

# 'Just a bunch of damn fools with their race cars'

## Gill man, son-in-law team that sets speed record

GILL — The blank landscape of the Bonneville Salt Flats couldn't be further removed from the varied and verdant scenery of this small western Massachusetts town.

"It's a mean environment, there's no animals, there are no birds, no insects, just a bunch of damn fools with their race cars," said Frank Cutting.

Cutting, a Gill farmer and lifelong hotrod enthusiast, is one of those over-heated car-owners, as crew-chief and co-creator of the car his son-in-law drove to yet another record this summer.

Cutting's vehicular companion is a low-slung torpedo of a car, wheels shot out to the side give it the look of a stretched water beetle.

The car, dubbed "Das Bullet," is a four-time veteran of Speed Week, the

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gathering of amateur racers held every summer on the salt flats, and this summer carried Cutting's son-in-law Jim Cosgrove to his latest world record.

The two built Das Bullet in 2007, dividing the work between their respective locations and specialties.

Cutting was responsible for the body of the car, a welded steel frame inside the sleek, torpedo-like skin of an old A-10 "Warthog" jet fighter fuel tank.



Recorder/Paul Franz

Frank Cutting of Gill with an image of the car he and his son-in-law built together. The car set a speed record this summer.

Cosgrove owns and operates vintage Mercedes-Benz and he filled Oldtimer Restoration Center in Harvard, refurbishing and restoring See SPEED Page A2

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in the car's engine and computerized guts.

Slightly modified with a stretched body, tweaked air-intake and newer motor, the car set a fresh record this summer, raising the bar to 246.66 mph.

The car is not the fastest vehicle ever to travel the earth — or the salt flats — but holds the record in the F Blown Gas Lakester class, where F designates the engine, blown gas refers to gasoline under the effects of a turbocharger and lakester describes the style of the vehicle, a throwback to the original post-war dragsters raced on the salt.

The vehicle originally ran on a vintage Mercedes-Benz motor, since swapped out for a newer, slightly larger than 2-liter turbo-charged Audi model.

Ice cools the air passing through the system for greater efficiency, reducing 50 pounds of ice in a special tank to warm water in a single run, five miles propelled by the 650-horsepower engine and two slowing to a stop with the help of a parachute.

The turbo charger provides 22 pounds of boost, more than the usual system Cutting says, but then it isn't built to last.

"You build it to last the time you're going to be racing," Cutting said, and that isn't long.

In four trips to Bonneville for the annual Speed Week gathering, Cutting estimates

they haven't been able to fit in more than 20 runs for Cosgrove.

While the longevity of the engine isn't of particular concern, that of the driver is.

"You have to prove that you can evacuate the car in an orderly, unexcited manner," Cutting says drily.

Additionally, the organizing body requires drivers to build up to high speeds incrementally, and heavy fire suits are on the dress code despite the heat.

"If you discover your car's on fire and it's going to take two miles to stop before you can even get out, you want good protection," Cutting said.

"We're not even using this motor to what we know its maximum capacity is. With the flick of a switch we can add another 100 horsepower," Cutting said, but the car needs some fine-tuning before anyone is comfortable doing that.

"There's no question our driver has found that at speeds in excess of 200 mph, the car starts to exhibit a bit of a will of its own," Cutting said; the car doesn't quite fishtail but wavers unsettlingly from side to side.

There is also no need at the moment; in the past, the car has been alone in its class, establishing rather than breaking records, although Cutting thinks a new car that broke down this year could take the record this year.

The official record is an average of two speeds measured on consecutive days at

the same one of three checkpoints on the five-mile course.

The bureaucracy of record measurement aside, the car's top recorded speed is 258 mph, a personal record the team set on their last day at the course and so could not back up with a next-day run.

Cutting himself doesn't drive.

At 72, he is technically retired, but the quantity of grease and scrapes on his hands testify that he doesn't spend his time on the couch.

Nevertheless, he says he is no longer flexible enough to fit easily into the cramped cab or exit quickly with the added bulk of the helmet, fire suit and harness.

Das Bullet came to be after Cutting brought Cosgrove along on one of his trips to watch the cars at Bonneville.

On the flight back, Cosgrove said something to the effect that he would like to drive something at 200 mph.

Now, Cosgrove has done so and Cutting enjoys the side benefits, time with his son-in-law and his family and long road trips to and from the salt flats with his wife, Marti, who with Cosgrove's brother forms the race crew.

The team won't be back next year; Cutting says they're on a two-year plan, but they'll be back to reclaim the record in 2014, if it's taken in the meantime.

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