

Joe Scalzo's

City of Speed and elsewhere

LSR

Almost half a century afterward, whenever we see each other, there still is disagreement

amongst the money-brokers, PR spell-binders, news-hounds, jet-freaks and plain old kibitzers about how the almighty battle for the Land Speed Record between Craig Breedlove and Art Arfons got started,

Those in the Breedlove camp say it all began the day in 1963 when Craig Breedlove listened to John F. Kennedy declaring, “Ask not what your country can do for you, ask what you can for your country!,” and concluded that the President was personally addressing him, Craig Breedlove. From that day forward, they claim, the thing Breedlove most wanted was to regain the Land Speed Record – the LSR – that had been lost to America for 35 years. It was all a matter of



meshing President Kennedy’s wishes with Breedlove’s own.



"Sober up," argue those in the Arfons side. The coming LSR extravaganza began the day that Arfons, the Ohio junk merchant and ingenious scavenger, paid a visit to a space-age flea market and returned home with the prize piece of merchandise he had long coveted: an F-46's jet warhead similar to those exercised by the Blue Angels in their air shows. It was worth about \$175,000, but Arfons swung the whole transaction for

a fast five grand. And after cabling his high-propulsion toy to a pair of quivering saplings, Arfons had watched with great satisfaction as the F-46's 32,000 horses immolated the adjacent woods and burned down an empty chicken coop. Righteous! Now Arfons was certain he had the required firepower to join Breedlove in the big game hunt for the LSR.

Fiscal bottom-liners, meanwhile, argue that the Breedlove-Arfons contretemps was brought on by the era's Goodyear/Firestone rubber war. According to this group, the LSR was merely another bauble coveted by the two tire titans. Still another theory, one suggested by ecologists, is that the 400 mph-plus speeds Breedlove and Arfons soon would be topping were brought on by an unseasonably high alkaline content on the Bonneville Salt Flats.

Because I, too, followed the whole Breedlove/Arfons saga from its rousing beginning to its disappointing ending, I have pondered the cause of the spectacle and concluded that its root cause was the special nature of the LSR itself. This revelation had come to me while Los Angeles was in the middle of another calamitous earthquake season, and ever since, I've come to regard the LSR as the San Andreas fault of motor-sports — something everybody knows is there, but doesn't like to think about.

There's good reason why going after the LSR isn't a mainstream or seasonal activity. For one thing, the personalities and projectiles involved are almost certain to experience considerable pain, if not outright destruction. Equally important, just as centuries are required to build up the hidden forces which become earthquakes, generations apparently are needed to breed men and women of LSR temperament. Prior to the arrivals of Breedlove and Arfons, the LSR had laid dormant for 17 years, which strongly suggests that everybody had forgotten about it, the same way everybody in L.A. forgets about the impending Big One.

But just when everybody seemed to have forgotten about the LSR, there came the sudden smashing of glass breaking, the sensation of walls shifting, and the ground itself beginning to quiver. And then Ka-Boom! Suddenly the LSR community was experiencing a bonafide 8-pointer on the Richter scale. It was the Ka-Boom! of Breedlove and Arfons, the two jet-heads, dumping in the raw jet fuel, goosing the afterburners, and locking themselves in their sights throughout 1963, 1964, 1965, and 1966. Before the San Andreas Fault had run its

course, Breedlove and Arfons had raised and re-raised the standing LSR of 394.196 seven times between them. Breedlove was the earth's fastest man on four occasions, Arfons three. Four hundred mph fell, 495 mph fell, then 500mph, and then in, November of 1965, Breedlove, tooling across Bonneville at better than ten miles a minute -- 608.201 mpg -- broke through the 600 mph barrier.



Hubris and lousy karma followed, which seemed inevitable with the LSR. During his four-year fight with Breedlove, Arfons, who died in 2007, almost bought the farm and Breedlove's post LSR life, typically, turned to junk.

A Frenchman first invented the LSR, in 1898, traveling at a hurtling 40 mph, and legend attached itself to the LSR ever since. Among the first to get caught up its stranglehold were a quartet of famous American racing drivers and builders who'd been friends before their



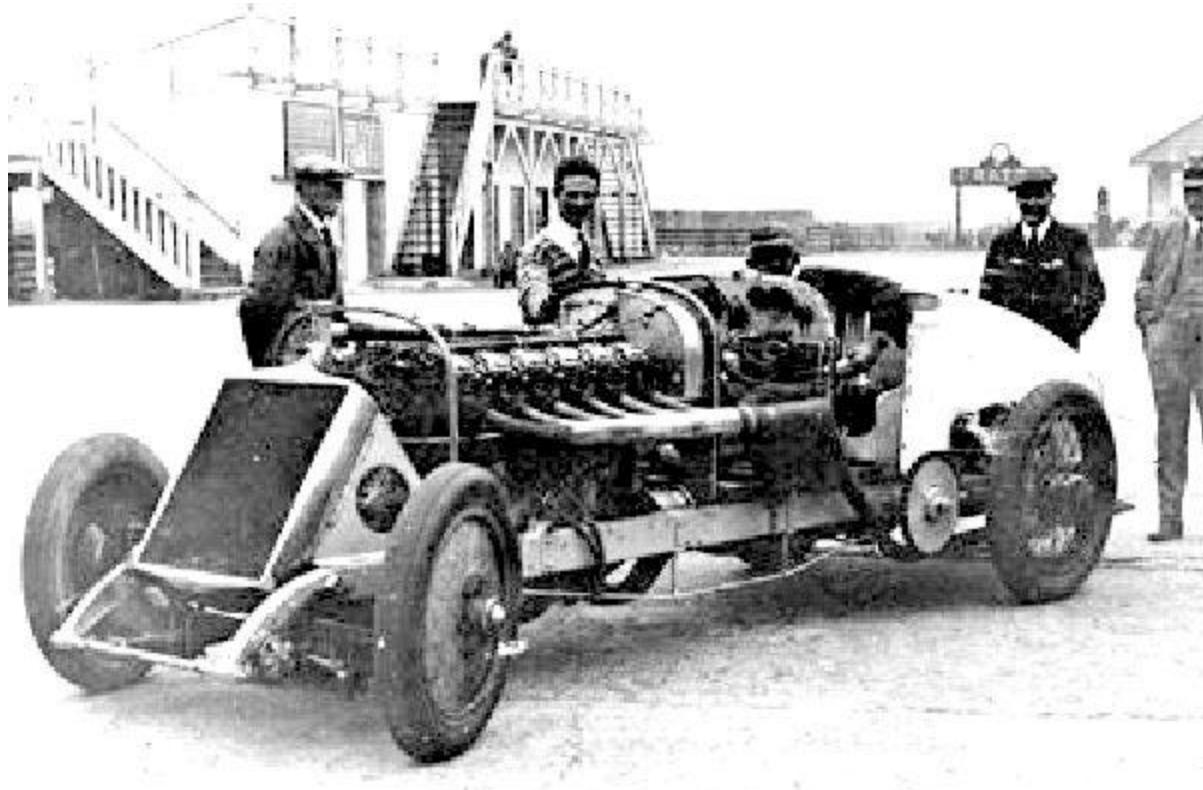
fight for the LSR arose. The drivers were Jimmy Murphy and Tommy Milton, two champions of the Indy 500, and Fred and August Duesenberg, the racing car-building brothers. At the start of their fight, everything had seemed copacetic, but then Milton became so infuriated about the Duesenberg brothers putting Murphy instead of himself in the seat of their Duesenberg LSR car that Milton spent the rest of his life condemning his old friends.

Even after out-living the trio by a substantial number of years, he went to his grave continuing to damn all three for the double-cross.

An ominous precedent indeed, and because it occurred in the LSR speed season of 1921, American LSR seekers had lots to think about. No sooner had Milton gained his revenge by demolishing Murphy's freshly-set LSR standard, than a pack of mad and monied Englishmen seemed to appear out of nowhere to claim the LSR in the name of Empire.

Suddenly the English, with their 6- and 8-wheel gargantuans, were everywhere, monopolizing the LSR the way Bentley, and later Jaguar, monopolized Le Mans. The most

successful of them – Malcolm Campbell, Henry Segrave, George Eyston – were knighted by King George, and their LSR gargantuans honored in odd ways, “Babs,” a Liberty V-12 airplane engine gargantuan that in 1925 set the LSR record of 172 mph across Pendine Sands in Wales, was subsequently buried there in apparent punishment for crashing and destroying her creator/driver, popular Parry Thomas. Some 43 years later, in 1969, sentiment unexpectedly shifted in Babs’ favor; she was exhumed and put in a museum.



The demise of Thomas proved Pendine unsound for future LSR exploit, so the British speed nobility began conducting their business in a former colony, America, where they behaved as if Daytona Beach was an extension of the crown.

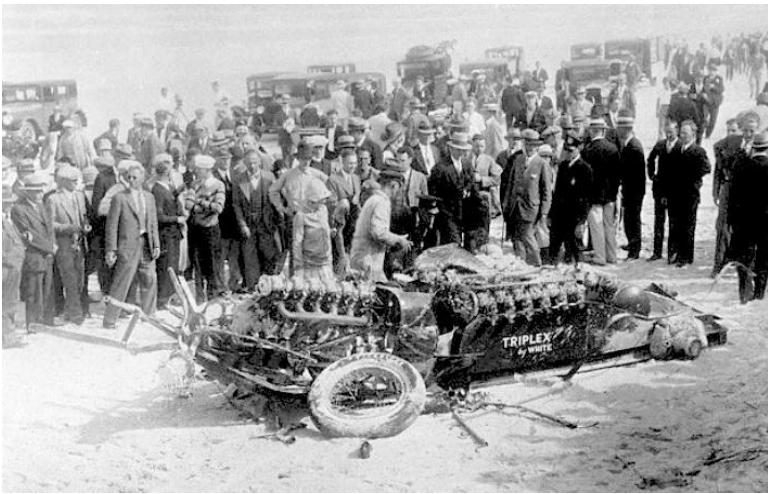
Segrave, in 1927, with a 1,000 Sunbeam, beat 200 mph at Daytona, and then Campbell, in his “Bluebird,” the same year topped 200 by six mph. In 1928, returning for the benefit of Union Jack, Campbell found an American Anglophobe named Frank Lockhart waiting in ambush with his Stutz Black Hawk. Lockhart was the prototype of Craig Breedlove, and, before Breedlove, of Mickey Thompson, the hot rodder. Lockhart’s was the same poor-boy whine: so brainy that he may have gotten a scholarship to Cal Tech to become a scientist, Lockhart himself ended up consumed with great LSR ambitions but without enough capital to pay for them.



What little capital he had was his prize money from winning the 1926 Indy 500, a race that carried considerable financial reward. Lockhart, however, being a typical tightwad racing driver who abhorred the idea of spending his own money on his LSR dream, had to shop around. First he did a deal with financially-pinched Harry Miller to use, gratis, Miller's expensive Indy 500 engines, then immediately infuriated Miller by modifying them; next he visited the Duesenberg works and carried off some of Fred's and August's best help, making the brothers angry; finally Lockhart hit up the publicity-starved Stutz Motor Company for sponsorship cash and actually got a little.

By early 1928, Lockhart's curiosity of double-engine Miller streamliner, constructed by ex-Duesenberg workmen, and bankrolled by Stutz, was ready to confront Malcolm Campbell and his Bluebird on the Florida beaches. Campbell tut-tutted that Lockhart's Stutz Black Hawk was so tiny and flyweight it might literally fly out control -- and, after blowing tires, fly it did, on two occasions. The second was the end of Frank Lockhart.

Permanent as Lockhart's fate was, it didn't have a deleterious effect on the LSR plans of still another Indy 500 winner, Ray Keech. Shortly after Lockhart's demise Keech, made a Florida sally of his own, in an LSR monolith that equaled or exceeded the tonnage of the British armor. A study non-sophistication, it primarily consisted of three Liberty V-12 aircraft engines hung between railroad ties.



Reaching 207 mph, the monster made Keech the planet's fastest man, or at least it did until Henry Segrave posted an intimidating 231.44 in response. While Keech was away, one of his mechanics impetuously took Keech's unwieldy locomotive out in his own attempt at the LSR; following the mechanic's funeral, Keech himself was scheduled to drive the re-built dreadnaught for another crack at Segrave. But the LSR wasn't the only dangerous undertaking in the 1920s: in

June, 1929, Keech ended his life on a Pennsylvania board track.

With an attrition rate like that, that was all she wrote for America's role in the LSR race for the following 15 years. Filling the void in the meantime were the English, who'd moved their traveling LSR act from Florida to Utah, making a happy home, in the 1930s, on Bonneville's Salt Flats. Campbell, Eyston, and the wondrous John Cobb pushed the LSR beyond 300 mph and soon were closing in on 400.

Cobb was fastest of all of them. Six-foot/two inches and 220 pounds of stuffy respectability when attending the London opera or conducting the affairs of the city's largest fur importer, the salt flats of Bonneville were where Cobb enjoyed lighting off his LSR leviathan, which was fired by double 1,250 horsepower Napiers, both supercharged. And after World War Two put an end to his harrowing trips on the salt, Cobb buried, for its protection, his LSR streamliner for the length of the war.

Following the armistice, Cobb got back to Bonneville aiming to nail 400 mph and came close –394.196. But none of his compatriots were doing the LSR adventure any more, and

Cobb, too, lost interest. In the process, Cobb established yet another riddle of the LSR: it is
an activity best practiced against an enemy; doing it all by yourself 1) isn't stimulating, or 2) doesn't balance out the risk.



So, for something to do, Cobb made himself amphibious, thereby repeating the error of Segrave, his old LSR mate, who'd

drowned in 1931 while trying to beat the water world record, Cobb's end came on the Scottish lake said to be the home of the Loch Ness monster, where his disintegrating speedboat capsized and went to the bottom sixteen years later. in 1968, Donald Campbell, Sir Malcolm's

son who'd earlier survived a terrific crash 'n' burn on the salt flats of Bonneville, became, with Cobb and Segrave, the third Englishman to die on the water.

With the passing of Cobb the English were out of the LSR game, but America's own gene bank still hadn't caught up to the years of Lockhart and Keech. So, for almost 17 years – from 1947 to 1963 – just one angry voice rose in outrage about some long-departed, stodgy, tea-bagger, instead of an American, holding the LSR. The voice belonged to Mickey Thompson, who was born in 1928, the same year Lockhart died. And, exactly like Lockhart, Thompson had ingenuity, wild ambition, and almost no money. A product of L.A. automobilia, Thompson had led the harum-scarum life of the renegade hot rodder and, long before coming down with LSR fever, had helped invent and organize quarter-mile drag racing, devised the sling-shot dragster, and invented his own LSR projectile, Challenger 1.



Challenger 1, and Thompson couldn't affect repairs within the one-hour deadline.

Fortuitously, Thompson was as accomplished as Lockhart at getting others to finance his LSR schemes. A GM bigwig shipped him four oversized Pontiacs for kick; Thompson bolted them into Challenger 1; and it looked like Goodbye Cobb, hello 400 mph.

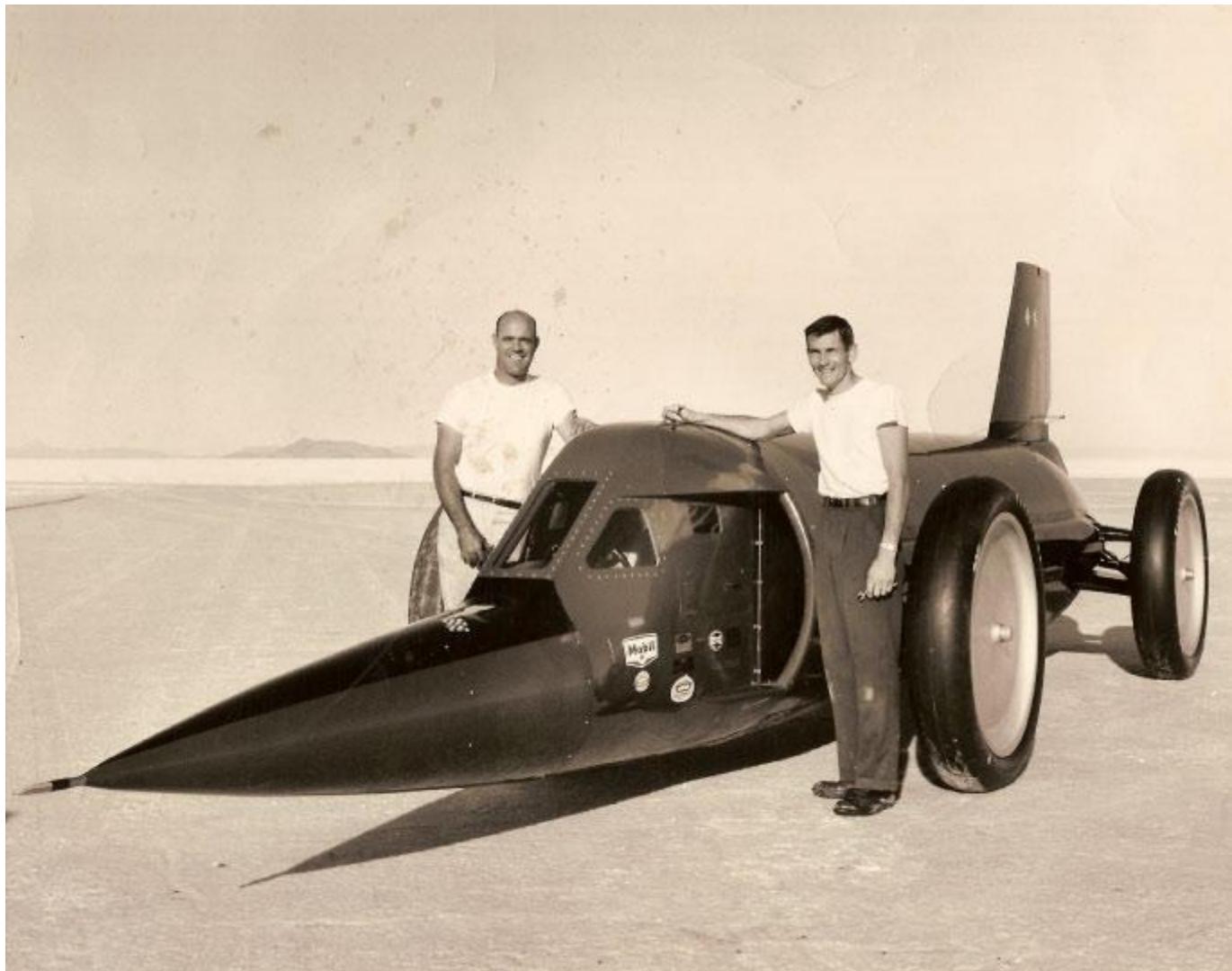
Sure enough, in the Bonneville summer of 1960, Thompson blew past 400 mph. But a sadism of the LSR is that its rules mandate that one record-setting rip isn't enough; to be official you have to make the return trip ; but the effort on reaching 406 wounded

Thompson's attention span, always short ,next became fixated on Indianapolis, and he carried a dangerous car to the 1964 500, which set off a gigantic gasoline holocaust killing Thompson's driver, Davey MacDonald, as well as another driver, Eddie Sachs; returned to drag racing with the silent Hawaiian Danny Ongais , and led Ford Motor Company's invincible Mustang funny car team or the 1970s in the 1980s; took up the new game, racing off-road, in Baja California and elsewhere; also co-invented, with a shady customer named Michael Goodwin, indoor stadium racing, and, in 1988, was assassinated, with his wife, by murderers sent by Goodwin, who was convicted of two counts of homicide in the first degree, then sentenced to two life times in prison without parole.

With Thompson gone from the LSR sweepstakes, no other promising lights were appearing at Bonneville -- until, that is, the San Andreas Fault served up Craig Breedlove. Just like Thompson, Breedlove was a real hot rodder. But quite unlike Thompson, who was thoroughly hung up on camshafts and connecting rods and the indisputable virtues of the internal combustion engine, Breedlove was steeped in a far more modern variety of candle

power: to hear Breedlove tell it, jet propulsion and cowboy rocket science, were the keys to 400 mph and beyond.

Breedlove wasn't the first pioneer to follow this path. In the flash of renewed interest that had flamed but quickly gone, a brace of aircraft- and jet-engine creatures had already visited Bonneville in the hope of cracking the LSR. They'd had 2 such intriguing monickers as Flying Caduceus, City of Salt Lake, Infinity and Cyclops, and their histories weren't encouraging. City of Salt Lake and Infinity both had extinguished the lives of their drivers, while the pilot of Flying Caduceus – he was an LSR-crazed medical doctor –1) who had stopped because he chickened out; or 2) the Flying Caduceus was a jet-powered Edsel -- the lemon of the salt.



Cyclops, however, had demonstrated promise. It was nothing but a warplane Liberty V-12 crammed inside a sling-shot dragster, yet, in spite of lacking the comforts and advantages of coachwork, its chauffeur somehow had gotten his quivering rail rampaging along in excess of 360 mph. The chauffeur's name -- a name soon to become as famous as Breedlove's -- was Art Arfons.

Around this same time, something important was happening elsewhere. Breedlove had just heard and become inflamed by President Kennedy's "Ask not" address. Already a matriculate The School of Helping People, Breedlove, when not obsessing over the LSR, was

a savant fireman for the city of L.A. Therefore it wasn't much of a stretch to imagine himself patriotically helping out the entire country by re-conquering the LSR for America by playing rocket man with the world's Land Speed Record.



Breedlove was just as handsome and heroic-looking as JFK himself, and he had the same impeachable earnestness as Lockhart and Thompson. These traits meant that Breedlove could speak of his absolute need to cruise along at upwards of 400 mph and not sound demented. And Breedlove's earnestness worked. Shell Oil, the first time he came to it begging for jet fuel, had thrown him out. But on Breedlove's second visit, Shell gave him all the fuel he wanted, plus more money than he'd asked for, and also guaranteed the services of a jet engineer. And at Goodyear Tire & Rubber it was much the same. Not only did Breedlove get all the Goodyears he wanted, but sponsorship in the six-figure range.

Somehow the parable has filtered down that Breedlove was a fly-by-night scam artist whose aim was to use the fantastic attraction of the LSR as a ruse for ripping-off big corporations. The reality was quite the contrary: both Shell and Goodyear were impressed by Breedlove's knowledge of jet propulsion, and a scale model of Spirit of America, Breedlove's self-designed three-wheel chariot, drew raves when a scale model was tested in the wind tunnel. Its chrome moly steel chassis and shapely aluminum and fiberglass body panels were the work of Quinn Epperly, the peerless Indy 500 Meyer-Drake roadster constructor.



Spirit of America's virgin Bonneville pass in August of 1963 was anemic 388 mph, well below Cobb's LSR. But on the return trip, showing the muscle of jet power, Breedlove opened up Spirit of America to 428 for a two average of 407.45 mph – Craig Breedlove had realized his dream – he was the fastest man in the world.

Wild elation, mixed with bolts of panic, now afflicted Breedlove. The LSR was his, but now what was he supposed to do? Shell and Goodyear were guaranteed to shut off the sponsorship tap unless other LSR fanatics tried taking away Breedlove's new record, and without then, what would be the prestige of playing jet-man?

Luckily for Breedlove, the San Andreas Fault was in superb condition and enemy forces quickly mobilized: the 35 years of American absence from the LSR, combined with Breedlove's success, were, in fact, causing an LSR glut. Not one but a pair of Ohio jets were on their ways to Bonneville; they belonged to the non-speaking Arfons brothers, Art and Walt, both from Akron, Lockhart's old home town. Art's Firestone Tire & Rubber-funded monster was aptly named Green Monster; Walt's Goodyear-funded projectile was sedately named Wingfoot Express.

The Arfons siblings were worthy additions to the folklore of the LSR. A pair of brawlers from the heartland, their volatile bloodlines were a combination of Greek and Native American stock, but even though lacked the glamour of L.A. hot rod luminaries like Breedlove and Thompson, the Arfons certainly knew as much about speed and racing. What's more, both Arfons' well understood and were enamored of jets, having engaged in pioneering jet car adventures for better than a decade.

Unfortunately, something bad happened during one of those adventures, and Art and Walt had promised each other never to be on speaking terms again. A high and formidable fence divided their speed compounds on Akron's Pickle Road, and even while the brothers were

out on Bonneville, lodged in the same middle-of-nowhere motel, no conversation exchanges occurred.



Aged 48, Walt was the elder Arfons by nine years, and his affection for jets wasn't without emotional cost – Wingfoot Express was a well-engineered candidate for the LSR, yet it gave Walt a case of the cold sweats. All his jet cars did. Walt Arfons' downfall was that, much as he loved assembling, disassembling, and tinkering with his jets, he suffered panic attacks watching his hired help racing them – he'd already been felled by two full-blown cardiac arrests. So, in the coming LSR battle with Breedlove, a guinea pig named Tom Green would be at the controls of Wingfoot Express while Walt, as ever agonized from the Bonneville sidelines.

Art Arfons, the younger brother, made a radically different study. Looking back through LSR annals, one discovers individuals so utterly without fear that just being in the same room with them must have been un-nerving, and Art surely belonged in their company: his experiences on the drag strips and Bonneville had already earned him special cachet in the bravery business.

Art was well aware of this. Asked why Goodyear, which already owned Breedlove and the LSR, was going to the trouble and expense of funding brother Walt's Wingfoot Express, Art replied that it was simple: "Goodyear needed backup -- it knew I was the one who'd be coming after Breedlove."

Exactly like Breedlove, Arfons got little joy out of merely driving jets. There was equal joy in inventing and building them, and Art's construction methods were a mixture of space age high-tech and junkyard scavenger hunt. Along with his bravery, what Art really was, was a sort of Max Balchowsky of the LSR – a Bonneville-sited analog to L.A.'s Balkan genius whose wrecking yard sourced Ol' Yeller Specials were the nemesis of Ferraris and Maseratis. Art's backyard was full of junk and his Green Monster was cobbled together in the spirit of can do/make do.

Assembling Green Monster cost Arfons almost three years, counting the time he invested checking out the afterburner of his F-46 and making amends to his outraged neighbors for the defoliation of their forest and chicken coop. Despite being buoyed by free rubber and lots of Firestone cash, Art refused to put on the ritz and stuck with what worked – Balchowsky-style alchemy. Thus the LSR missle that Firestone was pinning its hopes on had an axle borrowed from a 1937 Lincoln; the steering system off a 1955 Packard; various elements of 1947 Fords; 1951 Dodge kingpins; and instrumentation off an ancient salvaged aircraft.



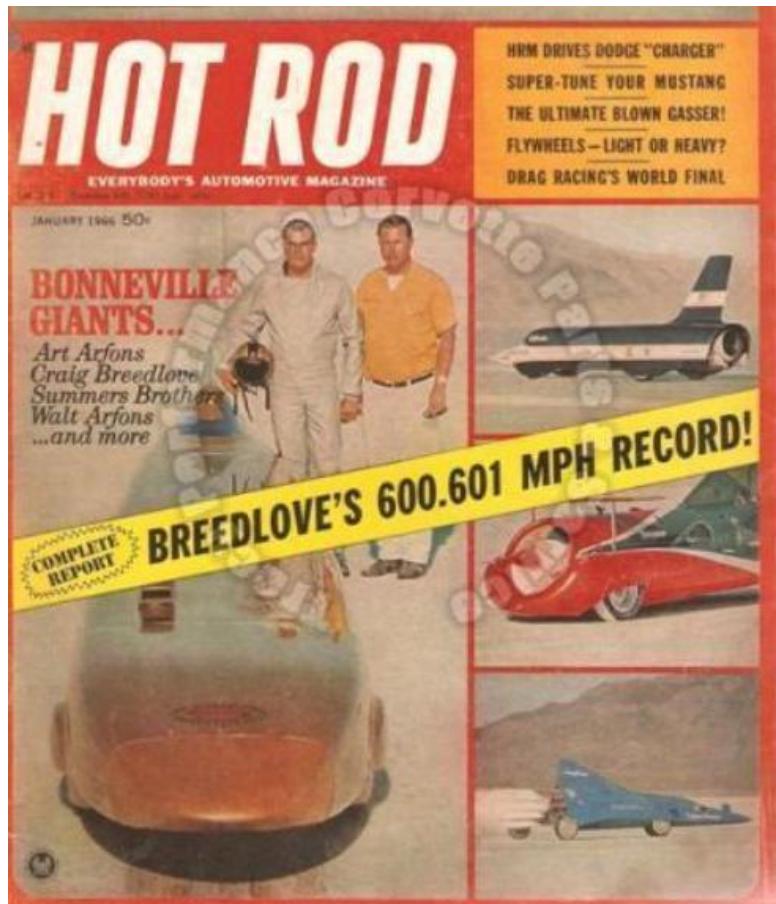
But Green Monster also had Art Arfons pulling its trigger, which counted for a lot. Almost inevitably, Green Monster's first act of aggression in the war for the LSR was to lay waste to Art's soft-hearted and tormented older brother. Nervous and quaking, Walt Arfons had, on October 2, 1964, observed Tom Green and the Wingfoot Express erase Breedlove's year-old LSR standard with a no-nonsense speed of 413 mph. But just three days afterward, the glory of Walt's and Green's Bonneville accomplishment ended abruptly. Art Arfons was arriving with Green Monster in all its beauty.

Green Monster's opening pass of 396 mpg wasn't much. All it meant was that Art was going to have to really get the hammer down making the return trip. And get the hammer down he did: Hitting the afterburner on three separate occasions, he brought Green Monster across the measured mile at a record 439 mph. And Art's two-way average, achieved at the expense of brother Walt's paltry 418 mph, was another new LSR record, 434 mph.

Meanwhile, Bluebird II, Donald Campbell's \$4.5 million streamliner, arrived with a support team of Land Rovers and even a spotting airplane, only to barrel roll while going 300

mph. A man who recognized publicity when he saw it, Campbell ballyhooed his Bluebird II wreck as "the fastest auto accident in history." How presumptuous! Campbell failed to take into account the coming agendas of Breedlove and Arfons.

Not about to be faked out by the pressure of the Arfons brothers, Breedlove sucked it back up and, on October 13th, just eight days after Green Monster had hit 434 mph, Spirit of America achieved an opening pass of 442.509 mph. Knowing full well how dangerous Art was, Breedlove wore out Spirit of America's afterburners making his return trip, lashing to 498.13 mph, which created another new LSR record of 468. mph.



Great as the temptation was to park Spirit of America in the barn, Breedlove resisted it. Bonneville soon would be water-logged for the winter: why not go for the big five-oh-oh right now? Word spread, and two days later on October 15th, a big crowd from Salt Lake City drove 130 miles to watch. Its reward was to see Breedlove, on his opening run, making himself the first man to visit the far side of 500 mph. Refurbishing Spirit of America for its return ride—and with everybody trying not to look at the dents 500 mph had put in the coachwork—Breedlove determined that 500 mph could be maintained if Spirit of America's throttle was left at its usual 95 per cent setting, Breedlove, though, wasn't taking any chances. Spirit of America had another throttle setting, one Breedlove never had dared use before, called "Banzai!"

"Banzai!" was where Breedlove set it on the return run; and as Spirit of America blasted away, the flying salt and obliterating jet blast combined to somersault a photographer shooting pictures in Spirit of America's wake. Three miles and roughly half a minute later, Breedlove came corkscrewing through the timing traps to the completion of his run, a new LSR standard of 526.28 mph.

The extra speed burned out Spirit of America's brakes, ripped out by the roots both the safety parachute and its spare, and, with its triple redundancy lost, Spirit of America was fast running out of Bonneville. Ahead of it was a telephone pole, a drainage ditch, a 20-foot dike, and a 30-foot moat of water. Spirit of America sheared in two the telephone pole, cleared the next two obstacles, slashed nose-first into the moat, and Breedlove, still inside, might well have suffered the same fate as Seagrave, Cobb, and Campbell had he not dog-paddled to shore instead. In any event his two-way average on 526.28 was the new LSR.

Back in L.A., the headline writer at the at the Herald-Examiner was the best in the business, and he out-did himself: 526 MPH - Some Freeway Nut?

Goodyear rewarded him with a publicity tour lasting two weeks; something like 10,000 news stories got written up. And Breedlove, living off his endorphins, spoke with bravado of his wild trip with Spirit of America into the Bonneville moat – “For my next act I’ll set myself on fire!” - and maliciousness: “Art Arfons will never break my LSR record because his Green Monster is about as streamlined as the side of a barn!”

Taking Breedlove’s smart-aleck remark personally. Arfons automatically with a new LSR mark of his own. Although more prosaic than Spirit of America’s splash-landing-into-the-moat smash, Green Monster’s returning salvo possessed dramatic content nonetheless. A Firestone cut, a parachute failed, and for a long time Green Monster and Arfons, as helpless as Breedlove, roller-coasted along at better than 500 mph.

Fall, spring, and most of the 1965 summer passed. By now the number of LSR belligerents had been reduced to just two; saving himself from a possible third cardiac attack, Walt Arfons had withdrawn Wingfoot Express. But with the dawning of the new speed season, Breedlove had replenished Spirit of America with a fourth wheel and even more thrust while Arfons had placed Green Monster on fresh steroids of its own.

So the battle for the LSR resumed. On November 2nd, Breedlove upped the stakes to 555.127. Five days later, despite the handicap of blowing out Firestones with the twisting torque of Green Monster’s afterburners, Arfons achieved 576.553.

In the meantime, while Breedlove and Arfons were co-existing in states of either bliss or denial, the realities of their duel for the LSR were affecting their entourages in a predictable way: everybody was frightened to death. Mechanics were having nightmares; wives and family members were waking up in tears; a helicopter pilot had a vision of Green Monster exploding into bits, and one of its Firestone bouncing into the chopper blades. Everybody looked like they were ready to start screaming, and if they started might not be able to stop.

Breedlove, before his celebrated run of November 15th, took the precaution of mailing farewell postcards to his children from his first marriage. Then he went, one-way, 593.178 mph. On the return ride, he had Spirit of America II moving at 608.21 mph, making for a magical average of 600.60 mph. Very early in the LSR proceedings, the PR handlers at Firestone responsible for the marketing of Art Arfons realized that in the publicity struggle with Craig Breedlove and Goodyear, they were coming off second best. Breedlove was L.A. hip, charismatically good-looking, appeared in deadly earnest, and knew how to get himself quoted. He also would do almost anything to please. It was, for instance, the conceit of Goodyear that The World’s Fastest Man ought to be married to The World’s Fastest Woman. So, Breedlove’s smashing young wife Lee had jumped inside Spirit of America II, got it going 307 mph, and made herself just that.

For Firestone's sad-sack PR guys, Arfons was a different story. There was little whiz-bang to Art, the junkman from the cabbage patches of Ohio with the blindingly fast, but hypnotically horrible, Green Monster. Sometimes they had to be careful where they took Art, because there was no telling what he might say. This had been the situation at a very serious conference called by Firestone for members of the scientific press. The tire maker was anxious to make a case for all the exotic technology that had gone into the Green Monster. A puzzled reporter arose to review for his readers the experimental process of elimination Art had used to deduce that the most efficient steering system for his LSR effort was from a 1955 Packard. When Art replied that it was all he could find in his scrap yard, the scientific conference came to a hasty end.

Yet what the LSR vocation truly comes down to is having an operator willing to push the button, and at that Art Arfons was the best in the world. At 8:05 p.m., on November 16th, Arfons was back at Bonneville after waiting a season to get the chance: hammering the Green Monster to 585 mph on its opening pass, he well understood that to overtake Breedlove's 600.60 mph he'd have to open it up like never before on the return. And this Arfons, remarked later, was when he realized that the Green Monster, traveling at 600 mpg-plus, was upside-down.



all the time he'd be wasting building Green Monster II.

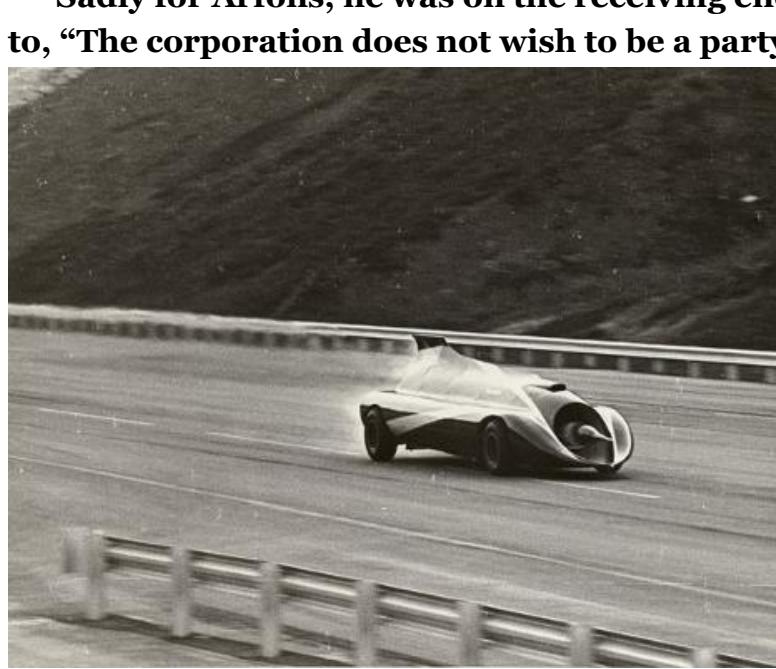
Tumbling through the air for the length of two football fields without hitting anything, the Green Monster's ultimate landing was predictably unkind: upon striking the salt it caught fire and began breaking apart like an egg, leaving a trail of debris that went on for two miles.

Arfons was trapped inside the wreckage, and rescue personnel with axes had to free him. Salt was filling his eyes and he'd briefly been knocked unconscious, but other than this, the worst thing for him was knowing that Green Monster was in ruin, and about

"What are we going to do?" Arfons had joked to Breedlove. In recognition of the wild LSR chemistry flowing between them, "just keep trying to beat each other until we kill ourselves?" "I guess so," Breedlove had replied, giggling. Breedlove, however, was wrong. Unknown to both himself and Arfons, outside forces and the old LSR malaise were combining to unplug everything. Arfons felt the new reality first. By 1969 he had Green Monster II ready, and it was a ton lighter, a foot lower, and grotesquely more powerful than Green Monster I. But while delighted with his handiwork, Arfons had his feelings bruised when Firestone turned off the sponsorship tap and refused to outfit Green Monster II with a set of fresh rubber.

Sadly for Arfons, he was on the receiving end of Firestone's new policy which boiled down to, "The corporation does not wish to be a party to someone getting killed." Forced to retire

from the LSR sweepstakes, Arfons took his jets into the peanut gallery of organized drag racing. The initial take was good: 276.07 mph in the quarter-mile, and in the 1970s Arfons was on target to achieve the game's first 300 mph pass. But when he traveled to a Texas strip to do the deed he got into a gigantic accident instead, and the aftershocks included a dead photographer. After the lawsuits were settled, Arfons took up the newest pastime, tractor-pulling.



Breedlove's forced exit from the LSR was more protracted. After exceeding 600 mpg,

Breedlove was expecting to keep right on going until he was punching through the Sound Barrier, somewhere in the neighborhood of 765 mph. Spirit of America II had reached its endurance limit, though: a jet-powered cigar of stressed-skin construction was going to have to be the new ticket. But Breedlove's pitch to Goodyear drew a less than helpful response, "We've already got the LSR. and Firestone and Arfons are dead meat. Forget it."

LSR income endorsements put Breedlove into business management, making himself and Lee sovereigns of a manse on the heights behind Palos Verdes Estates, and plunged The World's Fastest Man into an existence of numbing boredom. To remain semi-active, Breedlove loaded Spirit of America II onto the back of a truck and toured the car show circuit. He also indulged in absurd promotions, including "The World Speed Record for 24 Hours on a Snowmobile." His life was turning to junk, and things got worse. His Goodyear distributorship failed, he blew \$200,000 in bad investments, and Lee was divorcing him from their manse on the heights.

As a resentful resident of the flats below, Breedlove sometimes wistfully glanced up at his old manse, now occupied by Lee, still The World's Fastest Woman, and her new significant other – Spirit of America II's former crew chief. Toiling inside a tiny garage, Breedlove worked hideous hours fulfilling his newest, lowest assignment – preening a streamliner with supercharged Javelin power to smash the global speed record for piston-engine cars. It was a task Breedlove undertook for the pleasure of his new sponsor, American Motors, formerly the maker of such thrilling iron as the Nash Rambler.

Even Mother Nature blind-sided Breedlove. January of 1969 came in raw and rainy, with another epic L.A. storm flooding streets and trashing homes. Straight through the front door of Breedlove's garage rode a four-foot-high wall of water and mud that wiped out Breedlove's

uninsured lathes, milling machines, engines, spare parts, and the American Motors contract.

I happened to visit Breedlove during this time, a period in his life when he was prepared to demonstrate hearty gratitude to anyone who could slip him a fast million dollars to put everything back together again. At this time Breedlove's fall seemed complete and he was just another victim of the LSR's lousy karma: long-haired and affecting a hippie wardrobe, he slept on a mattress thrown on the floor of a cobwebby upstairs office. His transportation was a rapidly rotting old Buick with no reverse gear and acid-cool poppy decals pasted on the doors. It was such a wreck that even when shut off its engine continued to diesel and the ten-year-old Buick shook violently. Breedlove seemed unfailingly optimistic, as he always was in those years, but to me it was the sad end of an era...President Kennedy was dead...the country was mired in Vietnam..and Craig Breedlove had turned into a flower child.

Even so, the LSR scene continued. No longer was the San Andreas Fault rocking and rolling as it had in the era on Breedlove and Arfons, but the 1970s weren't altogether barren. A Chicano mystic named Gary Gabelich, a friend of Breedlove's, used his natural gas Blue Flame to up the LSR to 630 mph-plus. Then there was Kitty O'Neil , a beautiful and deaf young stunt woman who was supposed to pilot yet another jet to take a crack at Lee Breedlove's woman's LSR mark. But LSR attrition got both of them. Gabelich perished in a mundane motorcycle crash, and O'Neill lost her backing.

What happened next was historically inevitable. The English always have regarded the LSR as their property, and in 1983, at the new LSR grounds in Nevada, at Black Rock, a UK chauffeur named Richard Noble used the power of his Rolls Royce engines to bring the LSR back to its ancestral home. Then, in October of 1997, putting the LSR out of everybody's reach, Andy Green, a former RAF flyer, piloting his Thrust SS, became the first man to break the sound barrier, clocking 763.035 mph. Green set his LSR mark nearly a quarter on a century ago and the San Andreas Fault has been silent ever since.



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