in the She Devil TAFC. Wendy Baker came out with her Time Warp AA/FC on Sunday – what's the betting they were both solo passes?



# Cacklin' fun - and facts



"A Cacklefest is like a barely controlled atomic bomb," said Greg Sharp, curator of the Wally Parks NHRA Motorsports Museum, the man who coined the term back in 2000, adding, "That exploding nitro cracks like a gunshot and shoots header flames into the night sky. It's a sight to behold and people love it..."

To car folks, Cacklefest is the sweetest sight and sound in the world as vintage dragsters fire up and "cackle" 10 gallons of nitromethane fuel in less than five minutes. The sound of that exploding nitro is music to the ears of thousands of fans. Quotes and text courtesy Bill Groak

What could possibly possess normally rational human beings to go on an endless quest to find a large hunk of 40 year old pipe and tin? What could justify spending thousands and thousands of dollars to restore or recreate a ghost from the past? What magical moment can bring grown men to tears and for awhile - a short while - erase decades of time and make an old dog feel like a young pup? Cacklefest, the word alone sparks excitement in the hearts of drag racing fans young and old.

Since it was first coined by Greg Sharp, this strange word has spread all over the world and spawned dozens of "spin off" events at race tracks big and small. Although you won't find it in any dictionary, Cacklefest has become one of the most alluring words in drag racing's vocabulary. Since its inception at the 2000 California Hot Rod Reunion, Cacklefest has grown from nine cars to over 100 entries in 2010. Thanks to Cacklefest, there are more functional Top Fuel dragsters today than at any time in the last 40 years. Courtesy [www.cacklefest.com](http://www.cacklefest.com)

"For me it's one of the highlights of the Reunion," said the NHRA Museum's Monique Valadez when asked her opinion of the Saturday night Cacklefest, "when they push start all those dragsters as they did back in the day, and then they fire 'em up and they start to cackle and flame, it's amazing. The ground shakes and the air fills with nitro," chuckling as she added, "well you know Michael, you were there last year." Yes indeed Monique, but this year it seems I'll be joining the world watching it on [www.bangshift.com](http://www.bangshift.com) and waving my AA Zippo in the air!

## Cacklin' at the Pod?



Courtesy [santapod.co.uk](http://santapod.co.uk)

A bunch of fine looking dragsters and alteredds maybe, but alcohol cars only rumble – it takes nitro to make a car cackle! Check out the video on YouTube and you'll hear the difference when the Time Warp AA/FC finally enters the track

Prior to putting this up I phoned the Santa Pod front office and a spokesperson agreed with me about the lack of cackle heard at the Saturday night display, and also to not being aware that alcohol cars do not cackle until some folks, including yours truly, complained. Apparently "nitro cars were invited (to cackle), but none came up." Understandable really as even a cackle is expensive, and you'd at least expect the offer of some nitro for them to cackle with. Then, perhaps, they'd have answered the call! The spokesperson also agreed that, along with the lack of cackle, the lack of visibility for spectators of the flame burnouts was "a bit of an issue which we will control next year." Glad to hear this, as the VIP suite hid the show from fans on banks and most of the "fortunate" spectators in the stands had their view blocked by a wall of photographers in front of the flame shows!

I even received an apology before being told that Santa Pod wants "as many funny cars as possible for next year's Dragstalgia," which was good to hear. In fact, despite those complaints (and the weather), most folks had a ball. We nitro geezers loved bench racing with old pals and the younger fans enjoyed the sight of such a classy bunch of nostalgic race cars.

Let's hope that next year the purse strings are not held quite so tight as, although we will never ever match the quantity of cars which join the annual Cacklefest at the CHRR, we can match the quality. All it needs is a handful of nitro cars to ignite a feeling of nirvana for us race fans



## Real Dragstalgia!



[www.cacklefest.com](http://www.cacklefest.com)

[www.time-travel-dvds.co.uk](http://www.time-travel-dvds.co.uk)

Sadly Sydney Allard never saw the track, but it was good to finally see his dragster at the Pod. As readers know, he got his inspiration from the Greek's ChiZler, and these shots show the similarity in the roll cages. And talking of the Greek...

In a life time of AA Fuel racing, octogenarian Chris Karamesines, the first man to exceed 200mph, who's also gone 310.63 and a 3.897 over the 1,000 foot, only ever had one sponsor, Strange Engineering, and then Lucas Oil stepped up following a recent round win on the NHRA Full Throttle tour. Way to go Greek, and kudos to Forrest Lucas and his racing family for giving one of the great drag racing legends some buck\$. The Greek's ride was re-painted by Kenny Youngblood in Lucas colours with the ChiZler logo

Having a replication of Nobby Hills' first Hounddog together with the original Allard and Commuter dragsters in the Hall of Fame tent was quite a treat



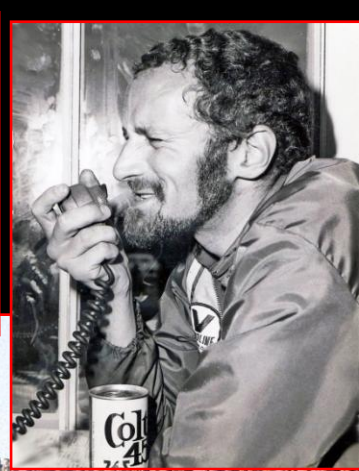
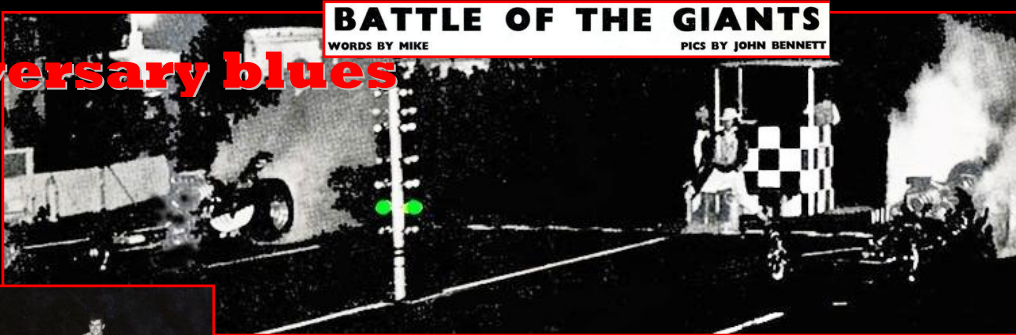
# Anniversary blues

Part two

## BATTLE OF THE GIANTS

WORDS BY MIKE

PICS BY JOHN BENNETT



That's yours truly over there, getting the fans hyped up over the PA as our two fuel cars rolled down the fire up road. Shortly later the ground shook and the night filled with the sounds of nitro thunder. Under the lights at Santa Pod, our first dual green light AA/FD race as Tudor Rose and Commuter smoked into the history books on August 17, 1968.

Santa Pod 1996 and Antony Billinton had returned Commuter to all its glory.



Photographer unknown Mike Collins' Asphalt Archives

I'm proud to have organised this 1968 gig for John Player that saw Tony Densham and Commuter thrilling Silverstone fans with their first taste of AA nitro power.

The Lord's been my co-pilot many times on the road, and I'm sure His hand guided me on July 16, 2011 as this image was at the very edge of what I was shooting! Antony Billinton recalls borrowing my crash helmet when I took the black and white shot of him as a very happy young child in August 1968.

How lucky can a guy get? The shots are close enough for rock an' roll, and G Max, who first supplied nitro for my Zippo in 1968, has extended their contract as my official nitro supplier for another decade!

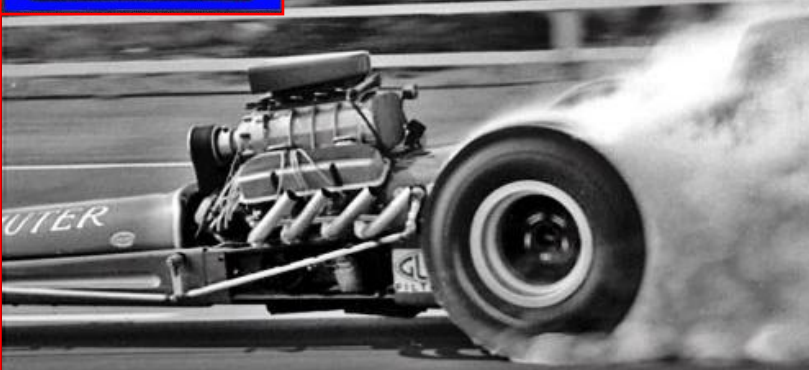


Antony B took over as Mr G Max from his dad Peter who founded the company in 1967, and was Commuter's original technical guru back in those halcyon days of yore.



For Tony Densham, a true drag racing pioneer who thrilled us all as he smoked his way to glory

Boilin' the hides! Commuter thunders to a best ever 8.22





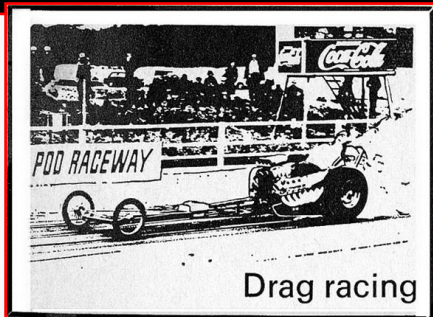
# Mag power - old and new

**Horsepower Unlimited!!!** As you can see in this scan of Rick Goodale's original artwork'd photo, that's what we called John Bennett's Drag Rod cover shot taken as Commuter actually set light to the tarmac on an out-of-shape 8.6, 176mph blast down the track early on Saturday August 17, 1968! That was all we had back in the day, 28 pages to keep drag race fans happy. Sure I was getting some space in other motoring journals like Autosport, (right) and even the national press, but basically Drag Rod was it.



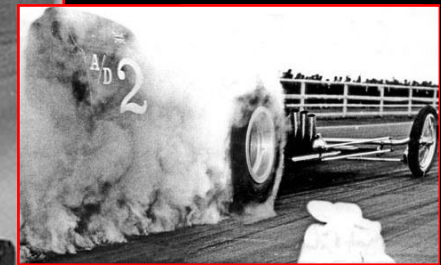
**DRAG RACING & HOT ROD MAGAZINE**

## HORSEPOWER UNLIMITED!!!



Drag racing

SATURDAY August 17's night drags saw the addition of the final ingredient required for the "Santa Pod Spectacular" cocktail, as Tudor Rose and Commuter blasted through the quarter leaving a 30-foot tall wall of tyre smoke that was so thick you couldn't see the other side of the strip.



Fast forward to 2011 and things have changed more than just dramatically. Our own news contains more pages that Drag Rod, all in full colour unless we choose not, but basically we do this for fun. Over in St Louis, the Drag Racing Online staff does it for real, and has a lot of fun doing it. And it's not just their amazing online edition as each month they publish an ol' fashioned glossy print Magazine that'd rock your socks off. Below are some mini images taken from the final part of the Harlan Thompson story which, thanks to technology and DRO's switched on staff is a true multimedia experience. Go to [www.dragracingonline.com](http://www.dragracingonline.com) and check it out, but be warned, it's a lengthy show and you'll need a beverage or two!

Multimedia - you betcha! Words and pix in the lead spread from the online edition tell of Harlan's last qualifying run of 1987, with the final caption offering, "Shot from the barn, Brad Beecham's film of this run is on the next page." And it is! The Budweiser years, as the piece is called covers Harlan's racing from his historic 1987 World Finals, through some amazing fuel coupe years to his final record setting Cannonball wins. However, the Budweiser Years go way beyond the drag strip. As I write these words, Harlan is in Seattle preparing his fund raising Armed Forces Funny car for the annual parade season, where burn outs have been de rigueur since it first appeared in 2007! He's seen at right making a back yard burnout during an engine check of the AAFC in 2010. So there y'go; it's an interesting feature which I believe you'll enjoy

Harlan was inducted into the BDR Hall of Fame earlier this year  
mc enhanced  
Ian Messenger photo



These boots were made for walking, and that's just what they do...  
See you soon **MC**

And talking of ground pounding nitro action - Sweden's Leif Hellander has finished his new Starkotter nitro funny car, so we might see some real side-by-side fuel coupe racing at the Pod's FIA Finals! Here's hoping...