



In truth it began on Wednesday, but ignorance is bliss, and cruising at 625mph almost 7-miles high in a smooth-as-silk Air New Zealand 777, sipping champagne and rewinding my mind back through earlier visits to California I was more than just blissfully unaware! First came a mini-mind-movie on the 2<sup>nd</sup> Manufacturers Funny Car Championships held at Orange County International Raceway in 1968, a track where Gene Snow's 205.46mph "Rambunctious" Charger (first AA/FC over 200), and Don Schumacher's 7.38 Stardust 'Cuda held the records at the first US race I'd covered, happily in the UK, as images of 24 fuel coupes were followed rapidly by a flashing title "Fog Foils Funnies at OCIR!" Actually, it was said that the fog "rolled in," and there's a fog monster "rolling" down into the valley like a run-a-way juggernaut to obliterate the forest in seconds! Not joking folks, shortly later another fog monster rolled out of nowhere on US395 to engulf my wagon! Cruising blind for almost a few hundred feet was not much fun - imagine being hit by one at 200mph and it's easy to understand the race being called! Then it rained before a 3rd attempt saw the race dominated by Mopar; Snowman was fastest at 204.08 and Rich Siroonian's 7.48 quickest in Big John Mazmanian's 'Cuda and Team Mopar won the Manufacturers title. Their low ET cars raced for the big buck\$ in the final with a 7.50 putting Don Schumacher next to Siroonian who made two smokey burnouts to Schumacher's three. Stardust left first, the Candy 'Cuda coming on strong, a 7.61, 191.82 taking it in the lights as Stardust went up in smoke, broke a drive shaft and blew an oil seal for even more smoke! A great memory, but my 21<sup>st</sup> century trips had all been blessed with sunshine - and far more powerful racing in every sense, so it was easy to fast forward my mind, return an ANZ smile and enjoy being rewarded with a fresh glass of bubbles tickling my nostrils and easing the search for magic memories to bring pleasure to even the most jaded reader, slowing to a gentle cruise at NHRA's 2010 California Hot Rod Reunion where 37 fuel coupés fought for the right to race for gold and glory, a hard task as it became the quickest ever field of Nostalgia Fuel Coupes at Famoso! But my search engine'd locked on to thoughts of Jungle Jim who'd won the first round at OCIR back in 1968, sliding to a stop during a Sunday morning pre-race Cackle as Jungle's Nova was fired up - and Jim's son Randy was in the hot seat! My mind's eye filled with the images you see here, the Champagne tasting really fine (my friend Claire pouring a glass during my flight to the 2012 race), my new pal Jo's team keeping me topped up en route to Famoso in March! Having met Randy earlier I'd discovered he'd only recently learnt of his late father's iconic status, so it was easy to shoot the car, move back, enjoying sweet sounds and tastes of nostalgic NitroPower filling the air until quiet returned, moving in low under the car to find his eyes filled with tears, mine too, but nitro induced, his from something far more personal, Randy's grin a mile wide when asked how it was, shooting from the hip as he laughed around, "It was this big!" All I said was "That's cool," with a silent "Thank you," sent on high! The CHRR is all about reunions so after presentations at their reception, I'd visited with Linda Vaughn chuckling around, "Bet you can't remember last time we met Linda!" "Don't be silly Michael, Maple Grove, Pennsylvania 1988," leaning over to kiss me. Always knew of her magic memory, but to enjoy it in person, wow! Later she came over to our table to party for awhile, and I "stole" her smile from Bob Muravez's delightful wife Sharon's shot!

words & photos  
mike collins



In JJ's Nova Clare Sanders won NHRA's 1st Winternats Funny Car title in 1969



# Fuel Coupe Fever



Chutes out or wide open, Nostalgia Fuel Coupes rule, especially at Famoso!



The top qualifiers at CHRR 2010 launching hard - both car owners, Jason Rupert far left, and Bucky Austin made March Meet finals in 2019! Teacher's Pet made the semis in 2010, but blew up big time in 2019 as you'll see again later! J'st love that Nitro Boss '69 Mustang...



Watching Leah win NHRA's Hot Rod Heritage Series with power launches like this and that smile was so cool, and when she won the CHRR with her 5.82 low ET that (with her 32car March Meet win seen LIVE on BANGshift.com!), gave her a Triple Crown, a feat unique among Famoso racers - wow! But the CHRR was far more than just racing, there was a virtually nonstop serenade of power from seemingly countless blown an' injected NitroFueled motors being fired up and Cackling during the sun filled days, with the icing on an amazing cake being Saturday night's CackleFest, itself unique in size to Famoso as moving time capsules covering our drag racing heritage paraded down the track before being push started, fired up to drive back leaving a trail of NitroFire alongside fan packed bleachers, then swing round to line the track's quarter mile length, slowly filling the air and our nostrils with the sweet aroma of NitroXhalations from fire breathing power plants. It was a never-to-be-forgotten experience, and man it felt fine having the good fortune to be there and enjoy far more ground pounding NitroPower in one weekend than during a lifetime at the Pod, with many magic memories that live on forever! Here're a couple of true legends that really wowed the fans...



California dreaming?

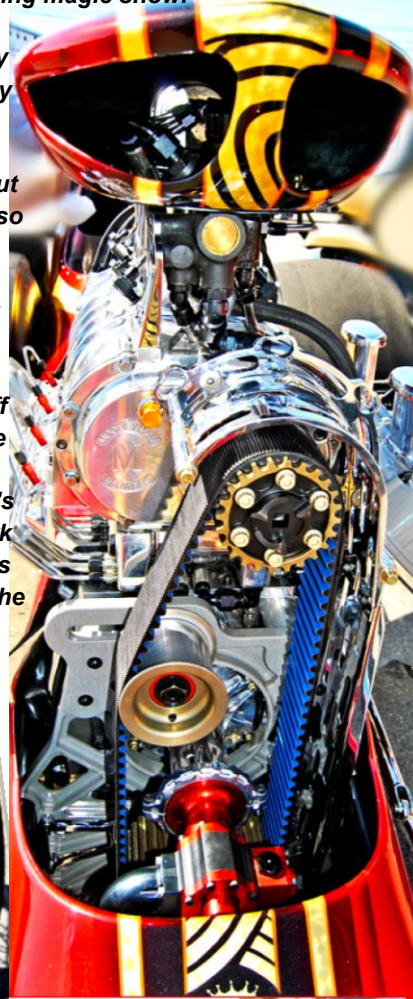
You bet, can't wait for October and more fun at Famoso

Most serious drag fans have heard of the legendary Bean Bandits, but to see the car push started by hand was an amazing thrill, albeit tinged with sadness as the memorial pass prior to the Cacklefest was in honour of driver Joaquin Arnett, one of drag racing's true pioneers who'd passed a couple of weeks earlier. Back in 1953 the team went 142.98 at Santa Ana and ran an 11.08 second quarter mile at Pomona that noted historian Robert C Post lists amongst the "First reliable ET's" in his much-lauded High Performance, a book that all fuel car fans need to read at least once, and then again later! The Masters Auto Supply Dragliner Chevy-powered C Gas Dragster (NHRA's Nitro ban folks!), is less well known; "painstakingly" recreated by the original team of the late Dode Martin (Feb 2018 at 92), and Jim Nelson (May 2012 at 84), who won the "Best Engineered" award at NHRA's 1957 Nationals. More than the swoopiest ride in town, that canopy means definitely no bugs in your teeth! As for the NitroFire, well we got lucky there too as 2010 was the first all "push start" only Cacklefest, it ran smoothly all the way, seemed to go on forever, which was cool! Any thoughts of counting cars never came to mind, didn't take many photos either, being too busy enjoying the moving magic show!

Apart from watching 37 fuel coupes going balls out in the last chance power drive of the final Q session, the top 16 racing for glory and gold a couple hours later, my biggest thrill was Friday evening, soon after a first sight of Tom Hanna's incredibly beautiful 21st century AA/FD created by the legendary '60s builder in 2002,



its candy red repaint, gleaming in the afternoon sun just stunning, but a few hours later I squat down oh-so close to this amazing machine, its body twitching, NitroFire dancing on its pipes, my world going crazy as Tom hit it hard, unleashing the fattest wings of NitroFire I'd ever known, their power lifting my body off the ground as he lit 'em big about five times for mind blowing NitroNirvana! It's still hard to believe Tom Hanna's gorgeous masterpiece, a true work of art, produced such outrageous NitroPower to lift me clear off the ground, stunned and reeling when I tried standing!



Seen from the dark side on Allumina's clip, the view is stunning!

Our view of the red car's awesome display was bright lit by the motel, but Xtreme closeness gave me a unique off-world experience - WOW!







Midnight Madness Moments after enjoying Mendy Fry's August 16 Spokane win I was saddened to learn High Speed's tuner and owner Tom Shelar passed away on August 22. Condolences to his family, friends, Mendy and her High Speed team. God speed

Famoso's top [NitroWarriors in action](#); 2018 NTF Champ Mendy Fry in the quickest AA/FD on the planet (5.49 and 5.51, 265.43), shows how to launch any fuel car - wide open, floating the front wheels! Two-time March Meet winner and NTF Champ Adam Sorokin pounds the ground with an ol' school burnout in the world's baddest small block Chevrolet!



To illustrate DragRod's feature on OCIR we used this powerful shot of TV Tommy Ivo's Showboat Buick station wagon funny car, a replacement for his 4-engine dragster with its stunning body featuring the work of 2010 CHRR Grand Marshal, the Tin Man Tom Hanna buried in smoke, reason enough for a 21<sup>st</sup> century colour shot! Here's the [ever-young TV Tom showing how this amazing car works](#), and taking it out for [one last drive to celebrate his 60<sup>th</sup> birthday](#) at Indianapolis in 1996!



Photographer unknown DragRod archive



twm1340 photo courtesy wikipedia.com

In drag racing's world of extremes you can't get much further away from the visual splendor of Tom Hanna's red car than Don Garlits' super long fueler, seen here in 1968, chasing a win and pouring on the "Pachyderm power," the other story with "Fog foils funnies at OCIR" on my first US racing page for DragRod, but they were both built with a single purpose in mind...



Photographer unknown DragRod archive

"What's Pachyderm?" they asked, "An elephant," my response. "What's that got to do with drag racing?" Well folks, the all new 426 hemi became known as the elephant motor, so I notched it up a tad! However, Big built his new rail to win races, which it did, and Tom built his red car to Cackle with more than a little style, and a better job than most any day as his AA/FD runs a 16 US gallon fuel tank! The Greek, Chris Karamesines' 7.59 and a 220.58 track record led 14 of the East Coast's finest fighting for a spot in an 8-car field. Big was close behind in his all-new Wynnscharger at 7.64, 214.24 (he had the 7.07 ET record), and TV Tommy Ivo had the bump at 8.19.

Ron Rivero's Frantic Fueler hole shot the Greek, a 7.51, 216.86 beating Chris K's 7.35, 220, then got an easy pass when Marvin Schwartz red lit, Don Garlits' new low ET 7.28, 220.04 put down TV Tom but he had to change a buckled rear wheel, and also the diet for his Elephant, nitro down to 76%! Fans got a good side-by-side race to half track, then Pachyderm power came on strong, Big Daddy storming ahead to win the money, retain his title of East Coast Fuel Champion and eat the Greek's day old mark with 7.36 at 223.32 to Rivero's 7.58, 215.30. What you might call a great day at the races for Mr Garlits... Me too at the March Meet this year, especially when my AA Fuel Zippo was fired up on a unique blend of 100% "quickest & baddest" California-Nostalgia Nitro! The earlier 98% writ as the aroma of my UK gas additive used to produce tall NitroFire seen at left lingered; but with more than a year since its last outing, we know it was PurePower that looks cool too!



The Greek hit the loud pedal as I fired the Nikon, NitroPower from ChiZler's weed burners trying hard to knock me over, the shot coming too low to capture his smiling eyes! But being that close was cool, so I hunkered down and enjoyed...

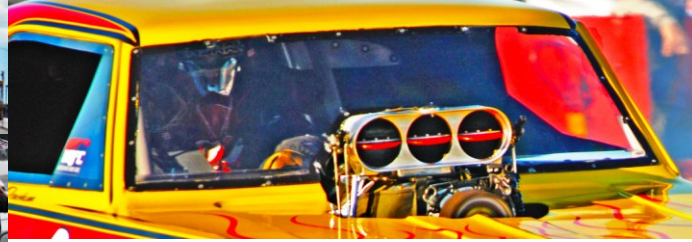


Bumping into old pals at Famoso is always great, but the best buzz in 2010 was meeting the Mongoo\$, Tom McEwen, who I'd been writing about since w-a-y back, and seen him race his Coors Corvette and his '57 Chevy nostalgia Fuel Coupe's record setting pass. He looked up as I introduced myself, speaking over his shoulder with a grin, "Hey check out the cap this dude's got on," chuckling as he turned, adding "Where d'you get it?" "1987 in Ennis, Texas Mister Mongoose." "That's cool, but where d'you get it?" His chuckled louder, adding quickly, "You sure do talk funny." "Yeah, the guy gave me it said the same when he'd invited me into the Coors suite." Mongoose shrugged, turning to a guy stepping from the trailer with a laugh as he said "Now you know why I never made money," shaking his head, wearing an even bigger grin as he turned back, holding out his hand which I shook as he said "Nice to meet you Mike." We talked some, he signed the cap, complete with the \$ sign instead of an S, leaving me very happy to have finally met the legendary man who we all miss. Had a similar buzz asking about a March Meet cap as "My first drag race was the same year as the March Meet's." It got a smile and "I was a teen when I first came to it," with a grin added before, "Now I own the race," turning with a chuckle and, "Here y'go, the last one." "Mister Bowser," I exclaimed, "Wow, I've wanted to meet you for years..." "It's John," he interjected and we chatted on for awhile. More than a few famed signatures have been added since the Mongoo\$, the last two being John Bowser and his super tall media man Kleet Norris, who's also one super cool dude too...





Time for some Xplosive fuel coupe thunder from 2019's March Meet that for many of us began when the first NitroFueled car fired Thursday, kicking off an action packed session you'd not believe especially a while later when the 2<sup>nd</sup> pair of Fuel Coupes got green lights, and it went on and on, sheer magic that still has me shaking my head with awe, I mean come on, NitroNirvana on a Thursday afternoon! Then I was told fuel cars raced on Wednesday-WOW! Nearly missed the first pair, but got close enough to feel 'em thunder away, shooting this wild Nitro Nick paint from the hip in passing. Got lucky like Shakedown's Bill Windham, his wild wheels up launch a tad late, clicking off early and being way behind the Nitro Nick car when [it made a violent left turn](#) and got airborne, spiralling like a dart before touching down, making a mess of the paint amongst other things! Happily its driver Matt Bynum was well shaken but not too beaten up! You'll find the full story with film at [CompetitionPlus.Com](#). There's no doubt about it, when a fuel coupe lets loose the results can often be devastating to put it mildly. Sometimes it doesn't happen 'til way down track, often it's kinda quick, one moment it's wide open, a perfect launch carrying the front left, yet in an instant, like next frame - KABOOM! Just a millisecond from a full bore money run to oh boy, there goes the budget, and Shakedown's violent explosion lifted the body up inches - you could feel it! But not like Bill Windham during [Friday Fuel Coupe qualifying!](#)



Courtesy Andy Willsheer

Jim Maroney, driver of the cool Cajun 'Cuda said the [body launching explosion](#) was "like a shotgun blast" with no load, j'st k'boom! Ouch!



Courtesy CompPlus TV & Magic Dry



Time for a little light relief for guys and gals, with thanks to Heidi, the Masked Man and our hard working extras!

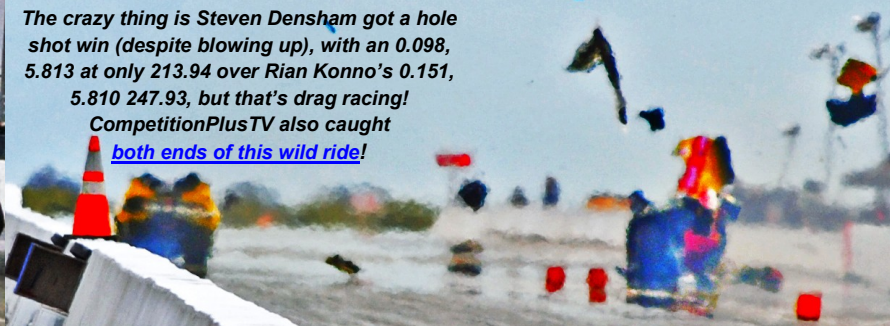
Bakersfield, land of country music, pick-up trucks, back up babes an' boys - and [Fuel Coupes at Famoso!](#) Click to enjoy [ComPlusTV's-AA/FC](#) race day coverage! Courtesy Rodney Flournoy's Crazy Horse and Bucky's Auto Service Centers



The Teacher's Pet Camaro was always my #1 best looking 21<sup>st</sup> century NFC Camaro! Known for the wide open, nose-high launches beloved by all Fuel Coupes fans, but not this type of ending! Happily Stephen's okay, but the budget's shot. Let's hopes the Densham team make it back, maybe with extra funding to ease the load...



Andy Willsheer photo courtesy Street Courtesy Machine fine-tuned by mc



The crazy thing is Steven Densham got a hole shot win (despite blowing up), with an 0.098, 5.813 at only 213.94 over Rian Konno's 0.151, 5.810 247.93, but that's drag racing! CompetitionPlusTV also caught [both ends of this wild ride!](#)