

The NHRA's Hot Rod Heritage series' closing California Hot Rod Reunion is often referred to as a "gathering of geezers," celebrating the past and paying homage to legends of yesterday. On the other hand, the series opener is living testimony to those NitroOutlaws who fought for glory at the original Bakersfield Smokers' US Fuel & Gas Championships in 1959 and those since who've turned the March Meet into a legend that continues to grow as the faithful gather each year hoping to add thundering new performance marks to its powerful legacy in keeping with its go-for-broke, NitroFueled origins, all dreaming of winning a coveted March Meet trophy at Famoso Raceway, and returning to win the CHRR and even the Heritage series' Championship!

words & photos
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Adam Sorokin (whose opening shot of 2019, a 5.85 clicked off to 209.49 put him second in Q1), has ticked off a few of those boxes. He won the March Meet in 2010, a lifetime after his dad Mike drove the legendary Surfer's AA/FD to victory at the 64-car Saturday show of the 1966 March Meet with an all-time low ET of 7.34 – and then won Top Eliminator the next day! (Chris Martin Top Fuel Handbook) Tragically Mike was killed in a 1967 crash. With a [5.63 low ET](#) at CHRR 2010 Adam became NHRA's Heritage Series Top Fuel Champion, and was also [runner-up in the rain-delayed finals](#) held at Pomona. In 2012 Adam drove Champion Speed Shop's unique AA/FD canopy car to another Heritage Top Fuel Championship when this ground pounding burnout from his

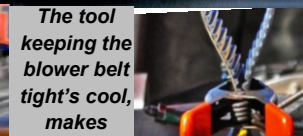
block Chevy led to this super hole shot to win the title! He also got a huge lead in the final, but his engine expired, Rick Williamson getting a first CHRR Nostalgia Top Fuel win.



Les Mayhew's [multi-camera mix](#) of Adam Sorokin's 5.67 in 2014

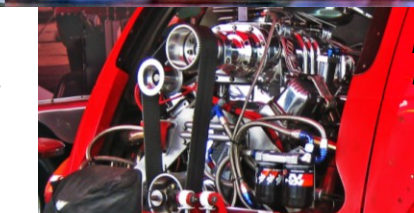


This 2015 shot is one of my favourite Top Fuel images from Famoso 'cos it's not only got NitroFire aplenty, the cherry red glows above the headers are kinda weird!



The tool keeping the blower belt tight's cool, makes sense too!

Adam's holeshot lasted 'til his throttle cable broke, the flames went out an' the other dude won! But the NitroThunder shook the ground; NitroFire filled the air behind that wild wheel stand an' we all went bananas! Talking of which, I'm hungry, let's go back to the future and check the menu...



Never seen a trunk full of power like this before, or one of these gizmos either, but I bet Dave has! It definitely beats Gunk and wire wool!

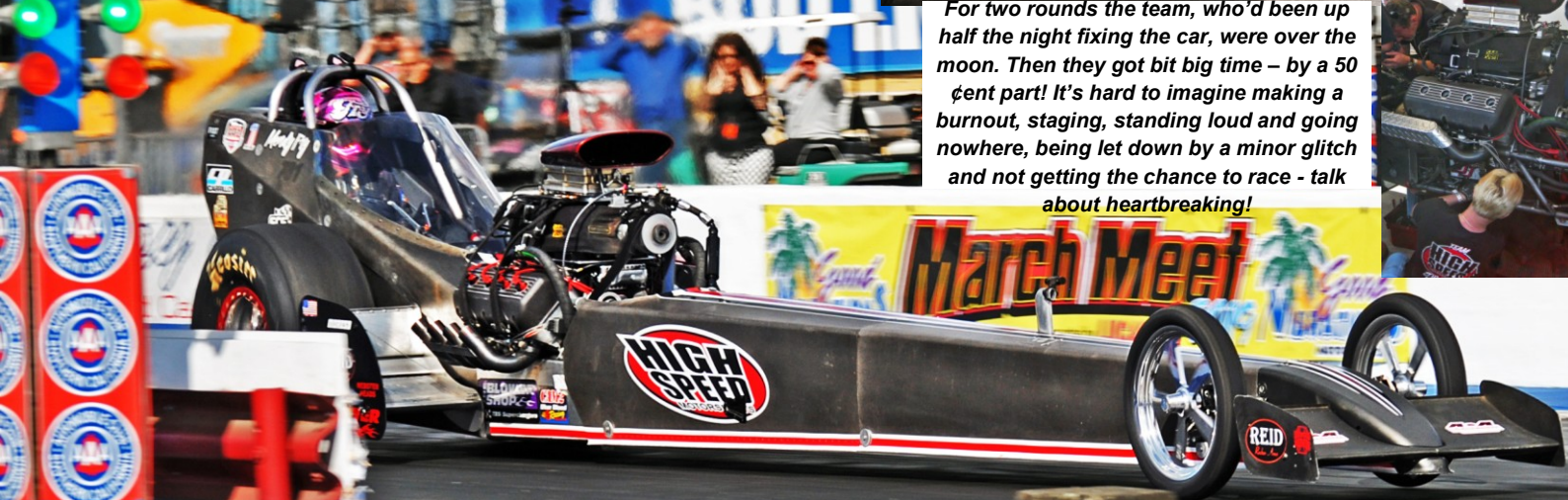


Actually, apart from that 21st century, let's-make-things-easy cylinder bore honing tool (and power-packed PT Cruiser), it was almost a case of same ol' same ol' in the Top Fuel pits with crews busy taking care of first run attrition. With Bret Williamson's 5.736 at 250.74 and Adam's 209.49 the only runs above 200, you know there was plenty of work to do! This young lady busy cleaning parts ready for the engine rebuild caught my eye or rather her tee shirt, "Top Fuel Intern," I read the logo out loud, adding "Wow, that's really cool, sounds like fun." She turned, smiling; "Yes it is, thank you," hardly stopping work as I moved on, not really thinking about it at all, noticing that the DeWALT power tool had done a great job, the block now ready to be filled an' fitted for battle. And even on race day, Mendy was still getting down an' dirty...



After two rounds of Sunday racing Adam Sorokin'd only eclipsed his Q time once, with a 5.834, 212.76 in round two, while NitroKitty set new NTF records in round one with a 5.518 at 265.43, and then a blistering 5.490, 259.71! Wow what a buzz, with fans and her High Speed crew going nuts, including two Top Fuel interns, bearded newbie Matthew and Alanna, now the team's bottom end babe, a clutch dust queen with a great attitude who told me drag racing had changed her life...

For two rounds the team, who'd been up half the night fixing the car, were over the moon. Then they got bit big time – by a 50 cent part! It's hard to imagine making a burnout, staging, standing loud and going nowhere, being let down by a minor glitch and not getting the chance to race - talk about heartbreaking!



Happily most NitroRacers know that drag racing's never been easy, most of 'em, especially Champions, bounce back with bigger smiles, and keep on keeping on...

Let's lighten up with the wildest PT Cruiser ever!



We had hopes for a good close side-by-side shootout, but to see the High Speed car not even move when the lights ran and Mendy stood loud was kinda cruel for all.

Adam dedicated this 2nd March Meet win to his father. Enjoy the AAFD Eliminations from ComPlusTV

As the quickest, fastest AA/FD pilot on the planet Mendy's plenty to smile about! Click to see her win Beech Bend in June, and enjoy some special magic from NitroKitty!

Nitro Mike kept fans happy, sparking the 1320 on his rear wheels!

Nitro Mike's 2018 full show at night!



The "almost" at the top of the last page was from meeting four Top Fuel interns – a name I'd never heard of before, learning about them while chilling out in Mendy Fry's High Speed pits where Alanna told me she'd begun last year as an intern out of Bakersfield College, was now full time crew and looking forward to the 2019 Nitro Tour. She laughed a lot too, and that was really cool, given she'd been working hard following the first two explosive runs that Mendy had made. Here, she's set to pull off her start line shirt, ready to check things after their last pass while Mendy's husband Cole shows ol' Nitro Nostrils the visible damage. Soon after the Top Fuel finals, Champion Speed Shop's other intern Dwight pushes his two-time March Meet winning boss back to the pits.



Shortly later, Diana and Matthew were both taking care of business with their team mates at the end of four long days, but apart from the High Speed team's late night thrash on the Saturday, I doubt their days were as long as Famoso's media head honcho [Kleet Norris who was busy live on TV at 6.09am Saturday](#) promoting the race with the temperature a chilly 37degrees, and the warmth and the light was long gone when he handed out the race trophies on Sunday! Sometime later I learned the [internships began in 2018](#) by Champion Speed Shop owner Bob McLennan who put the programme together with Bakersfield College auto shop tutors using the Jim McLennan Foundation created to honour his father and [Champion Speed Shop founder](#), who incidentally also drove

[the world's fastest Chevrolet in the 1960s!](#) As we've seen, the Intern's program was back again thanks again to the Jim McLennan Foundation, Bakersfield College, Auto Club Famoso Raceway, and AAFD teams with whom 20 select students were placed to discover the highs and lows of drag racing with our favourite old school, fire-breathing Top Fuel dragsters! Wow, they certainly did that at this year's March Meet no matter which car they were with, but those with Adam and Mendy shared the best and worst NitroFueled experiences in a wonderful weekend – all thanks to the program, how lucky can you get! All the Interns also get a course credit - that's super cool too! Now let's enjoy some FamosoFunder, except the heavy-duty cameraman's definitely – but folks on the Ferris wheel are having fun...



Jana was pulling double duty as "handsome hubby" Brad was also racing RE/TF

And ol' Nitro Nostril's living it up too with his - and race fans, long time favourite back-up babe AA/FC's Jailbreak Jana.



...especially when the jet cars lit up the night!



Brad won this match with a 6.17 at 224, but the Mike's Transmission car lead the RE/TF trio with a 5.98, 243.77



Smokin' 'em at the hit, and still wide open!



Okay, it's AA/FC time – both of 'em '69 Camaros! Bobby Cottrell's left lane 5.66, 256.65 beat Kris Krabill's troubled 6.59 in E3. Time for a Fuel Coupe, all-action MegaMix...

Rookie Jerry Espeseth's first race in Jason Rupert's '69 Camaro saw hole shot wins (0.072, 5.747, 237.17 to a 0.150, 5.774, 253.66 in E1), E2 an' E3, but smoked 'em in the finals against the swoopy Bardahl '69 Camaro!



With Nostalgia racing I prefer Fuel Coupes to look "real," but I've nothing against swoop-mobiles that have back-up babes like Heidi! Click to enjoy her walkin' the walk and 2018 Fuel Coupe thunder from Les Mayhew's NitroAmerica

Central heating perhaps as it was chilly!

Ryan Hodgson's Castrol car was the first swoopy '69 Camaro I saw, its 5.64 took pole at the 2015 CHRR with a new NHRA nostalgia AA/FC speed mark of 262.28 mph, the 4th member of the Legends of Nitro 260 MPH Club. Click to enjoy ComPlusTV's "fast-paced" recap of [Fuel Coupe eliminations](#)



Jason Rupert's 262.03, 5.668 at March Meet 2012 was the first, and he also won a 2nd straight Heritage Series



Racing legend Rodney Flournoy's wild '71 Crazy Horse Mustang



Rian Konno's fine lookin' '73 Mustang was 6th with a 5.746, his 5.810, 247.93 losing to a 5.813, 213.94 holeshot from Stephen Densham in E1



Jeff Utterback's '74 Vega went down to Dean Oberg's '67 Jeep in E1



On race day Wes Morris' failed to answer the call for E1

Matt Melendez Cacklin' Rose's 5.691 at 242.32 was 2nd quickest in E1.



Billy Morris got his first NHRA Heritage Series round win with a [17.843 at only 46.10!](#)

1969 Camaros again and ex-sand racer Billy "the Kid" Morris cuts a great 0.029 light behind Tony Jurado's blistering 5.53 at 229.51 with an 0.318 red light!

FamosoFunder will continue...