DRAGWAY RETROSPECT

by Dewey Ketner

Pomona NHRA Meet Fires Up Season

As the warm Pacific breezes hit the California beaches of the greater Los Angeles area, heading east toward Pomona, so did the many hundreds of drag racing competitors who are anxious to start the 2013 year of the fastest, quickest and most powerful auto racing on wheels.

The exciting roar of 10,000 maximum-horsepower engines, the ground-shaking vibrations of huge racing slicks biting the asphalt, exhaust explosions whipping the air and pushing the air past your body and slapping you as it rushes by, and the sweet aroma of nitro fumes will soon be back to enliven racing fans' weekends for the next 10 months. Hallelujah, racers, I'm ready.

The National Hot Rod Association has 24 meets for the 2013 season that starts and ends in Pomona, Calif., with races usually every two weeks all across the United States. So click your belts, get a big cold Gatorade and get set for two dozen weekends that will keep you on the edge of your seat with heart racing and right foot stomping the carpet.

Each Sunday's competition was a blood rush. Imagine yourself buckled in the driver's seat, looking out the helmet at the next 1,000 feet you will travel, feeling the frame shake from even the idle speed of this monster engine, now the countdown on the lights and suddenly you are off the starting line with maximum horsepower hurling you toward the end of the strip, tripping the lights to record your run. Question: Did you even breathe on the less-than-four-second run? Okay, the bare bones feeling of massive acceleration will be with you for some time. Now you can relax, inhale the sweet smell and taste of that 90 percent nitro fuel charge. Okay, race number one is in the record books. What's left is a feeling of "been there – done that." And maybe some broken pieces of engine, blower or whatever.

Cobo Hall will host the 2013 Detroit Autorama March 8-10. If you have never attended this premium collection of exciting vehicles, put it on your bucket list. If you have, go again, meet the car owners/builders, get acquainted and express your thanks for all their great work and competitive spirit. Many hundreds of hours in planning and construction go into their creative accomplishments. Most owners are willing to talk to you about their cars. Car people are the best!

Two years ago, E.J. Potter's Bloody Mary #2 Chevy-powered Harley was there, built in the early 1960s, and now owned by Clyde Hensley of Plymouth, Mich. On the sheet metal on the left side, I read, "Jackson Hot Rod Shop." I met E.J. in 1958-59 at Ubly Drag Way near Stanton, Mich. He was just 16 years old and this was his maiden run. He only went 77 mph. We got his car under a shade tree and waved our magic wrenches and got him up to 111. E.J. at the time might have weighed 115 pounds.

Very soon, he showed up at my Jackson Hot Rod Shop and asked if I would build him an engine. Two engines later, he was covering the U.S., England, and other parts of the world, thrilling and scaring the daylights out of promoters and spectators alike. He (in his words) fell off at 127 mph at Onondaga. If you can put your hands on his book, "The Michigan Madman," on page 38 you can see the slight damage to the bike in the box of my 1955 Ford pickup.

When I had Art Afrons at Onondaga, I introduced E.J. to Art and that changed Potter, giving him a permanent taste for speed. With Art's mentoring, E.J. went to an Allison V12 Aircraft engine in a Dodge Dart, entering through the tailgate to drive.

Then he went to pull trucks with multiple V12 engines. E.J. was not one for a painted pretty machine. His Ugly 1 and Ugly 2 outpulled the best on the West Coast two years in a row, causing the promoters to ban him from competition.

His mechanical ability was wild but exciting. I will be writing about his early days soon. It makes for good reading and explains his need for speed.

The 2013 Hot Rod 65th Anniversary Car Show is a one-of-a-kind car show –the best of the best. A one-time gathering of historic magazine-featured cars. Celebrating 65 years of *Hot Rod Magazine*, the event is set to showcase more than 800 cover cars and 2,000-plus featured cars. This is an open invitation to whoever owns one of the featured cars for a free inside spot for this great accumulation of wonderful history of hot rodding.

I had the honor of helping to build a 1932 Ford 5 Window Coupe for the 1955 Pan Pacific Car Show at Los Angeles, which was featured in *Hot Rod* of April 1956. I caught George Barris taking pictures of it. It was stripped by Von Dutch at the show.

That car has nearly been completed by my friend and owner, Ben Gutierrez, in Adrian, who is doing the frame-off restoration. It is considered one of the 10 best coupes anywhere, and no, it does not sport a '32 Ford grille. This is a unique car, hand-tooled leather, hard roof, etc.

Would like to have it return to California for this show but don't think it will be finished in time. Darn!

The date for this show is March 23 & 24 at Pomona, Calif. at the Fairplex.

Drag Racing Returns to ESPN2 Cable Schedule

The NHRA Lucas Oil Drag Racing Series will again be televised in 16 one-hour shows on ESPN2 and ESPN2HD beginning on Saturday, March 2, with coverage from select NHRA Lucas Oil Drag Racing Series national events.

The popular NHRA Sportsman Spotlights, focusing on NHRA's Member Track network, will be showcased as part of the race-coverage telecasts.

The NHRA Lucas Oil Drag Racing Series coverage will air on ESPN2 and ESPN2HD on a tape-delay basis as part of NHRA's relationship with ESPN, in its second decade as the exclusive home of NHRA Drag Racing.

All 16 telecasts will air on Saturday or Sunday. The NHRA Lucas Oil Drag Racing Series has a long-standing tradition of serving as a highly competitive developmental arena for the future stars of the NHRA Mello Yello Drag Racing Series.

The popular NHRA Sportsman Spotlight segments will continue in 2013. The segments will showcase unique and interesting stories from NHRA Member Tracks in each of the sanctioning body's seven divisions as well as focus on the different racing programs available for the weekly NHRA enthusiast.

The first ESPN2 broadcast is the O'Reilly Auto Parts NHRA Winternationals in Pomona, Calif. The race will be shown on Saturday, March 2, 8-9 a.m.

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