

Does this Aero package make my butt look fat?

The ravings of a first timer at Bonneville

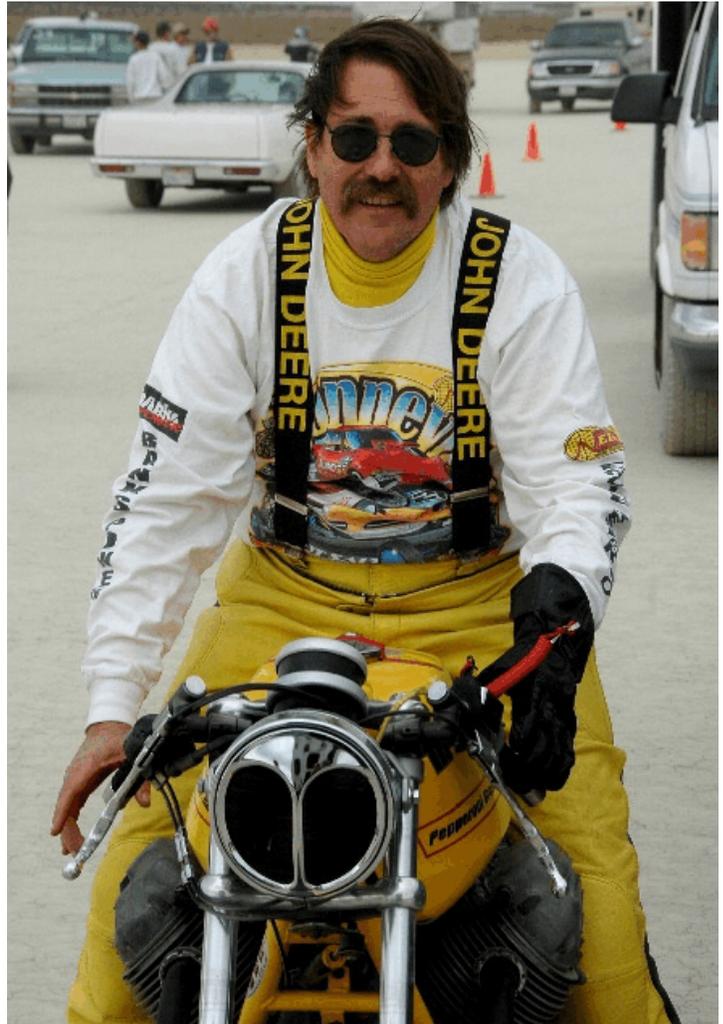
By Ted Liberatore

As I hastened out the door to my truck, I tried to remember if I had forgotten anything. My bag was loaded with all my race gear, I had my plane tickets, my rental information; yep, I was ready to go. On my way to the airport, I had a chance to ponder the events that led me to this impending adventure. About three months ago, I got a call from my brother Tom out in California. He told me that he was planning on going to Bonneville speed weeks this year to make another attempt at breaking the world land speed record in the 750cc modified-pushrod motorcycle class, and wanted to know if I was interested in going. Now, before I get into this too deeply, let me give you a brief background on my brother and myself.

Tom is not a stranger to the Bonneville Salt Flats; he had been a spectator and a crew member on other teams for a number of years before building his own Bonneville assault racer some years ago. He owns one world land speed record in the stock 750 class and two AMA (American Motorcycle Association) records, one in stock production and one in modified production. Tom was a one man show when he campaigned his motorcycle in the stock class, looking for people to drive his chase truck at events and to help load the bike after runs. This is a bit unusual but, you have to know Tom, when he wants to do something, he does it. Myself, I was busy practicing my road racing skills on road courses throughout the East coast riding a 748 Ducati motorcycle until I was forced to retire due to my early exit from the clutches of Corporate America. Tom had expressed an interest in modifying his 1973 750cc Moto Guzzi Lemans so he could compete for the world land speed record in modified production that presently stands at 137.218 MPH and was set in 2003 by a Harley Davidson XR750 (this bike has since been ruled illegal, but the record still stands). I decided that since I was not racing myself, that I would help Tom achieve his goal. The two of us formed **Pepperoni Bros. Racing**, which was Tom's idea and he will tell you that the name just popped into his head one day. However, people who know him will tell you it came from his love of pepperoni. You can believe that because I am his pepperoni dealer and only Margerita pepperoni will do and that can only be obtained on the east coast so, guess who gets to supply it?

The modifications to the 750 Moto Guzzi would take another book to describe but what I can tell you is that my brother Tom and Mike Rich of Mike Rich Motorsports in Pennsylvania designed and built a very exotic and powerful motor for this record assault. I helped with the financial part a little but the real magic to the bike was the extreme precision that was put into the motor and that was all Mike and Tom.

We had planned to try an assault on the record last year at the world finals in October. I had had my bags packed and was ready to go when they had to cancel the meet due to poor salt conditions. Now it is August 2006 and we are ready to try again. This time, we have added an aerodynamic front fender and rear tail section to help make the bike as slippery as possible. We have also added my name to the riders list. If



Tom cannot get the bike to the record this time, it may need a smaller rider and that rider would be me. Now, we can forward to real time.

I arrived at the airport the day after the news of the terrorist plot to blow up flights using liquids was reported. As I suspected, the airport resembled a border crossing at the Ukraine. After being poked and prodded for about 30 min. I was through security and walking towards the gate. After I boarded my flight, I started to think about the major thrashing it took to make it to this point.

When we were going to go for the record last year, I was also going to pilot the bike and I had packed my AMA road racing suit and was ready to go but little did I know that if the meet had not been canceled, I would not have been allowed to run. It was actually a blessing that the rains came and wash out the event. A couple weeks before I was to leave for Bonneville, my 2006 SCTA membership packet arrived which included my membership pin which gets me into the event and my 2006 rulebook. I sat down and read the rules for my class and was stunned when I read the rules pertaining to the riders outfit. The rules stated that any leather riding suit cannot have cloth panels. I called Tom in California and he confirmed this. He told me that it was a safety issue due to the risk of fire. My Dainese road racing suit has panels that are fire retardant and more armor in it than Sir Lancelot could use and if the AMA says it's good enough for a 200 MPH get off, why wouldn't it be good for a straight line shot down the salt flats? Well, I wasn't going to travel 2000 miles to argue my point and lose, I had one other option. I could use my street leather jacket and leather pants if I installed a 350 degree zipper so that the pants and jacket can become one. I contacted Lois Smay of Webster, NY www.embroiderybylois.com. She does all the leather alterations for Harv's Harley Davidson and she is very good. She was able to install the zipper and even mounted it to spandex so it would move with you.

My flight got into Salt Lake City at midnight and after picking up the rental car, I still had a two hour drive to Wendover UT. I'm driving down route 80 in the middle of the night and, not having been there before, I could not see the terrain that was blanketed by the darkness. Now, everybody that has ever driven in New York state knows that several things can run out into your path at any given time, deer, possum, raccoons, squirrels, you name it, if it lives in NYS it's roadkill. As I drove thru the night, I wondered what type of being would wander out into my path along this deserted stretch of highway. What was that? Look at the ears on that thing! It must be a Jackalope.

Tom picked me up at the hotel on Saturday morning and we made the short drive to the Salt flats from Wendover. Tom had already gotten our pit box on Friday when he arrived so we just had to load the bike and head for registration and tech inspection. The SCTA runs a very good event, everyone is knowledgeable and everyone has their job to do. However, it did seem like we would have to stand in one line, then another, then back to the first line, then into another line, then back to the second line again. We did manage to get most of the paperwork done but had to return with signed this and that at a later time.

Now it was onto tech inspection, here the bike would get scrutinized, to make sure that it complies with all the necessary safety and competition requirements to run on the salt. We also had to present all our riding gear to the tech inspector for review. The Bike passed without incident and Tom got thru with his equipment. My Helmet, boots and gloves passed with no problem but, the inspector had a problem with my leathers. He looked at the zipper on the jacket that attached to the pants and said, "I have a problem with this. I don't know if I like the idea of spandex on the zipper," he said, "If you fall, it might tear and pull apart." I told him that the zipper was well up inside the jacket and it fit tight enough to keep the jacket from riding up. He called over the head tech inspector and showed him the leathers. "Boy, I don't like that" he said. My enthusiasm started to plummet, after all I had gone thru to get here, I was going to be sidelined by a technicality. I tried to be diplomatic about it saying "according to the rule book, the leathers had to be joined with a 350 degree zipper, it did not specify how the zipper was suppose to be attached and with what specifically." The head inspector had been down this road before, so he sympathized with me. "Look, we are only concerned about your safety," he said, "We just want to make sure that if anything happens to you, you're protected." I understood what he was saying but I had faith in Lois's work. I appealed one last time. "How about this: What if I put the leathers on and you can see how tight they are and try to pull them apart?" The tech inspectors were agreeable to that so I put on the leathers and zipped them to the jacket. The first inspector was quite surprised at how tightly the jacket joined the pants and said, "Gee, they're not as

bad as I thought,” the head inspector said, “This is the real test.” With that he put both hands under the back of the jacket and yanked straight up as hard as he could, almost lifting me off the ground. The zipper didn’t budge, but I did receive a very memorable “leather wedgie.” The head inspector passed my leathers and now I was cleared for competition. The SCTA is all about safety (as perverted as it gets sometimes) and I would find out later just how much this meet was based on it.

With Tech inspection and all the paperwork we had to fill out, it burnt up most of the day so, we moved the bike into pre-stage later in the afternoon to await our first run. This would be the beginning of some very long waits in line on a daily basis due to some 500 competitors entered in this years speed weeks. The wait gave me a chance to survey the salt flats for the first time. When you arrive early in the morning, the sun is very low and casts long shadows from all the vehicles that are lined up which makes it very comfortable if you are there at 7:00 in the morning. Without all the cars, support vehicles, outhouses, and vendor tents, the salt flats are completely barren. When it gets to be 10:00AM, the sun reflects off the pure white salt with such intensity that sun screen, really good sunglasses, and the biggest hat you can find are mandatory articles if you wish to survive one day. I bought myself this funky French Foreign Legion hat that made me look like a dufus (not that I needed any help) but, by the end of the week, I was glad I had it. The salt itself is very smooth and damp to the touch, and it gets kicked up on anything that drives by. If you get any on your vehicle, and it dries in the sun, it becomes rock hard and has to be washed off with a special solvent. I noticed most of the really fast runs were mid day when the salt was the driest.

We waited in line for about 3.5 hrs before they closed the staging lanes for the day. You are allowed to leave your vehicle in line over night so that you don’t lose your place and that is what we decided to do. We were kind of hoping that we didn’t have to run the first day because after all the registration lines, and tech inspections, riders meeting, crew meetings, and opening ceremonies—all in the hot sun—we were just plan beat. We were ready to go back to the hotel.

We stayed in Wendover at the Nugget Hotel and casino which was one of about six casinos in Wendover. During the week, this is just a sleepy little western town where not much goes on until the weekend. That’s when a bunch of drunken cowboys (or speed freaks, in this case) converge on the town and it becomes a small city. There were people all over the place, and there was a Rat Rod show just about every night at out hotel. One of the most interesting things I noticed about the people that are here for speed weeks, is that there aren’t any squids (young adolescents that think they can go fast). It’s mostly made up of mature adults with degrees in engineering, aerodynamics, computerized fuel systems, and people with just plan lots of money!

The next morning, we got into the staging lanes a little after 7:00AM and it looked as though we would be making our first run soon. For the first time, I started getting pumped about what was going on. You are allowed to warm up your engine in the staging lanes but a driver or a rider had to be on board while the vehicle was running but it could not be put into gear until it was at the starting line. We warmed up the bike and it sounded great, you could tell that Mike and Tom had poured their heart and soul in that motor just by the sound of it. Other competitors were warming their cars up also and the sound was sometimes deafening. The sound of a full blown big block all aluminum motor just feet away was ground shaking! The noise was nothing but pure horsepower up close and personal, the smell of exotic fuels filled the air. This is what I came out here for—Sound, Salt, & Speed—all in one place. This would be the first run for the bike since the new aero package was installed and we were quite optimistic that it would have a very positive effect on the bikes performance. I was a little concerned however about how the bike would handle with the front wheel almost half covered. A sudden cross wind may catch the rider by surprise and push the bike laterally. We would find out soon enough. I was to drive the chase truck on this run, and would leave for the chase road that paralleled the course as soon as Tom launched from the start line. The chase truck must remain on the chase road at 55 mph until it catches up with the rider after he has pulled completely off the course and is waiting on the return road. The truck must have a working CB radio so that the tower can communicate with the chase truck in case of an emergency. The course itself is a five-mile straight shot. You are accelerating up to Mile Two and then you are officially timed thru Mile Three. You are also able to get your speeds as they are called out thru the one-mile, two-and-a-quarter-mile, and three mile sections of the course. You also get a print out of these times from the timing shack on the return road.

I rolled the bike to the starting line and Tom got into his leathers; it would all be over in less than five minutes. Tom fired up the bike, attached his deadman switch to his glove and got last minute instructions from the starter. I sat in the truck waiting to leave, adrenalin had me revved up as tight as the bike, “Had we remembered everything? How will it handle? Is there something we forgot? Would it run 139 out of the box? I just prayed that Tom would have a safe run and I would find him waiting on the return road when I pulled up. The starter gave Tom the signal to leave, he dropped it into gear and took off.

I heard him miss the first shift as I pulled the truck toward the chase road but I would miss many more before this meet was over. The motor sounded strong as he pulled away and into the white vastness of the salt. I was on the return road and Tom was out of sight, all I could do was try to keep the truck below 55 mph (they yell at you when you get too anxious) and listen to the radio as officials were watching the whole run from several vantage points. The first mile speed came over the radio, 125.695, something was wrong, he should be faster? Then came mile 2 1/4 129.478, OK, it’s picking up—that’s promising—and finally the mile 3 time, 129.215, it slowed down, why? I knew Tom wasn’t



going to be too happy about these times when he heard them but this is what it’s all about out here; you have to dig and scratch for every bit of speed you get and this was just the start. I could see Tom way in the distance parked on the return road and as I got closer I could see he already had his helmet and jacket off and was walking eagerly towards the road to hear what I had to say (there is no speedometer on the bike so the rider has no idea how fast he is really going). I pulled up to my brother who, at that point, had the expression of a hound dog looking thru a butcher shop window. I yelled out “129.478!” The expression quickly turned to what I can only describe as one of the characters from the Jim Carey movie “The Mask” (ahahahahahoooooga!). “Are you sure?” he asked, “I had that bike flat out I think.” You see, Tom quickly found out that the tachometer was having a severe nervous breakdown and he wasn’t sure what he was actually revving.

We started loading up to head back and I was quite taken when I took a moment and looked around. It was just the two of us, out in the middle of the salt, with no one else around. Away from all the noise, tents, people, everything, I suddenly realized how big and vast this place really is. It was actually quite peaceful and really scenic. I know you can get into some serious trouble if you get caught out here without the right equipment but it gave me a glimpse of just how beautiful this country is.

We were just about ready to head back when the chase truck belonging to “Bud” (a fellow that was pitted right behind us in line that we got to know while waiting) pulled up. Bud’s crew chief (whose name I can’t remember) said that his CB was out and Bud had gone down on the course and he couldn’t find him. We radioed the tower asking for Bud’s location and they replied he was at the timing shack. This was good news because this meant he was able to get there on his own. Bud had been a Bonneville competitor for a number of years on different types of motorcycles and used to campaign a twin-engined Harley Davidson back several years ago. Now Bud is 82 years old and was riding a highly modified 200 hp turbo charged Harley Davidson V-rod. Needless to say, Bud isn’t scared of too much and we just hoped he was OK.

We headed back and got into line again, then sat down with all the data and the timing slip and discussed what we might do on this next run to improve. We knew the tach wasn't working properly but there wasn't a whole lot we could do about that, out on the salt. The tach was an electronic LCD unit and one of the first things we thought was that the sun might be affecting the tach because of its intensity. A plug check revealed that the bike might be running too rich so we changed the jets in the carburetors to see if that would help. Our timing slips would tell us all kinds of information such as temp, wind speed, direction, specific gravity, and density altitude (of which I not even heard, before I came to Bonneville). The Density altitude was around 7700 ft so we knew we were losing horsepower (I believe the nominal altitude at the salt flats is 4280 feet above sea level). Tom had set the bike up on the Dyno in Talmage, California, where the altitude is 600 ft above sea level, so you can see that we were at a disadvantage. We had made our first run at around 8:30 in the morning, and we were back in line waiting for a second run but judging by the number of competitors it was going to be a long wait.

We got to make our second run at about 2:30 in the afternoon and by then it was plenty hot with no shade to be found anywhere. Tom made his run down the course and I followed in the chase truck listening to the radio as I went. The First mile came over the CB, 126.424, then mile 2 1/4, 127.670, finally mile 3, 128.259. As I drove towards my brother, I was at a loss as to what was wrong but Tom would have some idea as he had been doing this for a while and I was the newbie. I told Tom the news, he shook his head and recommended that we load up the bike and head back to the pits to go over the data with Mike to see what the problem might be. Once we were back in our pit, we poured over everything we had, The tach was of no help at all, and Tom said he thought that the bike felt maxed out and without the tach, we had to rely on our ears. Maxing out at only 129 mph just didn't seem right since the bike had gone 131 without the aero package.

Mike was being contracted as a consultant for another team, which was very well funded, and that team's bike was able to download computer data for analysis. Mike had said that the other team's bike was experiencing wheel spin from the data he had downloaded and was wondering if this was the problem with our bike. Tom had been offered the opportunity by a friend to have the tires shaved to increase the speed rating and supposedly give them better rolling resistance, so because it was free, he had it done. Tom is not a small person and when we thought about how much beef was hanging off the bike, we decided that wheel spin was not our problem. However, Mike's interest was peaked by the tire shaving scenario. Just how much of the tire was shaved he thought? We measured the tire diameter and found that he had lost 1/2 inch off the back tire. Mike and Tom did some calculations (I always wondered when physics class would ever come into play; now I know) and discovered that with the smaller diameter rear tire caused his rear gear ratio to drop to the point that the bike WAS actually maxed out at 129 mph. The remedy would be that we would have to get a taller rear tire in order to bring the gear ratio back up to where it should be. There are many advantages to having a motorcycle with a shaft drive but, unfortunately changing gear ratios is not one of them. Our plan was to remove the rear tire and head for Salt Lake City (two hours away) in the morning, to try to find a rear tire that would work. There wouldn't be much sense in running the bike until we had gotten this problem fixed so we decided to go for it.

We got up early on Monday, and removed the rear wheel from the bike and threw it in the back of my rental car and headed off to Salt Lake. Thanks to a very helpful night manager at the hotel, we were able to obtain a list of motorcycle shops in the city complete with phone numbers. We started calling these shops while we were on the road to find out which one might have a special V rated tire that would be the correct size for the bike. We found a couple and got directions to the shops via our cell phone. The first shop we hit was Plaza cycle in Salt Lake. This was one of the biggest motorcycle shops I have ever been in but, coming from a small town in NY, I suppose there is a lot I haven't seen. Plaza cycle was helpful but, didn't have the tire we needed so off we went to the next shop. WRIGHT'S Motorcycle parts and Accessories (www.wrightsmotorcycleparts.com) ended up being our saving grace. It had the tire we needed, gave us all kinds of support, mounting and balancing the tire and wheel for us and had us on our way back by 3:00 pm. I'm totally overwhelmed with the helpfulness of strangers when we are so far away from home. It's a good feeling knowing people like that are out there. We got back right at 5:00 and worked to get the bike back

together so that we could put it in line for a run on Tuesday. With that done, we headed back to the hotel to await the next morning so we could see if all that running around was worth it.

It's now Tuesday morning about 8:30 and we are already in the staging lane. We thought we would get to run very soon but the wind was gusting across the salt at about 18 mph so that might cause a concern. It did; the officials put the meet on hold due to the gusting winds. As I had said before, the SCTA is all about safety, and if anything poses a threat to the competitors' safety natural, or mechanical, it will hold the event until the issue is rectified. We finally got to make the first run of the day at around noon and Tom did not have a good launch, the transmission was not cooperating and would be a thorn in our side throughout the meet. Tom made a pass at 129.766 which was a little disappointing because of course, we were expecting a lot more with the taller tire but, speed racing is all about baby steps, one mile per hour at a time. We at least were accelerating and getting faster so it was on to looking at other things that might help. We got back in line for the second run and it was a struggle to stay hydrated. The sun was high enough that it had taken all the shade and the only relief was lots of water and keeping my funky hat on. Tom had me beat in the funk department though, his trademark blue "Billy Jack" hat could be seen for miles so it wasn't hard to find Tom if I needed him.

I was trying to find a way to crawl under the truck for shade when I looked up to see a familiar site coming towards me; it was Bud, the rider that had crashed on the V-rod a couple days earlier. He was looking pretty healthy for an 82 year old guy that just survived a 160 mph get off. "Bud!" I yelled, "Man, I'm glad to see you; are you OK?" "Yeah, I'm fine," he said, "I've had worse." (I suppose being 82 years old and riding motorcycles all your life, I'll bet he has had worse). "What happened?" I asked. "Well, when I got it up to around 160 mph, I started to get a high speed wobble. I tried to bring it back but I couldn't so I let it go." (This was my first indication that the \$60,000+ motorcycle he was riding didn't belong to him.) "The next thing I know, I'm sliding down the salt on my stomach and when I looked up, I saw the motorcycle sliding in front of me. I remember thinking to myself, 'I hope that bike doesn't dig in and start flipping, because I'll probably catch up to it if it does.'" This grisly old coot was a riot to listen to. "They said I slid thru the lights at 140 mph," he chuckled. "So, you must have gotten the record then?" I asked. "Record for what?" he responded. "For 'Vintage modified,' I said. Bud would be back, I was sure of it.

We got to make the second run about 4:00 in the afternoon and this one showed some promise. Tom left the line in good shape, accelerated smoothly and was out of site as I watched from the chase truck. 131.466 through the lights and still accelerating. At least we know we are moving forward. We took the bike back to the pits to change the jets back to the original setup we had and moved the timing up a touch. It was a struggle in the heat, we drank as much as we could but the water just wasn't doing it. We got off the salt around 8:00pm and the two of us were really beat. The sun had baked the crap out of us so, we stopped and bought more water and this time gatorade to help keep us going tomorrow. After a shower and some food we were out.

We arrive at the salt at 7:00 and get into final stage at 8:25; it's cool right now, but we have a long line ahead of us so we may not get to the line before 11:00. By then it's going to be hot. Tom has decided that he will make one more run with the bike; if he can't get close to the record on this run, he will turn the bike over to me so that I may try. I really hope he can pull the trigger and get the record on this next run because, this is his deal. As much as I look forward to getting out there and pushing the envelope, hoping my smaller frame will give us the advantage we need, I would really like to see Tom get this because of all the work he has put into this effort. I have already experienced victory by just being a part of this, now it's his turn.

The wind is starting to come up and this is a concern, not enough to stop the meet but enough to affect your top speed thru the Timing lights. It is now 11:30 and Tom gets suited up as we near the starting line, we have come up with a procedure to beat the heat. Whoever is riding will get into his leathers and stay in the truck until we are at the starting line, with the air conditioning on, while the crew chief moves the bike and gets it warmed up. This works out well because standing in the hot sun in black leathers can cook you in about five minutes. Tom is at the line and the conditions are not great, a head wind, and a rise in the density altitude. Tom leaves the line and accelerates out of sight. I listen for the time on the CB as I drive down the chase road, 130.433.

I wasn't all that excited when I pulled up to my brother waiting out on the lonely salt. I wanted to ride the bike but only after HE had broken the record. When I gave him the news, he shrugged and said, "That's all I can do with it; now, it's your turn." I was just hoping I wouldn't let him down.

We got back in line and I started to get my briefing for my rookie run. This run is so that the officials can see that you can run the bike at speed safely, and then you can get your competition license to make a record attempt. We are sitting in line baking in the heat, when I started to hear bells, they were playing a tune, (OK, now I'm losing it, time for more gatorade). I turned around just as a cheer went up from the competitors around me, to see a Good Humor Truck pulling up. ON the Salt Flats? I'm not one to pay \$4.00 for an ice cream bar but, considering the circumstances, I gladly pulled out my wallet. I wondered how he kept them so cold in all this intense heat. Can you say, "Dry ice?" It did help ease the heat a little. I guess you may have guessed by now that we do a lot of "waiting" during speed weeks. It's very typical that you spend about 3.5 to 4 hours under normal conditions between making runs. Everybody is in the same situation so we were able to strike up several conversations with our competitors. I probably should change that word "competitors" because unlike other sporting events that I have been involved in, there isn't any competitive rivalry. Everybody is trying to beat the clock, not each other so it is more like a family atmosphere than a competitive one. If you need help, there is always someone that will lend a hand and recommendations on how to go faster are unlimited.

The staged in front of us this time were Kathy & Van Butler. You may know of her from a discovery channel special they did on her about a year ago. She and her husband own several world speed records with a 50cc Aprilla motorcycle. They are very nice people and will to share information on how to go fast as they have been at it for a while. Van builds race motors and Kathy (who probably weighs 80 lbs soaking wet) rides the bikes. This year they are fielding a 100 cc Aprilla to see how they do. Compared to us, they are a high dollar operation, with a big van to haul everything, computer downloading capabilities, a complete weather station on-board, these people are into land speed racing seriously. We were sure glad they were staged in front of us and put that big van to good use as a shade, instead of baking in the sun. We got within seven cars of the start line, it was about 2:30 and we unloaded the bike. We decided not to make any changes to it for this run so we could see if size did matter (no pun intended). I got into my leathers and Tom warmed up the bike as I sat in the truck. This is it, I'm really starting to buzz now but, I'm still strangely focused on what I have to do. My body feels like you could bounce bullets off of it but, I check my pulse and I'm still very calm. Have all these years of competition in other forms of sport finally taught me something? If I pass this test I will be allowed to try for the record so, let's get this out of the way. I'm ready to leave the truck when the wind starts gusting to over 25 mph. The SCTA, you guessed it, holds the meet for safety reasons. Fine by me, I didn't need any other variables affecting my rookie run.

We waited all afternoon; I finally took my leathers off because it got too hot. As I had said earlier, you get to meet all different kinds of people out here and get to talking about just about anything. However, the next conversation we were about to have came totally out of the twilight zone. Tom had discovered by opening the truck's hood, he could create a pretty decent shade so Tom and I were hanging out under our new found shelter and Kathy came over to join us to discuss some tachometer issues.

Our bike was pretty popular as people would stop by all day and ask about it, and take pictures of it, so when this somewhat normal looking fellow approached us, we just thought he was another fan looking to take a picture of the bike. He asked the normal questions: "How fast have you gone? How big is it? Where are you from?" These were simple enough questions but, when Tom tells him where he's from, the guy starts into this rant about how America doesn't have enough natural resources and it's all the government's fault, and he doesn't know what to do with his 5 wives. Oh, it gets better, believe me! At this point, he's talking to my brother and Kathy and I are exchanging smirks because we both think he's nuts. He tells Tom he's from San Francisco but he's not gay. What he really wants to do is, buy a Russian tank (that recently went on sale) and move to Nebraska and shoot elk! Kathy says, "I think there are laws against that." "Laws! What do I care about laws when I own a Russian tank!" he bellows. "(jeeze Kathy, don't make him mad!)" I'm thinking. With that, Kathy excuses herself saying she has to check the density altitude again. As she walks pass I whisper "Coward." If you know my brother, he will listen to anyone, I don't think he has a rude bone in his body. He just stands there and nods. Myself, I don't like to be rude, but this guys crazy so I

retreat back into the cab of the truck while Tom patiently listens to this guy go on and on about God only knows what.

After about 15 minutes, I take pity on my brother and decide maybe I can create a diversion and he'll go away. Of course, he has a captive audience because of the wind delay. I get out and break into the conversation against my better judgment. He's talking to me now, and it was like I just got in from out of town, he's now telling me he's from Massachusetts and he hates everyone from Boston. He tells me he is a drug and alcohol councilor but he would really like to be employed by the government to shoot crack dealers. Finally, a group of people came up and start asking about the bike so he gets bored and moves to the next team in line (but I notice that they must have been watching us because nobody would talk to him). I found my brother over at the Butlers van and said, "That guy had to have escaped from somewhere," and as luck would have it, later on, a pickup truck pulled up into staging with a very large animal cage in the back. I pointed to it and yelled to Tom, "There, Ya see!"

At 5:30, they canceled competition for the day due to high winds. We were to leave the bike in stage for the night and return to start 6th in the morning if the wind died down. We went back to the hotel after spending 11 hrs on the salt and basically not accomplishing very much. I would have a chance to think about what I had to do the next day, and if I would have a chance at the record. The weather report didn't sound too promising but it was now or never, tomorrow was Thursday and my plane would leave that night so I had one day and that was it.

When I awoke on Thursday, I went to the hotel window expecting to see the giant American flag to be completely horizontal but, to my surprise it was draped quietly against its post. It was dead calm out; this was a good thing. I put my leathers on at the hotel because it would be cool in the morning and it wouldn't be long of a wait before I got to run. This was it, this was my day, I would finally get to experience what it feels like to push it as far as it would go and not have to worry about hitting anything. As we drove to the salt that morning, I did have a concern about my first time on the bike. I have ridden lots of motorcycles, some of them at extremely high speeds but I did so only after I had ridden them for awhile and gotten to know the bike's characteristics. This was going to be different; I had no actual riding time on the bike itself. I had sat on it to make sure I could reach all the controls and got used to the motor but SCTA rules prohibit the powered operation of a race vehicle unless it has left the starting line on an official run.

My first concern was the transmission, our race bike had a Grand Prix shift pattern (which is the total opposite of a std street bike) so I would have to think about making a shift the right way other than just doing it automatically. I had some experience with GP shifting last year when a good friend loaned me his Ducati race bike to get some laps in at a racetrack up in Canada, and I found it a struggle to have to take my mind off of riding the bike to pay attention to shifting. I thought this may be different because I wouldn't have to pay attention to things like retaining walls, corners, other riders, etc. The next concern was the clutch. The race bike had a competition ram clutch. We all know that every clutch acts a little different so I wondered how much grab it would have. These were all things that I could do nothing about so I addressed these concerns, noted them in my head, and then put it in God's hands. I had become old enough (or maybe mature enough) now that worrying about things I have no control over really makes no sense and I have faith in my brother's ability to set up a bike correctly.

Now, it's show time! I make it to the start line and receive my instructions from the starter. I can't say enough about the SCTA officials, they are friendly, informative, and their first priority is safety. I fire up the bike, drop my face shield, put the bike into gear (remembering to pull "up" on the shifter), and stare at the outstretched hand of the starter holding me at the line. The starter listens to his radio until he hears that the previous competitor has cleared the course, gives me a thumbs up, I nod, and he points down the course, I'm off!

I accelerate away from the start conservatively and shift to second gear, got it, now roll on the throttle and go for third, missed it! Damn it! I pull in the clutch and hit it again, now it catches, I continue accelerating and go for fourth, missed again! Thank goodness this is only a rookie run and I'm not shifting the bike at redline (of course if the tach was working, we would know where redline was) so I get it back into gear and run it up again and hit fifth which I get. Now that I'm in top gear I can roll on the throttle but, because this is a rookie run, I'm only at 3/4 throttle (the truth is, because I'm an idiot I didn't wrap my

throttle hand around the grip far enough so that I couldn't pin the throttle). I had already gone by mile marker one and I had myself slammed onto the tank trying to get out of the wind as much as possible. The trick is, once you're in high gear, there isn't much else to do except, get as low on the bike as possible to cut down the wind resistance, and watch the tach (which wasn't working) to see if you gain anymore RPM during your run. Here is where my expectations about what it would be like, got a lesson in reality. I had thought that I would be accelerating so violently that it would be hard to focus on the gauges and that things would be vibrating so badly that it would be a handful just to hang onto the bike. Once I left the starting line, things started to sort of "quiet down." The motor was revving as it should but it wasn't as loud, the salt itself was incredibly smooth, even better than tarmac. Once you are away from the crowd at the start line, the normal sounds that you usually hear do not have anything to "bounce" back from and it becomes peacefully quiet. Because you are out there all by yourself, with nothing around you, there is nothing for you to gauge your speed by.

When you are running the Tri-Oval at Pocono, you are very aware of the retaining wall that is very close to you. The key is not to look at it, focus on the other riders (that are going as fast as you). At Bonneville, unless you have a speedometer, you really don't know how fast you're going, except when you pick your helmet up off the tank and the wind catches it and tries to drive it thru your colon. The only thing that you can focus on are the little mile markers that are on the salt (which is the only other thing out there besides you.) And the thin black line that is painted on the salt on both sides of the course. Because of the curvature of the earth, you can only see one mile marker at a time, so you focus on the first one, when that passes, you will be able to see the second and so forth. I fly thru mile two and see the third marker in the distance. I'm getting comfortable on the bike now as all my expectations had been proven false so, I work on moving myself around the bike trying to find a tighter position. I make it thru mile three and start to roll off the throttle. Not knowing how the bike would react on the salt, I was going to let it slow down thru mile three before I attempted to turn it off the course. The clip-on bars were positioned very close to the tank for aerodynamic reasons so the turning radius was almost nothing. This made turning a little touchy at times, but you got used to it. I turned off the course and headed for the return road, I hit the kill switch and pulled in the clutch, when I did that everything went silent, all I could hear was the crunching of the salt under the tires. I rolled to a stop at the edge of the return road and got off the bike to wait for Tom. I took off my helmet and looked around me, what an incredible sight, just me, the motorcycle, and miles and miles of pure white salt. Nowhere else on earth could you see something like this and I've had a chance to experience it. I could see Tom coming in the distance and I knew he had been listening to the CB to get my time. I wondered how bad all those screw ups at the start would hurt me but, Tom pulled up and yelled out the window 127! At first I was a bit disappointed but then I thought, "Hey, that's good enough to pass the rookie test and get my full competition license." We loaded up, picked up my time slip, got it signed by the starter and took it back to registration where I got my official class D SCTA competition license. Now I can legally drive 150 mph (not). Once I got a look at my timing slip, I could see that I was still accelerating thru mile 3, which meant the bike was running right so we headed back to the staging line to wait our turn at the record. This time, I could really let it loose and see if this beast has got what it takes to break the record.

The staging lanes were moving along pretty good so I would probably get a run soon and possibly a third. This was going to be a record attempt; I had gotten all the politics out of the way, now it's time to rock! The start wasn't a real concern as you do not have to launch off the line like a drag bike. A good stable start would get you rolling and getting up thru the gears is the important thing. I hadn't had very good luck with the shifter on the first run but, neither had Tom and he had more time on the bike than anyone. I would just make the best of it and try to get it into gear a little more conservatively. When your into the first mile, you should be in top gear and accelerating, and you should be concerned about pinning the throttle and getting your body as low on the bike as possible. As we waited in line on the salt, I tried to visualize what I was going to do on the next run. This time, I needed to wrap my hand completely around the throttle so that when it was wide open, my hand would be at a level position on the bars so that I could tuck them into the tank without moving them off the throttle. I was going to shift the bike at 8000 RPM until I reached top gear then I was going to pin the throttle and wait to see if the tach would work until it reached 10,500 rpm (this is what our motor was built to run but that's maxed out and I wouldn't leave it there for long).

I didn't think we would reach that high of an RPM, given the problems we had encountered already. I was still pretty calm but I have to admit that the last run got the adrenalin pumping and I had to keep telling myself to "calm down and concentrate." The sun was getting hotter and after I got into my leathers, I sat in the truck while Tom moved the bike to the start line. Everything seemed to be going as planned as I mounted the bike, and moved it to the line and fired the motor. I would soon find out that Murphy's Law is still alive and well and was about to give me a wake up call.

When I pulled off the course after my first run, I had shut the bike off, and pulled in the clutch and coasted to a stop. When we loaded the bike up, we must have accidentally gotten the bike between 4th and 5th gear so it would roll and give the impression that we were in neutral. I waited for the starter to give me the OK to go, then I lifted the lever up into first gear (I was actually putting it into 4th gear), revved up the motor and released the clutch. The bike lurched forward and stalled. Of course now, the whole game plan is thrown out the window. I panic because I don't know what happened and fire the bike up, pull up on the shifter again (third gear) and try to leave again, the bike bogs but doesn't stall. Now my adrenalin level has reached super nova status, so I pull in the clutch and pull up one more time on the shifter. Now, it's in second gear and rolling so, I run it up to 8000 rpms and shift it to third. I miss the shift, and pull in the clutch and hit the shifter again. Because my throttle hand is wrapped so far around the throttle, the bike is still revving about 4000 rpms when I release the clutch. This brilliant move pitches the front end into the air about a foot or so and slams the gas tank into my helmet. Nice move rookie! Wheel standing a salt flats racer, not what I had in mind. The shift into high gear went without incident and I rolled the throttle wide open and sucked myself down onto the tank. The motor sounded real good, not missing a beat (Tom & Mike built an unbelievably strong motor). I look at the tach, 11,700 rpm, yeah, the tach's broken all right, if I had been revving 11,700 rpms, there would be two carillo rods heading for the moon right now. I trust my ears that the motor sounds like it's revving 9400 rpms, so I keep the throttle pinned and take a short peak up to look for the mile marker. I had already passed the first mile, and I could see the second mile coming up quickly, this was when I would have to get as low as I could and keep everything pinned to the max. I fly past mile two and start tucking myself as tight as I could against the bike. The wind is pulling at you so intensely that the slightest lift of your head will try to suck you off the bike. I take another peak and see the three mile marker coming up, the motor is running flawlessly and my heart is keeping pace with it. Man, this is a total rush! I pass the mile three marker and start rolling off the throttle, I knew with all the problems I had at the start, this was still a very fast run as I was hurtling across the salt a whole lot faster than my first run. I pull off the course and head for the return road, this time making sure I get the bike up into first gear again and then hit the kill switch. Everything goes silent again and I coast to a stop at the edge of the return road. I get off, with my heart still running on overdrive, and take my helmet off to look around for someone to share this with. Of course, there isn't anything but open salt so I open my arms to the sky and look up and scream "YEAH!!!" man, that felt good. I strained to see Tom's truck coming and was hoping to see him flashing his lights as he drove towards me with good news. He finally came into view and it was like a kid waiting for Christmas to hear what he had to say when he pulled up. 133.732 mph! Yeah baby! Were back! I was hoping for a lot more but, given the circumstances, we were on the right track. Tom asked, "What was the tach reading?" "11,700 RPM," I said, "You're right, it's broke," he said.

After I had picked up the time slip, I went over it with Tom. We noticed that I had slowed down slightly near the end of my run. I didn't think the motor was maxed out so I attributed this to picking my head up to see where I was on the course as I went thru the final set of lights. Getting as low on the bike as possible really does mean the difference in how fast you run. The wind was calm at 2 mph coming from behind me and the salt was dry so, the conditions couldn't have been better for my run. I just wished I had gotten a better start so that I could have been in top gear and accelerating before I hit mile one. I knew the mistakes were getting fewer and I was getting more comfortable on the bike with every run, I just hoped I could fit in one more run before I had to leave.

We were in the staging lane and moving up in line when we noticed the wind picking up again. We didn't need this, and I was hoping it would die down before I made it to the start line. I was going thru the list of things I had to do on this run in my head. We know what the priorities are now: Getting the bike in the right gear, making the shifts at the right time (the tach was working somewhat up to 8000 RPM, so I

would use it until I got into top gear and then it would be useless), and getting as low on the bike as possible. This would be my last shot, there was no more time.

We were only a couple vehicles from the start line and I was already in my leathers as Tom was warming up the bike. The wind was continuing to blow and as I watched the flag at the start, I was thinking that they would hold the meet any time now. But, it was my turn now, so I rolled the bike up to the start and sat waiting for instructions from the starter. The previous competitor had broke and left some parts out on the course, so they held me at the line while they cleaned up the course. I shut the motor off and sat there waiting when Tom came up with an umbrella to shield me from the intense sun. One of the other competitors, whom Tom had known for a few years and was a regular runner at the salt flats, and whose name was Jon Wennerberg (a.k.a. Seldom seen slim) walked up to the line to bust my chops, “ well, did you learn anything while you were out here, like maybe not wearing black leathers in 110 degree heat?” I laughed, saying that I didn’t have much of a choice and that I needed to lose a few pounds anyway! They cleared the course and I fired the bike back up, the starter keyed his radio to get a weather check, then bent down to my helmet and said, “Son, you have a 13 mph headwind, it doesn’t look good for a record today.” What choice did I have? I had to go, there was no more time besides, he just gave me the best incentive I could have gotten, he just told me I “couldn’t” do something. I acknowledged him and pointed down the course. He smiled, gave me the thumbs up and turned me loose.

I left the line without any problems and ran the bike up to 8000 RPM, shifted to second and missed it but quickly recovered and got back on the gas after another short wheelie. I hit the rest of the shifts on time and I was in top gear before the one mile mark, so far, so good. I completely ignored the tach as it was no use to me now and pinned the throttle. I got into the tightest tuck position I could and let the bike run. The motor was running perfectly, singing along, not missing a beat. Even though the wind was trying to pull my arms and legs away from the bike, I could feel this was a good run. I hardly looked up at all, and had the bike running wide open for over two miles. I knew the wind was hurting my time but, I had done all I could and I was hoping that it was going to be enough, but the reality was that it would take a miracle to overcome that much headwind. I flashed thru Mile Three and lifted the throttle; the bike had done all it could for today and I felt a bit sad as the revs on the motor wound down.

This was all for me now, it was over. I would leave for home in a few hours and this had been my last shot. I knew in my heart that I couldn’t overcome that much wind resistance but, I gave it my best, and I was curious as to how close I came. I watched as the chase truck grew nearer and knew it would be the last time I would be in this scenario so I tried to savor the peacefulness one last time before I had to return to reality. Tom pulled up in the truck and with a smile said 132.675 mph. Not bad for heading into a pretty stiff breeze.

We had tried everything and gotten pretty close to the record. Considering what we started with, we had accomplished a great deal in a short period of time. It’s tough to try to duplicate salt conditions when you’re building a salt flats racer and we had discovered things we hadn’t planned on and made adjustments to try to compensate. Sometimes, you can make these adjustments without too many problems and sometimes you have to go back and start over. We were fortunate. We know what we have to do now and the changes that we will have to make. We may not have gotten the record today but, we will be back!

We loaded up and headed back to the hotel where we got cleaned up and went out for a really nice dinner. This was suppose to be the celebration dinner for breaking the world record and we were suppose to celebrate by toasting each other with Corona and lime. We did this anyway, even though we did not break the record; we did this to celebrate our many other accomplishments. We had worked as a team to overcome a ton of problems, both mechanical and environmental. We got to spend time together as two brothers working together, for the first time in over 20 years, and we got to experience the incredible vastness of the Bonneville Salt Flats.

We said our goodbyes outside the hotel and I pointed the rental car towards Salt Lake City airport. I was taking the red eye back to New York and as I drove on thru the night, I tried to rewind the week I had just experienced. I had gotten to meet so many wonderful people and experienced so many new and incredible things. I had gotten to see the West as no television program could ever portray it and I had gotten a chance to bond with my brother again (something 3000 miles makes pretty difficult sometimes).

We had pushed the race bike faster than it had ever gone before, and we had discovered new things that we could improve on.

Bonneville has definitely left its mark on me. I had been trying to get back into road racing before the opportunity to go to the salt flats came up. However, putting my road race money into the Bonneville bike, then actually getting to ride it, has got me wondering which road I should choose? Those motorcycle streamliners look pretty interesting. Hey Tom, you think we can hit 300 mph with a couple punched out 1100 turbo-charged Guzzi motors mounted in a super slippery body, if Margerita will pay for it?

You see, it's starting already...