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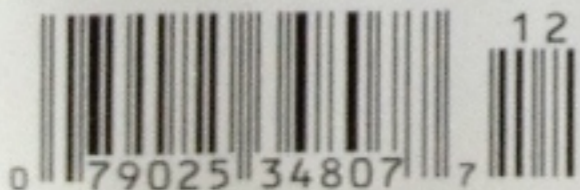
250 MPH ON E85!

MICKEY & DANNY THOMPSON REUNITE IN SPIRIT AT BONNEVILLE



DECEMBER 2008
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HOT ROD WHERE IT ALL BEGAN

"These two cars took the same path. The original car was purpose-built for NASCAR, the FR500C was built for road racing, and both were converted for the Salt." —Brent Hajek



Mickey Thompson's **Historic Mustang** Returns to the Salt With a (Faster) Younger Brother.

By Rob Kinnan

Photography: Randy Lorentzen

40 YEARS ON

▶ Isn't this one of the baddest Mustangs you've ever seen? Check out the old-school shackles for tire clearance.



In July 1968, Mickey Thompson and his crew ventured to the Bonneville Salt Flats to set records. Only this time they didn't bring along multiengine streamliners; they brought three Mach 1 Mustangs. As you'll read in Bill McGuire's fantastic story on the man right after this feature, Mickey was the epitome of a goal-oriented person, and one of those goals was to set a slew of national and international endurance records in a production car. Ford gave him its blessing, along with three cars and engines, and Mickey set up a 10-mile oval course on the Salt Flats for his attempt.

Always the promoter, Mickey convinced HOT ROD Publisher Ray Brock and *Sports Illustrated* writer Bob Ottum to co-drive—and then obviously write all about it in their magazines. Rickman shot it for the cover of the Oct. '68 issue of HOT ROD, and Brock wrote a three-page story on it titled "At Least I Got My Name on the Door."

The cars were originally built by Holman Moody for NASCAR's Baby Grand American series (that ran limited races and featured ponycars). Mickey converted them to run on the Salt and gave each a different engine configuration based on the records he was going after. The hero car was the yellow one, powered by a Tunnel Port 302 from Ford's Trans-Am-series race cars. This is the one that would be driven for the C Class (183 to 305 ci). The red car was powered by a Tunnel Port 427 from the NASCAR program and ended up being used for test runs to get familiar with the Salt surface. The blue car also had a 427 Tunnel Port, but it was configured to run in a straight line. Strangely, in Brock's story there was no mention of the blue car, even though it was shown on the cover.



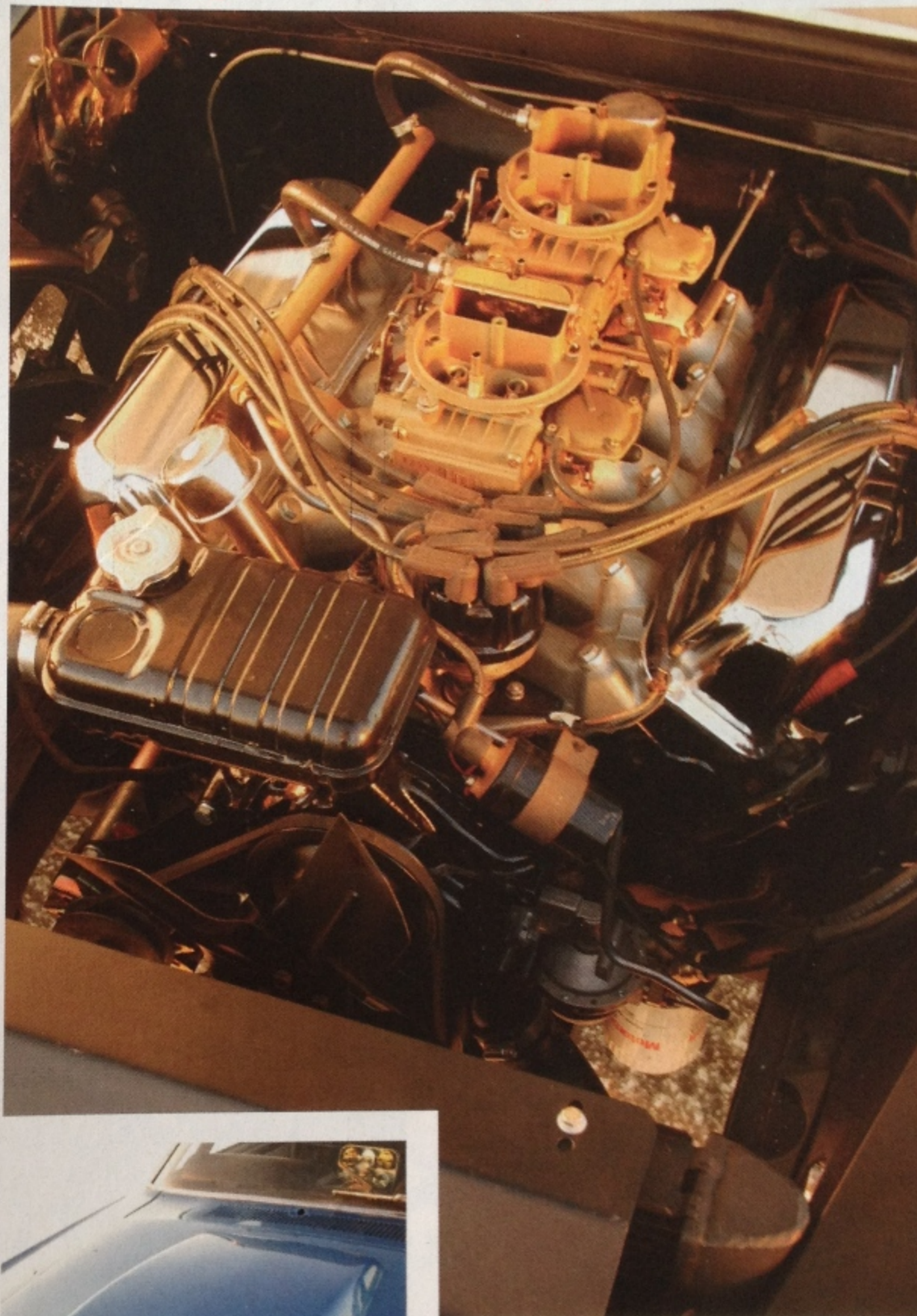
> Mustang fans will notice the '68 dash insert steering wheel and seat paired with a '69 dashpad. The lever sticking out of the trans tunnel, below the shifter, was used to engage the Hone overdrive unit used with the blown 427. The car supposedly ran well over 200 mph with this setup, but no official timeslips exist.

Brock and Ottum drove the yellow car for a little bit, but the main shoes were Mickey and Danny "On the Gas" Ongais. Mickey originally planned to set the 24-hour endurance record, but a combination of bad Salt conditions (which caused lots of high-speed spins) and some fairly minor parts breakage made them call it quits at the 500-mile mark, at which point they had already broken every Class C record in the FIA books (except for the 24-hour ones). The yellow car averaged 159.556 mph for 500 miles. The red car was to go after Class B, but the Salt would never have allowed it to run fast enough, so they shelved the idea.

A return to Bonneville a few months later found much better Salt conditions that allowed them to run the yellow car for the full 24 hours, where it averaged 157.663 mph, while the blue car (now injected and blown) grabbed 27 Class B (305 to 488 ci) records on the straight course, the fastest of which was 188.812 mph in the flying 1 kilometer. The USAC record book shows the blue car's records coming on September 15 and 16, 1968. When they were done that week, they had racked up an amazing total of 295 speed and endurance records.

After Bonneville, the three cars went back

"We discovered a lot of unusual parts and found out it was a prototype '69 Mustang built in late '67/early '68, making it one of the first '69 Mustangs built." —Brent Hajek



> Bonneville Salt Flats, September 1968. Note the big Roots-style blower and mechanical injection sticking through the hood.



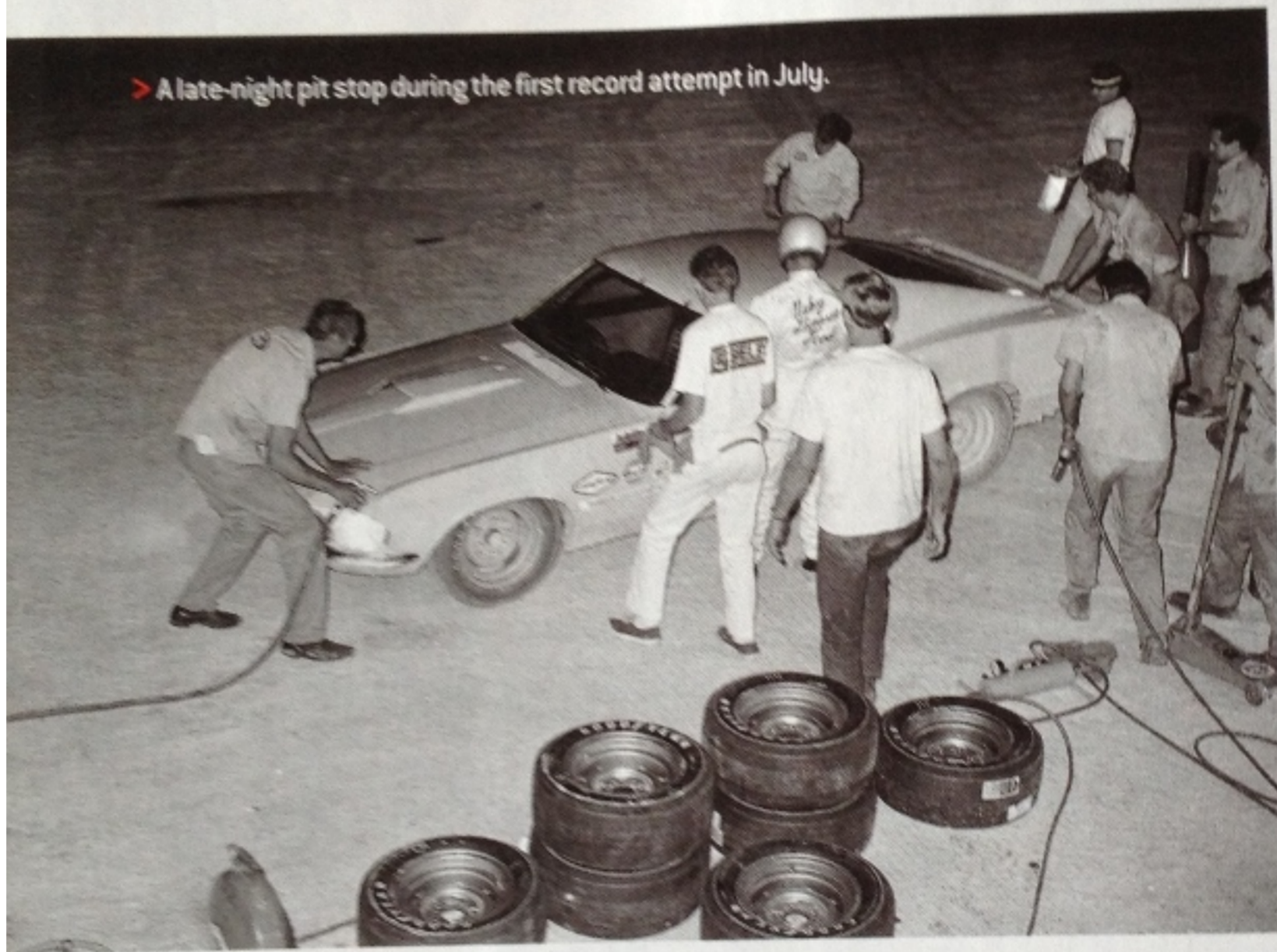
> Above: The blue car is once again powered by a rare 427 Tunnel Port engine with a pair of Holleys.
> Left: The hole in the hood was to clear that supercharger that went on the car for the return trip to the Salt. The prototype boss 429 scoop covered it.

to Dearborn, Michigan. The yellow one has disappeared, probably a victim of just being beaten to death on the Salt, but its full-race small-block stayed in California with Mickey. The red car is a mystery but appears to have been raced, and wrecked, by Bobby Allison at some point. The blue car eventually made its way back to Mickey for some development work for Ford, which we'll get into later, and has stayed in the Thompson family all these years, owned by Mickey's son, Danny. It was stored in Danny's shop in pretty much exactly the same condition as it left the Salt in 1968, minus the engine. One day, while researching a book on Mickey's life, Brian Pain saw the car and knew what it was. Danny did too, obviously, and mentioned that he was thinking of selling it to send his kid to a good college. Brian called his pal

"There weren't any date codes on any of the body panels, the motor mounts didn't fit the 302, and there was a bunch of other stuff that was just plain mysterious," Brent says. With a big Mustang show in town, Randy gathered "all the Boss '9 and Mustang gurus that were there," according to Brent, and brought them to his shop to help decode some of the car's history. It was agreed that the Boss 429-style hood scoop (sans any part number) was an early prototype. The team also had paperwork dated September 4, 1968, canceling a NASCAR 429 Mustang build by Mickey Thompson (it wasn't referred to as a Boss 429 yet). Brent called famed race car builder Pat Foster, who worked on the land speed project for Mickey back then, and he remembered that Ford had sent "some motor with weird valve covers" to put in the

"We shot the cover at dawn and the sun shone under the car. It was really weird going around the circle at night with the lighted smudge pots fading off to your left in the distance. Danny [Ongais] never lifted his foot, all out all the way. A great ride." —Eric Rickman, HOT ROD photographer, who shot the original record attempt, and HOT ROD's cover, in 1968

> A late-night pit stop during the first record attempt in July.



> The end of the July attempt, stopped at the 500-mile mark. He just set a bunch of records, but you can see the dejection in Mickey's face. Notice HOT ROD Publisher Ray Brock's name on the door, hence the title to his Oct. '68 cover story.

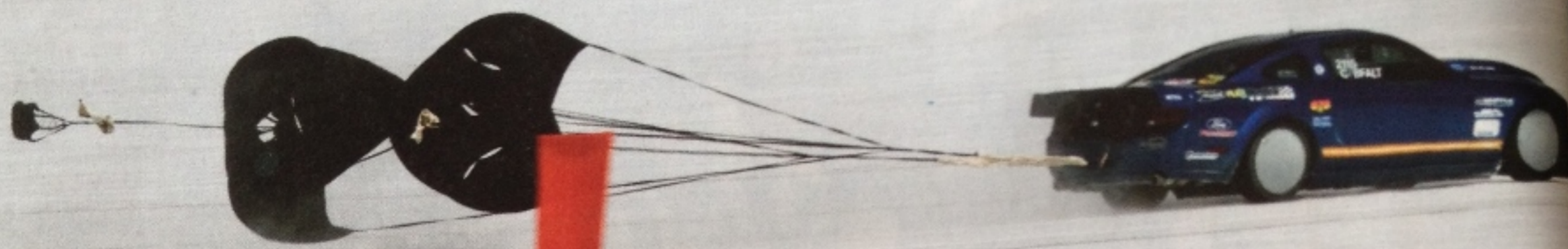
Brent Hajek (pronounced *high-ek*), Oklahoma oilman, corn farmer, car collector, and certified good ol' boy.

Hajek has a collection of historic, championship-winning race cars that will absolutely make you faint. As soon as Brian called, Brent knew he had to have the car and struck a deal with Danny. Danny wasn't sure what engine had originally been in the car, so he included the Tunnel Port 302 from the record-setting yellow car in the deal. The car was then sent to Mustang specialist Randy Roberts at Muscle Car Restoration in Owasso, Oklahoma, for restoration—which amounted to little less than sticking an engine in it—and during the process some interesting tidbits popped up.



40 YEARS ON

"It was a really bitchin' deal."
—Danny Thompson



> Here's the new car coming down from a 250-mph run after Danny pulled the chutes.

car and test before Ford canceled the project and took it in-house. So, you're probably looking at the very first Boss 429 Mustang ever assembled, as well as possibly the first '69 Mach 1 ever built. Quite a history on this little mule, huh?

In 2006 Brent and Danny took the car back to Bonneville to assist in filming a promo of the movie *Gearhead* about Mickey and had a ton of fun showing the car. A few months later, Brent was at a Barrett-Jackson auction, and the first Ford Mustang FR500C Boy Racer went across the block and got huge money, cementing it as a collectible. Brent had to have one, and through conversations with Ford Racing, the idea to make it a modern version of Mickey's old '69 race car germinated.

The FR500C is a road race car, so Brent sent his new toy to Holzman Race Cars in Wichita, Kansas, to convert the 'cage to SCTA specs and get everything ready for land speed racing. After that, it went to Snapp Fabrication in Hennessey, Oklahoma, for aerodynamic work. Snapp took it to Ford's wind tunnel in Michigan and, with help from SCTA's Mike Cook, aero'd the thing up for Bonneville. As that was happening, Paul Svinicki at Paul High Performance in Jackson, Michigan, was building the engine, an E85-fueled, 1,000hp 5.4L DOHC Ford GT mill with a big Ford Racing/Whipple blower. The trans is a stock Tremec six-speed that came in the FR500C (with a Spec clutch), and the rear is a Moser full-floating 9-inch.

Last August, both cars made the trek back to the Salt, with Danny set to drive the new one. The '69 car was there for inspiration and to make the first, ceremonial pass down the Salt to celebrate the opening of the 60th anniversary of Speed Week. After that, attention turned to the new car with the goal of being the fastest production E85-fueled vehicle. The record for the class they were in,



> The road race FR500C 'cage needed some readjustment to meet SCTA's specs, which were handled by Holzman Race Cars.

> The engine is a 5.4L based on a Ford GT engine, and it uses the stock block, crank, and heads, but good Oliver rods and Diamond pistons. A 3.4L

Whipple supercharger sucks through an Accufab twin 80mm throttle body and burns Rockett Brand E85 fuel to make 1,000 hp at the rear wheels, at 8,000 rpm. The headers are from JBA, and the oiling is a Petersen dry sump with Paul-made beltdrives, adjusters, brackets, and so on.



40 YEARS ON

C/BFAIT (C for the engine size, B for blown, F for fuel other than gasoline, and ALT for Altered) was 246.4 mph.

"We didn't think it would go that fast. Running in a fuel class, with other cars on nitro, we were taking a pee shooter to a bazooka fight," Brent says. "But we wanted to be the fastest on E85." Brent is a corn farmer, after all.

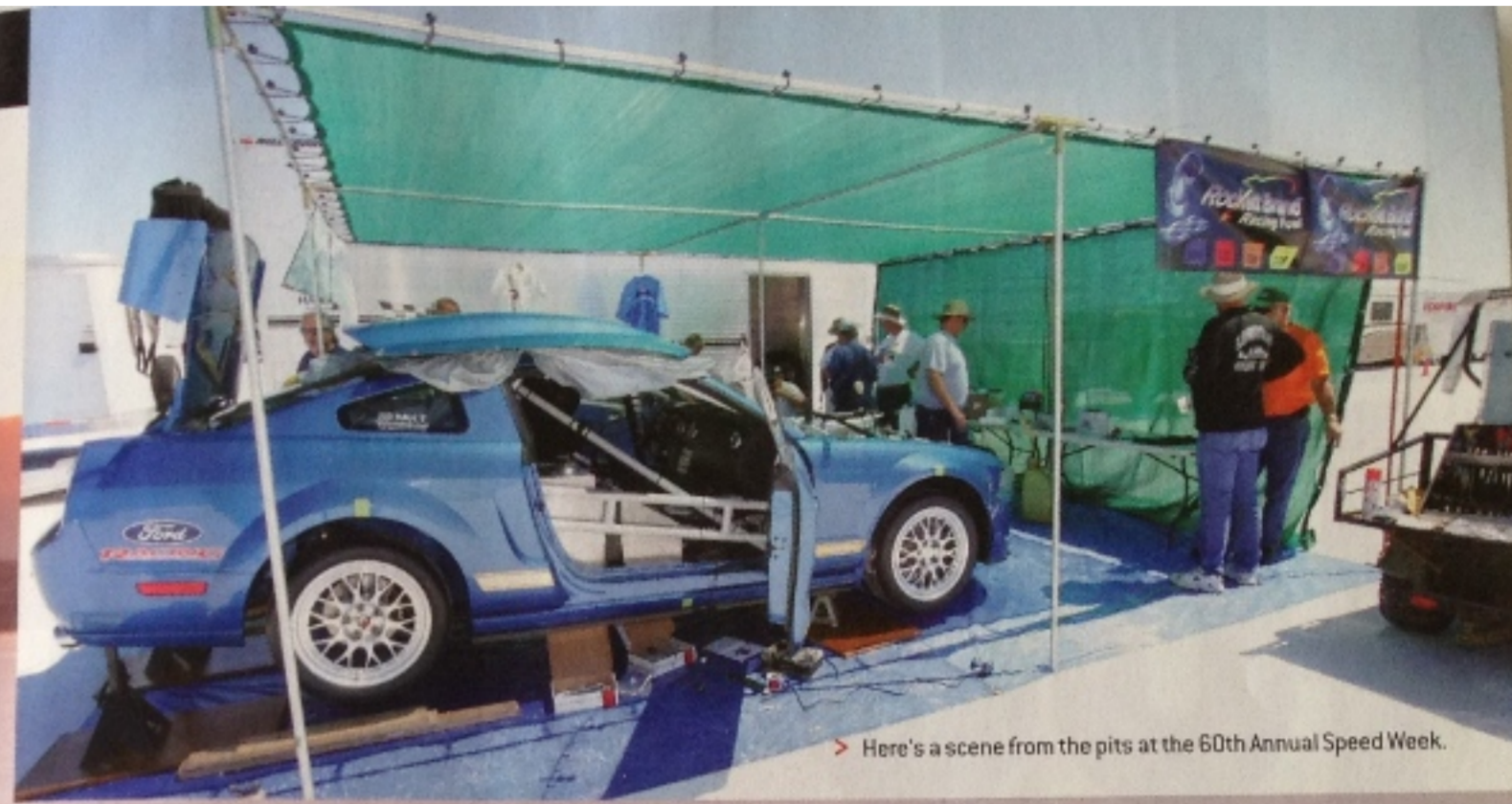
Since it was a new car, the SCTA required Danny to run 175 on the first pass. He ran 174.9—close but not close enough. The next pass was faster and qualified him to run on the long, 8-mile course (5 miles up to speed and 3 miles to shut down). The first pass at full speed was a 245.9, just half a mile per hour off the record. It didn't qualify them for a shot at the record, but the next run of 251.7 mph did. For the record (backup) run the next morning, Paul put the screws to it and everyone crossed their fingers for a big number—but something in the motor let go and they were done. They broke the record but didn't set it.

More significant than the record, though, is what the effort represented: This year is the 60th anniversary of the Bonneville Salt Flats Land Speed Time Trials, the 40th anniversary of Mickey's original attempt, and the 20th anniversary of Mickey and Trudy Thompson's tragic death. This is quite a pair of cars representing quite a group of people, and the story's not over yet. Brent doesn't want to let the cat out of the bag, but we think some more high-speed antics are in store... and not necessarily on the Salt.

> Top right: Power is only half the game in land speed racing. Plenty of time was spent in Ford's wind tunnel to make the car as slippery as possible. Notice the blocked-off grille and front bumper cover/air dam/splitter—no mirrors either. One neat thing shown here is the single driving light—the yellow car had a single high-intensity light [in addition to the stock outer headlights] for night driving.

> The crew, from left to right: Rick "Fish" Fisher, Patrick Quirk, Paul Svinicki, Ronda Svinicki, Mike McGuire, Brent Hajek, Danny Thompson, Carl Rokle, Britt Mayfield, Chuck Henderson, Rick Hernandez, and Glenn Snapp.

HRM



> Here's a scene from the pits at the 60th Annual Speed Week.

