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DRAG RACER

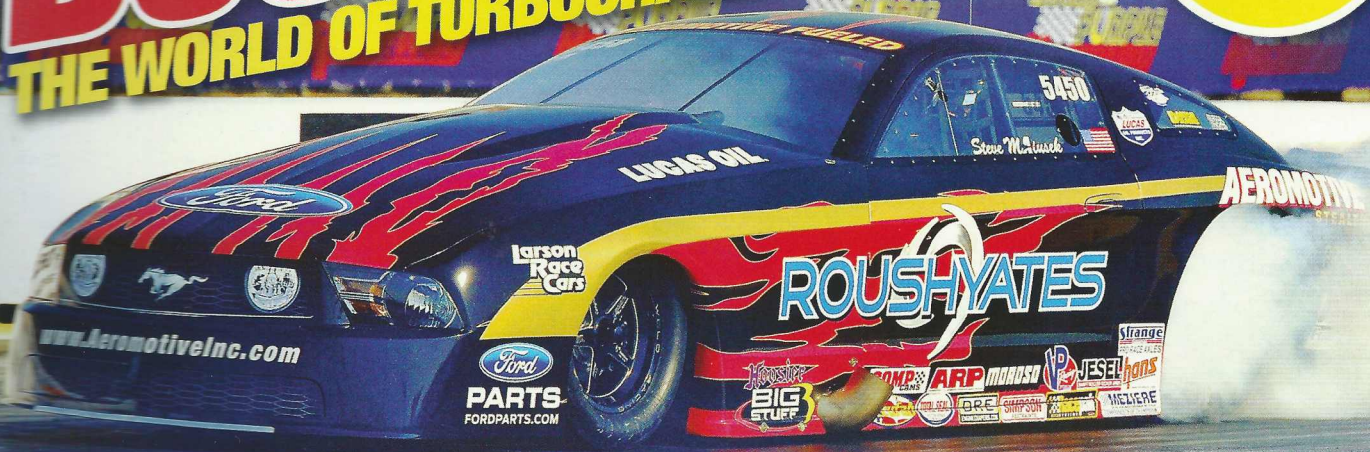
DRAG RACER



BOOSTED!

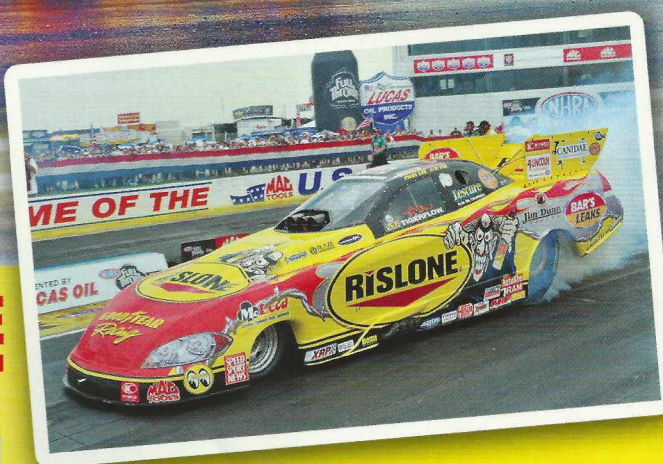
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The Spirit of **Mickey Thompson** Races On



Danny Thompson, son of America's racing legend, is preparing to attack Bonneville with a fortified version of his father's fabled Challenger 2, renamed the Challenger 2.5.

His goal: For the Challenger to be the fastest piston-powered car in the world. The elusive 420-mph mark is his first target.

Thompson's creation last saw the salt in 1968, where hostile weather conditions hampered the vehicle's full potential, limiting its speed marks to 400 mph.

Challenger 2 showcased the talents of some of the most talented fabricators and mechanics of the era. Those illustrious craftsmen included: Nye Frank, Roberto (Bob) Skinner and Tom Jobe of Surfers T/F fame, Quinn Epperly, John Buttera and Pat Foster. Ford Motor Company's skunk works did the aero design work and the project went from drawing board to Bonneville in an amazingly short five months.

Ultimately, Mickey's drag racing fortunes forced a shift of attention away from Challenger. Don Alderson of Milodon fame acquired the racer in 1980, and while in his charge, the late Randy Scovill refurbished it. Mickey eventually regained ownership and it remained in his hands until his tragic death.

Upon acquiring Challenger 2, Danny's goal has been to mod-

ernize it and return to Bonneville. To that end, he's been drumming up corporate funding and assembling a first rate construction/race team. Mickey Thompson Performance Tire, on both the domestic and international corporate level, has become committed to the project. The tire company provided transportation and funding to relocate the Challenger to the Southern California shop of metal craftsman/race car builder, Steve Davis less than a year ago. Dave Hadley and Chip Foose are providing support. Ed Iskenderian has also signed on—for his third tour. Ed was involved with Mickey on the Challenger 1, first with its four unblown Pontiac engines, then for the supercharged versions and now with Challenger 2.5.

On the construction side, Steve Davis, aerodynamicist Tim Gibson, who's been associated with Dan Gurney, John Force and Don Prudhomme and Danny Thompson, also a skilled craftsman and race car constructor, are hard at it, preparing for a 2012 Bonneville record attempt.

Obviously, Danny is still very active in acquiring further funding, but with the support of Mickey Thompson Performance Tires, Hadley, Foose, Iskenderian and Fiddy Alvarez, Challenger 2.5 is a go. Stay tuned for further updates.

By Tony Thacker

Lions Last Drag Race Reunion



Many famous and infamous careers were started at Lions. Here, a very young Jim Liberman—not yet "Jungle"—readies for a pass in Lou Arrington's Brutus GTO Funny Car.



Two legendary names in Lions history are Ivo and Chrisman. Here, the late Jack Chrisman in the Sidewinder leads "TV Tommy" Ivo in his blown-Buick, Fuller-chassied dragster in a 1959 all gas event.

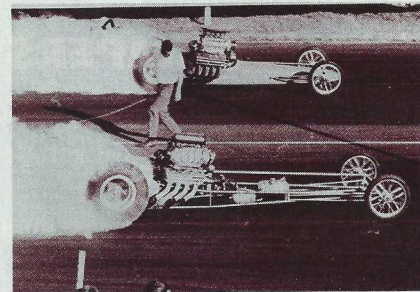
■ Tom "The Mongoo\$e" McEwen announced that he will host a Lions Last Drag Race Reunion at the Wally Parks NHRA Motorsports Museum on Saturday, Dec. 3, 2-5 p.m. saying, "The last drag race at Lions took place December 1-2, 1972—that's almost 40 years ago! We're all getting old, and it seemed appropriate that we should host an event to celebrate what is regarded as the preeminent drag strip known throughout the world as simply, "The Beach."

Lions officially opened on Oct. 9, 1955, actually a few weeks after the opening of another purpose-built strip—San Fernando. *Drag News* described Lions as,

"Probably one of the greatest auto racing spectacles in local history." The place was packed. The pit gates had to be closed, officials had to limit the number of runs and the parking overflowed into the surrounding streets. Track manager Mickey Thompson announced he would double the number of bleachers.

Less successful were the new red, yellow and green starting lights operated by a hand-held switch. It was hoped the new starting system would eliminate anticipated flagman starts. Unfortunately, a lot of drivers had problems with the lights, so starter Ralph Helm resorted to the flags. Nevertheless, some impressive times and speeds were recorded. Fritz Voigt was Top Eliminator with a speed of 131.38 mph, but top speed went to Ed Losinski who ran an impressive 151.26 mph. Low E.T. was 10.54 set by Lloyd Scott driving the Howard and Weiland Special Bustle Bomb.

For more than 15 years, the Beach enjoyed an unrivaled reputation. Sadly, the fun ended when the Los Angeles Harbor Commission decided that it needed the land for development—it eventually became the Intermodal Container Transfer Facility.



Years before they formed Wildlife Racing and not yet The Snake and The Mongoose, Tom McEwen, near lane, faced off with Don Prudhomme in the legendary Greer, Black and Prudhomme dragster in this 1963 Lions contest. Photo by Mike Kosulandich.

The 'Goo\$e, of course, went on to win Funny Car at that last race (against arch rival Prudhomme) and he will be joined in a panel discussion by other Lions Drag Strip notables, including "T.V. Tommy" Ivo, who (with McEwen) arguably made more runs down the Long Beach quarter-mile than any other driver; Pro Stock champion of The Last Drag Race Bill Bagshaw; and long time starter Larry Sutton.

Hot Rod DeLuxe Magazine Editor Dave Wallace will moderate saying, "Fascination with 'The Beach' only seems to increase the further away we get. I'm really excited to moderate this discussion, which I expect will be lively given the panelists."

Joining Dave and the racers will be other personalities from Lions, including Gordon Browning, who discovered the location, and track manager Mickey Thompson's wife Judy and son Danny. All this for just \$25 per person. For more information about the Lions Last Drag Race Reunion, visit Wally Parks NHRA Motorsports Museum website at Museum.nhra.com or call 909.622.2133. **DR**