

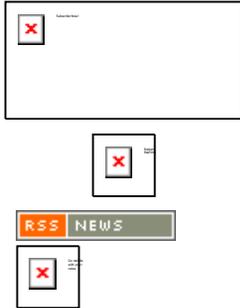


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Bridgewater native lives in the fast lane

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By KAREN LANGLEY
CORRESPONDENT

When Bridgewater native Scott Horner was in third grade at Crim Elementary School, he sent away for a book about motor racing. Looking at the pictures and stories of legendary land-speed racers, many of whom wore the Bonneville 200 MPH Club ring, Horner decided he would one day join their ranks.

Three decades later, in August 2007, Horner rode a Suzuki Hayabusa motorcycle he built at a record average speed of 209.793 mph at the Bonneville Salt Flats in Utah, earning an invitation to join the prestigious Bonneville 200 MPH Club.

On the night of his induction, Horner, now 41 and living in La Verne, Calif., told the gathered club members how he had idealized their racing accomplishments since he was in grade school.

"I'm not a jewelry guy," he said. "But that ring just stuck out. I said, "I want to go 200 miles an hour and get a ring. That's all it takes, right?" "



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The crowd laughed.

As a land-speed racer, Horner competes against records for average speed on different courses and in different categories. Competitors in land-speed racing only consider a race a win if they beat the existing record.

That level of competition is one of the factors that draws Horner to the sport.

"It's a 'go big or go home' deal, and you're down to every single minute aspect of what you do," he said recently. "There's people who spend all year building and perfecting their machines to go out there for one week."

John Noonan, president of the El Mirage 200 MPH Club, said Horner's accomplishments in joining both 200 MPH clubs on a motorcycle are quite rare. Only about a quarter of club members joined through motorcycle runs, Noonan said.



Noonan said he and Horner have known one another about 10 years, since they first raced against one another in drag races. Noonan said Horner was always easy-going and looking to have fun while driving fast.

"It wasn't about trying to win the race," Noonan said. "It was about just doing the best job he could, staying safe and having a good time."

Horner is now building a bike for Leslie Porterfield, a racer from Dallas who Horner said is on track to become one of a very small number of females to surpass the 200 MPH mark on a motorcycle. He continues to pursue interests that have developed along with his career in land-speed racing, such as writing articles for various publications about meets and technical aspects of racing and traveling abroad with his fiancée, Candice.

Horner's next racing goal is to race at a speed greater than 250 mph, a feat only two racers have achieved on a motorcycle at Bonneville, he said. Horner hopes to achieve that speed by riding with streamlining equipment he has not used on previous timed runs. And his attempts at those new records will be done at Bonneville.

"It's the pinnacle of the sport," he said. "I may race at these other venues but the only record that means something to me is the Bonneville stuff."

Horner's brother, Tom Horner, who graduated from Bridgewater East High School in 1990 and lives in Salt Lake City, has traveled to Bonneville to see Scott race. Tom, who rides a motorcycle but does not compete in races, said the 47 square miles of flat salt that make up Bonneville are a striking location for competition.

"It's a weird place," he said. "There's nothing out there. Even when they fly past you at 200-something miles per hour there's nothing that really gauges the speed out there."

Video footage of Scott Horner competing shows the sleek, red Hayabusa blazing across the grainy, white ground, which is made up of ordinary sodium chloride. Racing season is limited to summer, the only time when the sun dries the ground enough that the water level retreats a few inches below the surface, Scott Horner said.

Horner has used his passion for land-speed racing to have a positive influence on

his community. In 1991, he formed the American Motorsports Safety Association, a nonprofit corporation focused on youth education. When he travels to races, he visits local schools and gives presentations using racing as a focal point for messages about setting goals, teamwork and avoiding drug and alcohol abuse. He also initiated and sponsored a high school drag racing program in Las Vegas.

In 1993, he was appointed to the Board of Directors of Racers Who Care, a Hollywood-based group that sponsors similar presentations to young people, and has chaired the organization since 1998.

Sue Ann Thompson, a friend who, along with her husband and children has accompanied Horner to Bonneville to provide support, said Horner stands out among land-speed racers for his generosity and humbleness.

"Most people with world records like that, they've got an air about them," she said. "But Scott doesn't. He's proud of his accomplishments, but he's not arrogant."

Horner's good humor and willingness to help others, along with his records, have earned him a good reputation throughout the land-speed racing network, she said.

"He comes from New Jersey, and he's proud of it," she said. "He represents his hometown well."

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