

Rodder's Journal

PUBLISHED for the CUSTOM CAR and HOT ROD ENTHUSIASM

'55 Nomad Surf Wagon | Angel Hair Car Shows | Nailhead & 409-Powered Hot Rod



The Kessler Roadster

\$15.99

22>



0 73361 97180 7

UNFINISHED BUSINESS: Danny Thompson Attempts to Complete his Father's Legacy

It's been over five decades since Mickey Thompson charged across the Bonneville salt flats at over 406 mph in his Challenger I Streamliner. A broken driveshaft on his return run prevented him from officially claiming the land speed record, but 32-year-old Mickey's accomplishment, made possible by his homegrown ingenuity and hot rodding roots, instantly cemented his status as an American hero. Now his son, Danny Thompson, is trying to do it again. And he's doing it in a car his dad originally built 44 years ago.

Mickey constructed the Challenger II Streamliner in 1968 with the singular goal of finishing what the Challenger I started. By that point the bar had been raised to 409.277 mph by brothers Bob and Bill Summers in the Hemi-powered Goldenrod. The Challenger II was gunning for better than 409, but weather conditions prohibited Mickey from running in '68, and the Streamliner was parked for the next 20 years. "In 1988, we decided to run that car together," Danny explained recently. "It was supposed to be a father-and-son thing. Then less than a month later he was murdered." He's referring of course to the fateful March day when Mickey and his wife, Trudy, were tragically gunned down in a murder-for-hire plot orchestrated by a former business associate.

Danny Thompson's list of accomplishments within the world of competitive motor sports is impressive in its own rite. He has enjoyed successes in everything from land speed trials to motocross and sprint car racing. But he has always wanted to fulfill his dad's dream of breaking the piston-powered land speed record, and about a year ago he set the wheels in motion to do just that. Partnering with veteran racecar fabricator Steve Davis, the two dusted off the old Challenger II and began the arduous task of updating a 44-year-old Streamliner to compete at the highest level.

"It's probably easier to start from scratch than to do what we're doing," Danny says. "Because this car takes so much engineering to re-do everything, Steve Davis is just one of those guys that you hope you could get involved. I'm lucky that he said he wanted to do it." The original 4130 chromoly tube frame is being modified extensively to accept updated components like, among other things,



Acclaimed automotive designer and illustrator Chip Foose penned the rendering of Danny Thompson's re-imagined Challenger 2.5. Much of the original sheet metal work will remain intact, though it will be modified to wrap around the driveshaft that now runs down the left side of the Streamliner. The illustration's perspective makes the cockpit look like it is positioned further back in the frame, but it is actually almost dead center, with twin 500-inch Hemis mounted just in front of and behind the driver. Danny recently commented, "It's pretty cool to sit inside a 3,000 horsepower sandwich!"

an innovative new steering assembly designed by Davis and two mid-mounted, injected Hemis. The 500-inch motors are capable of producing an estimated 1,500 horsepower each. Danny is hoping that will be enough to propel the Streamliner to 420 mph, breaking not only the standing unblown record of over 414 mph, set by Charles Nearburg in 2010, but also the blown record of over 417 mph. "At the end of the day, I want to be the baddest man there," he laughs. "The classes don't make much difference to me!"

Aero Consultant Tim Gibson is responsible for designing the bodywork, which will incorporate the original 42-piece aluminum skin into a slightly longer package. Other than the added length and a blister running down the left side of the body to make way for the new driveshaft, the body that was originally used will remain largely intact.

Much like the original Streamliner, the success of the Challenger 2.5, as it has been renamed, has relied largely on Thompson and Davis' personal resources, with Mickey Thompson Performance Tires and Wheels being the only major sponsor. "I'm writing sponsorship proposals in the morning, then welding and chasing parts all day," Danny says. To help supplement their efforts, they created www.thompsonslr.com where T-shirts and posters can be purchased and donations can be made. "My dad accomplished so many things, but the one thing he didn't do was officially get this record," Danny continues. "To finish something that my dad started and to keep it in the family is just so cool to me."—Curt Iseli

The Streamliner is currently under construction in Steve Davis' shop in Huntington Beach, California. The body stands just slightly over three feet tall at the canopy, and although the bones of the original Challenger II were retained, the car was lengthened 32-inches from its original configuration, making it over 29-feet long. As evidenced by the condition of the paint and graphics on the original aluminum nose and body panels, the Streamliner unfortunately did not see much action before Mickey Thompson's untimely death in 1988.

