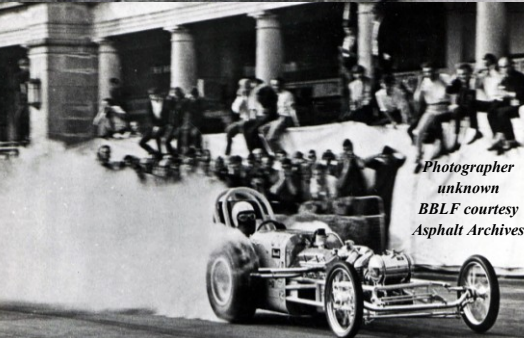




Wet an' windy, but the topless "VIP suite" was perfect to shoot from, the vista a far cry from my shot above...

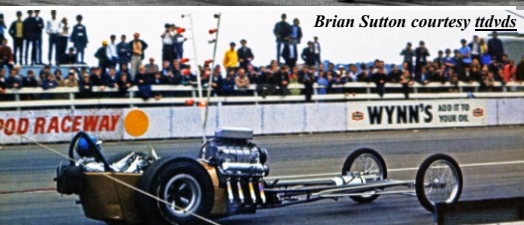


Timekeepers kept dry two floors below - unlike race fans lining the wet track as the Owen, Hicks & Lingard's Purple Heart dragster suffers a carb fire during Santa Pod's first drag race on a wet an' windy Easter Monday in 1966.



Photographer unknown
BBLF courtesy Asphalt Archives

Brian Sutton courtesy [tidvs](#)



Shortly later it was reborn as the Golden Hind, coughed down track and vanished again...

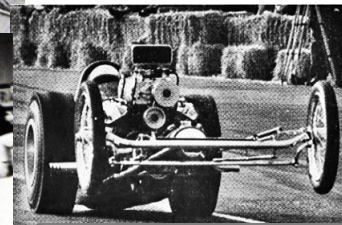
Duncan Micallef thundered to his first FIA Top Fuel title for Rune Field Motorsports and Malta in 2017

This was once the pits and we parked in the fields - just like today!

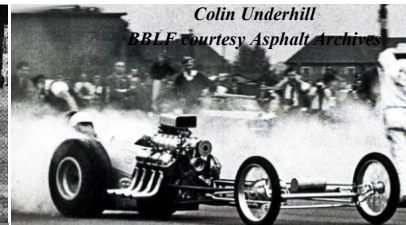


Unless noted all mono photos
John Bennett DragRod

Harold Bull's Stripduster leads the pack above, ready to make the first pass on the quarter mile. On that day, Tony Densham won Top Eliminator with a 12.32 at 122mph. Later in the year Harold won in the wet running the skinniest tyres in town, a far cry from those used by our 21st century thunder cars - in 1966, nowt at the Pod came close. Actually that's not quite true; their latest resident was a genuine AA/FD! More than that, it was Mickey Thompson's historic Harvey Aluminum Special, the first nitro burnin' fueler ever to pound the ground here in the UK after crashing the party at Brighton's famed Speed Trials and blowing the minds of our staid ol' school sprinting officials by telling 'em "You're doin' it all wrong!" Then he unleashed more power than ever dreamt of by visitors to the quite seaside town, his big bad blown 427 fueler thundering down Madeira Drive like a screaming banshee with wheels high in the air! As you can see, the fans seem to be in pain from the less powerful Mooneyes (below left), so heaven alone knows what happened when Mickey T blasted by! Following that short tour laid on by Sydney Allard to race Mooneyes, which he did once at a media day held at Silverstone, Mickey T collected the trophy for best performance (8.84 at 178mph) and then vanished leaving his car behind. The USAF (who brought the fueler over courtesy a high-ranking pal), couldn't take it without paperwork, so it too vanished! Until a story appeared in the April 1965 Drag Racing saying they'd found the "once proud dragster" in a "two-car garage" suggesting it was more than just a mess



Autocar photo Xtreme crop
1964 Brighton Speed Trials programme



Colin Underhill
BBLF courtesy Asphalt Archives

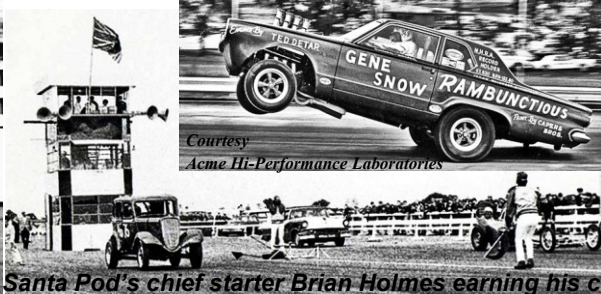


Drag Racing magazine 1965

In 1966 the car was rescued and parked unceremoniously at the Pod, looking as if someone just ran out of road - and cleaner too!



Brian Sparrow
courtesy [tidvs](#)



Santa Pod's chief starter Brian Holmes earning his coffee!

No balls-to-the wall AA/FD's perhaps, but we now had a proper VIP suite, a Christmas tree (that often malfunctioned!), and side-by-side dragsters! Talking of which, Juggernaut, the first car I fell in love with, raced as a dragster (like Gene Snow's awesome Rambunctious FX over in the NHRA), 'cos alteredds didn't exist in the BHRA! As did the Rat Fink team's Wild Thing and Liquidator with back-seat drivers and Jag power. To me and many fans the latter was the toughest of the Pod's first generation Fords. Our original Outlaw Anglia perhaps as, after opening its door, RAC scrutineer Capt. Tom Hales found a naked power plant with no firewall fitted - it did not pass! Much of its macho appeal came from that top chop, and don't forget we're talking 1966! But the Larry Arnold driven Lawman Pop was the real deal, its low-down, set-back hi-winding 327 fuel injected V8 Chevy producing low 10-second ETs that wowed all the fans - wish I'd been there!

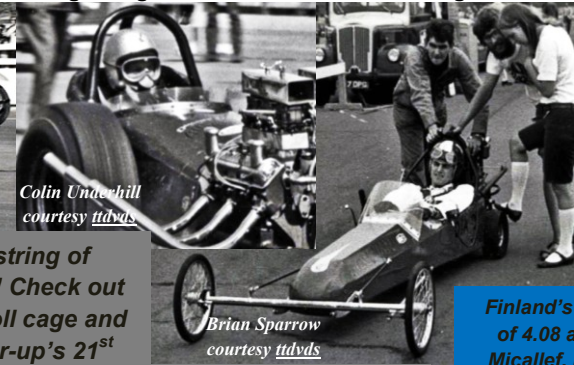


Brian Sparrow photo courtesy [ttdvds](#)



Ron Fisher photo courtesy [ttdvds](#)

Hole shots have always been cool, a big ol' Chevy getting out on Cliff Jones and a true gentleman, Gerry Tyack, puts his 427 Cobra way ahead of Al Eckstrand's Lawman Dodge Charger with its King Kong 426 hemi in one of 1966's great match races - missed that too!



Colin Underhill courtesy [ttdvds](#)

Brian Sparrow courtesy [ttdvds](#)

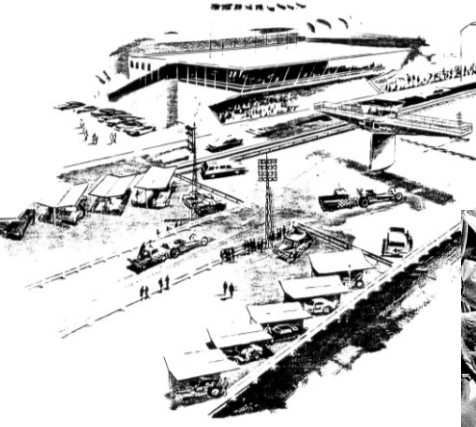


When Bootsie Herridge tipped the can Pulsation ran a string of 10s, his 10.68 and 129.37 records lasting through 1967! Check out the difference between Bootsie's open faced helmet, roll cage and leather mask compared to the 2017 FIA Top Fuel runner-up's 21st century kit! Even more so Tony Gane's diminutive Rudge powered Wicked Lady, BHRA's championship winning dragster (crewed by Dennis Priddle), it's a far cry from fire-breathing 21st century monsters, with the top two in the 2017 FIA Top Fuel title race dukin' it out below.

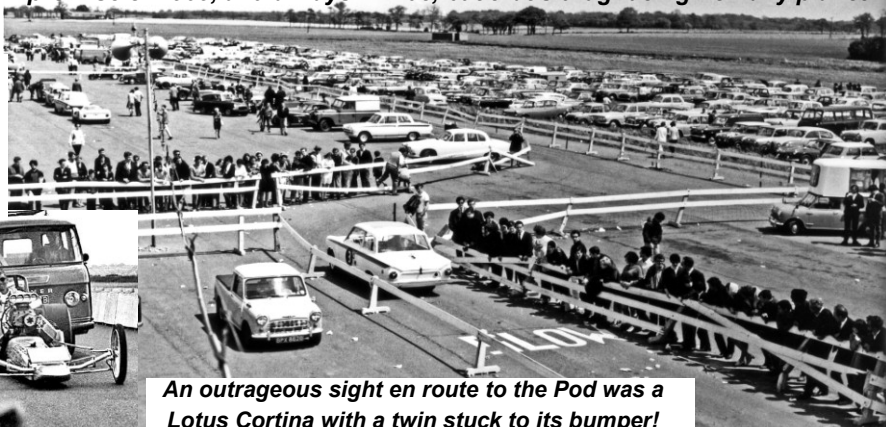
Finland's Antti Horto in the zone! He set low ET of 4.08 and hole shot RMF teammate Duncan Micallef, but the Maltese Lion drove on by - set top speed at [303.78 in E1](#) and won the FIA title! (At 6.54 in the [SantaPodTV](#) clip, the only full pull in eliminations before rain stopped play!)



1967 saw a new Christmas tree, we were blessed with lots o' sunshine, and thanks to our old pal Albert Einstein, we enjoyed close, exciting side-by-side racing - but the race at left is maybe not quite as thrilling as today's NitroFire filled action!

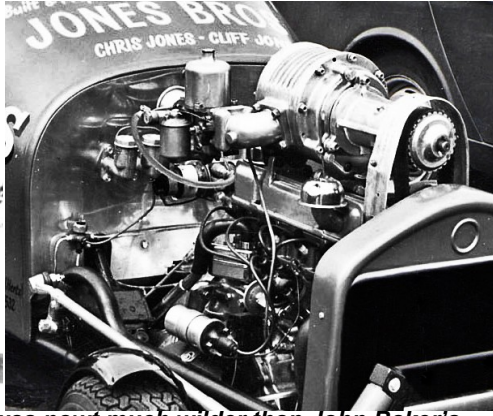


Let's not forget Bud Barnes - fans loved the Pod's original Nitro Messiah



An outrageous sight en route to the Pod was a Lotus Cortina with a twin stuck to its bumper!

I thought they were racing, but it was the Lotus race car above being towed on a short drawbar by its road going brethren! To this day such a sight has never been matched in my eyes. This was the wildest Austin Ruby I'd ever seen! Guaranteed to offend purists, it's well set-back blown Jag power unit helped the driver literally bounce down track! Actually, sometime later it was redone in a violent yellow that made it kinda scary! Much like the set-back on that V8 Hushabye at right, but you know it helped weight transfer on the launch! Opus One was new from the Jones Bros - using a freshly released Opus HRF, a £199 glass roadster body with a tube chassis that Chris and Cliff somehow managed to make seem full with a tough looking blown Cortina engine that started the rod off on an amazing journey...



Mark's driving...

In 1967 I got to drive one, Mark Stratton's Hustler - truly a wild ride! Photographer unknown BBLF courtesy Asphalt Archives



There was nowt much wilder than John Baker's Stormin' Stude! Filled with Cadillac power, its modified nose no doubt upset folks that thought the Hawk a classic! But that's their problem, like Jack Daly's in his rocket kart. Unlike Slam'n Sam's sophisticated system, this dude's ride didn't quit 'til his Turbonique ran out of fuel, then it began to slow down! In the wet, you gotta be kidding!



At the other end of the scale, the toughest set of wheels in town was Keith Sales' Megalomania, but it was too f*ckin' heavy - pardon the unintentional pun!

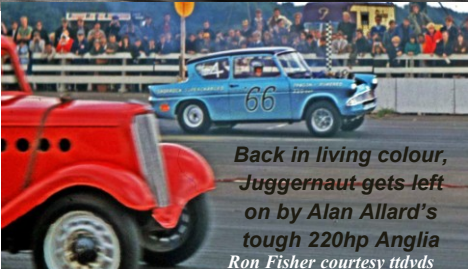
We also had some real thoroughbreds come visit, like this rare pair - a cool Ferrari and a swoopy Aston Martin, and Gentleman Gerry Tyack came back with this wild Porsche, scaring everyone when he missed a shift. Why, you might ask - well, he was pulling max rpm at the time and the resulting banshee scream was wilder than Mickey T's down in Brighton! Talking of which, much of his AA/FD was back, cloaked in a swoopy FGR body that wore a name,



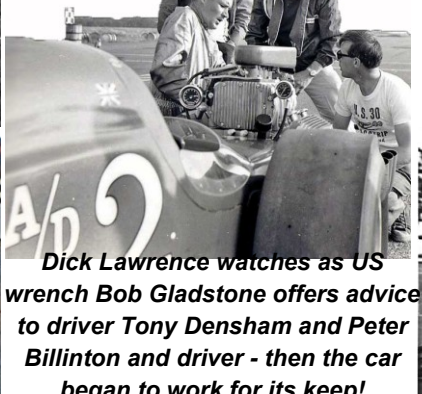
The Commuter!



When they fit a set of injectors to John Wachter's big 396 the awesome machine came to life and pounded the ground in style, but it was still too fat - in the negative sense. Bob Rose's McLaren turned up on a trailer and many jeered, then they spotted the tax disc! Yep, it was a genuine 100% street machine. Megalomania won a bunch of races, it also had a ton of bad luck as this shot attests - after this giant hole shot on the oh-so-low McLaren, disaster struck, but then we all know anything can happen in a drag race...

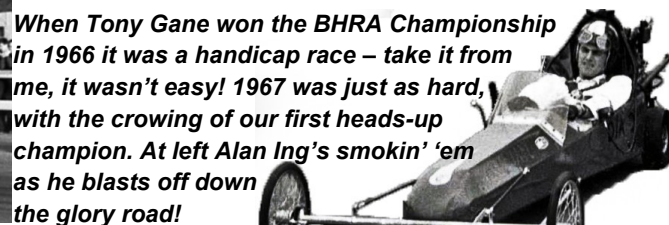


Back in living colour, Juggernaut gets left on by Alan Allard's tough 220hp Anglia Ron Fisher courtesy ttdvds



Dick Lawrence watches as US wrench Bob Gladstone offers advice to driver Tony Densham and Peter Billinton and driver - then the car began to work for its keep!

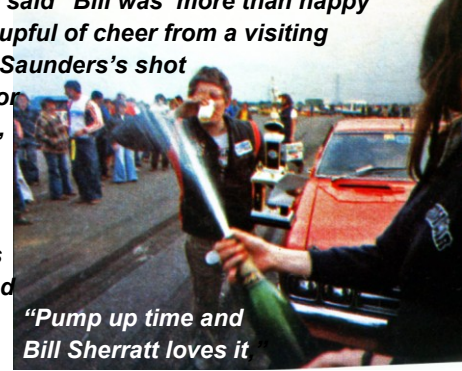




Late the night before, he sent a crew member back to base for a spare block so he could answer the call on race day – it arrived eventually, but it was untested! As you can see below the engine survived,



When Tony Gane won the BHRA Championship in 1966 it was a handicap race – take it from me, it wasn't easy! 1967 was just as hard, with the crowing of our first heads-up champion. At left Alan Ing's smokin' 'em as he blasts off down the glory road!
Alan ended up taking the title and getting a kiss from our trophy girl. Bill Sherratt, who I first met when we drove north to visit New York Raceway in 1979 for their Street Racer Championship, won it and didn't get a kiss, but as my next Hot Gossip said "Bill was more than happy with a big pot, 250 quid and a cupful of cheer from a visiting Southern Belle," seen in Steve Saunders's shot spraying bubbly for race sponsor CC. Bill's Vauxhall Ventora won, it's nitrous'd small block Chevy ran a best of 12.78 at 112mph, kinda cool on street tyres!
Couple of years later, Wild Bill's ET's were halved, speed doubled in winning the first Cannonball in the car of the same name!
These pix are here as I'd heard that Bill Sherratt had gone to Florida



"Pump up time and Bill Sherratt loves it"



with the winner of the [DialAFlight](#)-donated trip from last year's BDRHoF gala. Oops! Bill was there alright, seen with grandson Adam Clayton who's been hangin' with Terry Haddock's American Flowtech Top Fuel team. DialAFlight's package including car hire, hotel and VIP hospitality at Kalitta Motorsports (wow!), went to Antony Noble, who took his best friend Will Sherratt – shown on the wall at right! Seems they both crew on Wild Bill's gorgeous AAFD cackle car too – and you know they had an absolute ball when Richie Crampton put Connie K's Kalitta Air/DHL fueller in the [Gator's winner's circle](#) – lucky truckers indeed! Quite a family affair with lots of fun and NitroThunder in the Florida sun...



Courtesy nhra.com

Cannonball was also the first fuel coupe to hit 240mph in Europe with Wild Bill at the helm, and he got his hands dirty too! Doesn't mind showing off his back-up skills with the crew of the Yesterday's Dreams AAFD either!



Geoff Martin courtesy [tdvds](#)

In 1966 the Pod's quickest and fastest Brit was Les Turner in his blown 1500 Ford rail, a 10.661 at 131.23mph! Alan Allard was the first Brit to run a single digit ET, a 9.30 at 168mph in the Allard Chrysler fueller at DragFest '65, and set a 9.33 FIA record in 1966 at Elvington. In 1967 Tony Densham ran 9.1 at the Pod, and then blew it away with an 8.81 and 9.08, the Commuter's 427 Ford setting a new FIA mark of 8.91! But forget all this NitroThunder and check out December's Street Machine, it's full of fun and my "Glory days" is wall-to-wall muscle cars from 1967! Try and find the mag on eBay, or surf for [Glory days @ eurodragster.com](#) – it's cool...

Back Page Blues



Wiped out in California, touched down in the Pod's mud! Hope you had as much fun as this at Easter...