

The Nevada OPEN ROAD RACING SEASON

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When you ask people what images they conjure up when you say "Nevada", they imagine opulent hotels, gambling, showgirls, and celebrity entertainment. When you ask a racer what they think of, the first thing that comes to mind is **Open Road Racing**.

Nevada is one of the few states with 100-mile stretches of highway between towns, rural communities with sparse populations, and a little bit of the old west "derring-do" attitude. So back in 1990, when Indy legend Roger Ward and a group of friends convinced the state to close down a stretch of highway so they could show off their vintage cars, no one thought the request unusual.

Fast forward 15 years; Las Vegas resident Mike Borders acquired Roger's racing business and has turned it into a real race series on closed highways in Nevada. While all this sounds like real racing, in actuality anyone can do this in almost any car. In order to satisfy the state,

the race aspect is down-played; the goal being to average as close to the speed class you've selected as possible. In our case we've been running in the 140 mph class where an average of 139.999 is a winner. But you could bring out your commuter car; run in the 85 mph or 90 mph class just as well. Find out more at www.openroadracing.com

The first event of the season, held in West Wendover, Nevada proved to be even more exciting than we expected. Weather in May can be iffy; nearby mountains were snow covered but we had nice cool temperatures and a starting grid of over 100 cars. Wendover, adjacent to the Bonneville Salt Flats, has all the excitement of Vegas or Reno, yet retains a small town feel as it's not near anywhere—130 miles west of Salt Lake City and 400 miles east of Reno. Other than the Salt Flats, Wendover's claim to fame includes the air base where the Enola Gay trained,

prior to dropping the atom bomb on Japan in 1945. Along with all the history, Wendover is the terminus of U.S. Hwy 93A, 50 miles of which was closed for our racing event. This can be a really fast road; dozens of 130 mph corners separated by 5- to 10-mile straights. And the highlight—running 150 mph through 6500 ft. Wild Horse Pass then dropping down to a 10-mile straight and running flat out at close to 165 mph. But on the return 50 mile run, thunderstorms loomed on the horizon and sporadic rain showers hit part of the course. The above mentioned exciting run through Wild Horse pass was twice as exciting at 150 mph in the rain. Overcoming all this adversity, we managed to win our class with an average of 130 mph.

The next event, held on Hwy 225, running north from Elko, Nevada to almost the Idaho state line was similar in layout; 50 miles north, a brief stop for breakfast and a turnaround run south bound. Weather was improving (meaning hot) in northern Nevada and wind would also be a factor.

Elko, founded as a railroad stop in the 19th

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century, has casinos and restaurants and numerous non-racing events throughout the year. Tourists can enjoy the Basque Festival or Cowboy Poetry gathering without once hearing the sound of an unmuffled V8.

For the 100 racers however, road conditions were a priority. In the high deserts of northern Nevada, the best weather is always at dawn. Temperatures increase and winds pick up as the day goes on. An early start was mandatory; we were 29th on the grid and hoped for cool weather and no wind. That was not to be. While 7AM temperatures were in the 70s, they had already crept up to the high 80s, combined with 20+ mph headwinds by the time we started. So we motored along, unable to exceed 156 mph in the wind. On the return run, with temperatures in the 90s and crosswinds of 20 mph, we couldn't get over 151 mph (4000 RPM in 6th). So, our average was way off; no trophy here but another exciting and trouble free ride.

Then it was on to Battle Mountain, Nevada; once called "the armpit of America" by the Washington Post, It's not a bad place; just a railroad town and truckstop on Interstate 80. The locals are very supportive; the car show in the park draws everyone in town and we raise some money for local schools and service clubs.

This is the longest event of the season; 130 miles of Highway 305, south to Austin, Nevada. Always one of our favorites, this is a great road with numerous 10-mile straights and a number of twisty 100 mph sections. Averaging 140 is always a challenge here as it's necessary to really crank up the speeds on the straights in order to offset all the 100 mph corners. We got some help from one of our sponsors, Superchips, with a new computer program that added some horsepower on these high altitude roads, improving both top speed and mid-range acceleration. Most of Northern Nevada is 5000 to 6000 ft. elevation; not conducive to making

horsepower. Of course, there is a decrease in wind resistance but it doesn't offset the reduced power. But the new programming paid off. We were able to see 165 mph with regularity on every straight and the jump off the corners improved tremendously. The rules in our class mandate not exceeding 168 mph without increased safety equipment and we didn't want to chance a disqualification by getting too close to that. Regardless, we averaged close to 140 and ended our season successfully.

Where do we go from here? Well, we certainly proved that the GTO is a contender and superb high speed road racing car. Now we're going to go faster. Adding Corvette ZO6 parts to get into the 400 hp range and tweaking the electronics, we're now looking at the world production car speed records. We think we can get into the 140s in a standing mile and find top speeds above 180 mph while staying street legal and meeting emissions. Stay tuned!

In Search of 1963 Tempest LeMans "Wampum II" Drag Car

The following is an e-mail exchange between Kirk Bell (searching for father's former drag race car) and Keith Baker (Little Indians Chapter of POCI- '61/'62/'63 Tempest and Lemans). Perhaps some of our readers can help.

I'm just taking a shot here, but I thought you might be able to help. My father, Glenn Bell, drag raced a 1963 Tempest LeMans in the 1970s. The car ran high 10s, and was painted gold with "Wampum II" painted on the rear quarters. He sold it to a guy I only knew as "Tank". I'd like to try to find that car, but don't know Tank's real name or contact info. Might you know who Tank is and where he is?

Any help would be greatly appreciated.

Thanks,
Kirk Bell
773-478-9558
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Hello Kirk,

How exciting that is! I have a couple of pictures attached of gold '63 race cars from Norwalk, Ohio and the 2005 POCI Convention. I don't know who the current owners are but I'm coping several others in this e-mail with the hopes that possi-

bly one of them might know. These pictures may or may not be of the car you are searching for but the owners may know about your father's former car.

The other thing you can do is go to the Performance Years Tech Forum on '63 Tempests and I would bet that somebody there knows of the car if it still exists. The website is www.performanceyears.com and you go to the tech forums link. Then select '61-'63 Tempest and LeMans Tech. You may have to register but that is no

big deal. Then just ask your question.

Best of luck to you in your search.

Keith Baker
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(ED: Nostalgia drag racing and old race car collecting is a hot part of the auto hobby today. Don't forget to also post your questions and needs in the POCI Tech Forum at our web site: www.poci.org.)



Norwalk, Ohio- 2005



POCI Convention- 2005