

Gone Racin' ...To the 2011 Rod Riders car club awards and banquet. Story by Richard Parks, photographic consultant Roger Rohrdanz.

The Rod Riders Racing Team annual club banquet and trophy presentation was held on March 26, 2011 at Don Ferguson's shop in Wilmington, California. My brother David Parks came by and picked me up and we arrived shortly before noon on a cloudy day that seemed like it was going to rain. A gloomy day perhaps, but with several hundred happy land speed people in attendance it turned out to be a very interesting and fun day. There are three Don Fergusons; Senior, who has since passed away, Junior who now owns the shop and his son, whom we affectionately call "The Third." This three generation land speed racing family is one of the backbones of the sport and we would be a much poorer group without their input over the years. In fact, Don Ferguson III is the current President of the Southern California Timing Association or SCTA. The club's history goes back to 1959 (in the SCTA) when Bruce Geisler was elected the President of the club. Over the years the club has included some very unique land speed racers; Bill Burke, Mel Chastain, Al Thayer, Jack Stewart, Bob Kehoe, Elmo Gillette, Mike Cook, Les Leggitt, Jim Lattin, John Helash, Chuck Kalbach, Jerry Bates, Jim Travis and many more influential land speeders. The old shops and buildings not far from the docks in San Pedro and Wilmington added an aura of history to the occasion.

The first person that I saw was Louie Senter. If no one else showed up, it would still be a party worth attending if I could talk to Lou for the afternoon. The founder of Ansen Automotive and founding member of SEMA has just passed 91 years of age and yet he still is young and vibrant and his knowledge of events allows us to learn so much about the past. With Lou is Bob Leggio, who has been underwriting insurance plans for racers for over thirty years and has promised us a story on the business and what he has seen over the years. Others who were there included; Bob and Judy Sights, Dan Warner, Warren Bullis, Alan and Gene Barbee, Al Eschenbaugh, Matt Williams, Tim Rochlitzer, Scrub Hansen, Jim Ludiger, Don Ferguson II and III, Jim Travis, Bill Harris, George Steele, Steve McElroy, Alan and Donna Fogliadini, Ted Bowen, Tony and Chick Hunsaker, Dennis Jones, Jerry Bates, Chuck Kalbach, Linda Vaughn, Nick Arias Jr, Brian Crawford, Don and Jane McMeekin, Tim Crouch, Don Prieto, Doug Kruse, Manuel Maldonado, Bill Fowler, John Richards, Pike Kelly, Vick Mark, Joe Turner, Ron Main, Aaron Cranford, Ian Campbell, Julian Doty, Ray Banks, Doug and Miriam MacMillan, Fred Blanchard, Tom Evans, Jim Miller, Keith Allen, Tom Simpson, Charley Reno, Terry Hagman, Mike and Robert Bell, Ed Stuck, Dennis Piranio, "Weed," Terry Baldwin, Joe Panek, Rody Lindhe, Terry Abercrombie, Ron Kissinger, Tony Baron, Ed Iskenderian, Jack Lufkin, Dale Martin, Ronny Capps, Ken and Carol Walkey, Elaine Cohn, Karen "Naby" Davis and Mark Johnson. There were more coming to the party.

Of course it was impossible to get all the names, so vast was the crowd, but I wanted to preserve this gathering for posterity and so I resharpened my pencil and started to gather more names. I met Monte Osborn, Dave Kennamer, Ron Hayward, David Bics, Tom and Gracie Hope, Matt Doyle, Gary and Kyle Messersmith, Twyna Brauer, Mike, Tracy and Devin Kilger, Bill Kennedy, Jerry, Jackie and Jacob Teeppen, Steve Montrelli, Nancy Roberts,

Sterling and Renee Anderson, Jody Daw, Ron Burke, Bruce Vaughan, Lee Ryan, Pat McDowell, Kevin Lane, Erich Nichols, Jeff Sandin, Randall Foehner, Jerry Clelland, Gordon Foster, Paul Paul (yes, I asked him twice), Gage, Dan, Steve and Kelly Cox, Jim Dincau, Larry McCullough, Dave Donnelly, Hal Donohue, Fred Phillips, Jack Bateman, Christina and Gerry Reynolds, Dave and Bryce Hagen, Doug Robinson, Allen McAlister, Brad White, EJ Verdugo, Tom Vaughan, Ian Baldwin and Gabe Carrillo. Fred Blanchard and Steve Montrelli work for Arias Pistons in Torrance. Some of the best engine work bears their name. Charley Reno is a Gear Grinder and we like to ask him if he was the Reno that survived the battle of the Big Horn with Custer's troops. He's one of the regulars at *Jack's Garage*, a local hot rod hangout in Orange County.

The food line is the best place to get the names as they pass, but I had to remember to work fast and not slow it down. As they passed I met; Roy Akiyama, Chris Castorina, Jesse Holder, Don Stevens, Frank Bussell, Andree Nutter, Erik and Ruth Hansson, Bobby Green, Lucky Burton, Dean Spencer, Nicky Wheeler, Arnold Hoschak, John Meadows, Paul Demeester, Jim Hahn, Ronald Trouble (He spelled it out for me and he was no trouble at all), Robbie Cohn, Tom Sauter, Dennis Baker and his son Dennis Baker II, Larry Henry, Tony Dawson, Adrian Robles Jr and his son Adrian Robles III, Mike and Vickie Dawson, Mike Spacek, Mike Wheeler, Jim Alvaney, Doug Fisher, Jimmy Rossi, Sherry McCarty, Jim, Amber and Bill Lattin, Chris Field, Bob and Annette Barmore, Norm Grant, Cliff Wheeler, Don Zig, Carmen Zig Price, Joe Fontana, Debbie Collins, Doug Prince, Nicole Petrovic, Bob and Diana Nakonieczny and Deryl Rider. Andree Nutter is the ex-wife of Sonny Nutter the Speedway bike champion. Erik Hansson owns Scandinavian Hot Rods in Huntington Beach. Nicky Wheeler owns All Valley Trophies and provides the awards for the SCTA. There were others that came later and I missed getting their names for the story. Mike Spacek is a regular at *Jack's Garage*. Jimmy Rossi is co-owner of the Yeakel Brothers nostalgic dragster. Jim Lattin is a long time land speed racer and car owner. His museum is one of the best that I have ever seen. Don Zig is the famous magneto maker. Joe Fontana makes racing engines that are very fast.

Bob and Judy Sights are Gear Grinders and are always welcoming new members into their club. Linda Vaughn is a spokes model for many companies and is best known as Miss Hurst Shifter. Who can forget Miss Linda on the big shift prop riding down the track at the NHRA Nationals back in the early '50's? She has represented drag racers as their model for years. Al Eschenbaugh is an old time drag racer from the 1950's and '60's. Matt Williams and Tim Rochlitzer brought the food down from the Santa Maria area, which is famous for their barbecued food. Jim Travis built a replica of Suddenly, the Plymouth that set the stock car record at Daytona Beach. Steve McElroy was an important player in boat racing and helped put on the Boat Racers Reunions. Dan Warner and Warren Bullis are long time officials and volunteers in the SCTA. Dan recently did a cameo appearance in Faith Granger's hot rod movie *Deuce of Spades*. Chick Hunsaker and Dennis Jones are pinstripers who gave some of their fine work for the auction and raffle. Nick Arias Jr is an engine and

piston manufacturer in Torrance. Ron Main is a Sidewinder and owner of some very fast streamliners that race at Bonneville. Julian Doty has gone to Board meetings of the SCTA since 1937. Jim Miller and Keith Allen are members of the Dry Lakes Racers Hall of Fame. Jim is also the President of the Society of Land Speed Racing Historians.

It's always a treat to see Jack Lufkin at events. Jack told me that his long time friend from Las Vegas, Lou Madden and his wife were killed in a traffic accident. Lufkin helped my brother set a record in David's Camaro by giving parts and an engine. Jack was Ak Miller's close friend and business partner since the 1950's. Ed Iskenderian is still grinding cams, six decades after he ground his first cam. Ron Capps, the professional top fuel drag racer was present at the event too. Ken and Carol Walkey took their streamliner to Australia in 1995 in a tour called Thunder down Under. Past Rod Rider's president Karen 'Naby' Davis was on hand to sell raffle tickets. Her late husband, Vince, passed away earlier this year. Vince and Naby and Vince's brother J. D. could always be found at the dry lakes helping others in need. The Miller car that won best Hot Rod at last year's Pebble Beach show was on display. There was a digger from the 1960's and a turbine powered streamliner that the Ferguson's will run at Bonneville. Among the awards to be given out were the following; Club top speed (car), Club top speed (motorcycle), Top points car, Top points motorcycle, Al Thayer Memorial Award, Jack Stewart Memorial Award, Rod Rider Annual D/S Award, and the Recognition of Rod Rider Dedication Award. A special thanks to the Rod Riders Club and to their current president, Miriam MacMillan and her board for putting on a great party and awards banquet.



The Eddie Miller car (purple) that won best Hot Rod at Pebble Beach in 2010.



Joe Panek with Gear Grinders jacket on facing away.



Group shot.



Hot rodders in food line.



L toR Jack Lufkin (Ak Miller's partner), Dennis Jones (pinstriper), Jim Travis (car restorer and builder).



L toR Don Ferguson II (2nd from left), Bob Leggio (facing away 3rd left), Nick Arias II (piston maker 4th left).



Far left is Terry Baldwin, car builder and restorer.



Karen Davis standing on left, Doug MacMillan seated at raffle table.

Gone Racin' is at RNPARKS1@JUNO.COM.