



RECORD AMERICAN BLAST

"Hey, turn on those lights!" a voice shouts from the dark. Two Rebel sedans churn wildly backward, narrowly missing collision, then swing to bring their headlights to bear on the banked track. "Cut," someone else yells and everything goes back to its original starting point and begins over — the command, the car's churning backward, the narrowly missed crash, the headlights on the track, and the settling dust, filtering through the arclight's beam.

Craig Breedlove is supposed to be out there in the pitch Texas blackness, see — only he's not standing still like you'd expect because you can just about make out the outline of the terrain in the moonlight; he's running at about 153 mph in an AMX with no headlights, breaking the international Class C 24-hour record that Smokey Yunick set at Bonneville last fall, and he needs something out there to see by. Or at least he would need some illumination if he really were running, but he's not. He's backing up a big Shell gasoline tank truck so it will be in position when the movie people are ready to recreate the pit stop action.

It's like the apex of commercialism. Here in Marlboro Country, where a sunset has just faded that the Lone Ranger would have given his silver bullet and Tonto to ride off into, Craig Breedlove is easing this yellow Shell gas truck back so it will be in the picture subliminally with Goodyear and STP and whoever else has some dough in the project. It won't be like Smokey and Mickey Thompson when they went up to the Salt, broke all those records and nobody knew about it. American Motors isn't taking any chances — they can't afford to. When Craig has the Class C and B records there will be a lot of commercials and press releases, plus a full length documentary movie starring Craig, his wife, Lee, and Ron Dykes who co-drives and yells, "Hey, turn off those lights!" There may even be a magazine article.

You can't go anywhere in this part of Texas without crossing the Concho

River. In fact, depending on how you hit the Concho you might almost consider the place a kind of land-locked Venice. "You know, if I lived here," Craig offered, as we drove along a particularly peaceful stretch on the way out of the airport to pick up a transmission, "I'd have some kind of hydro to make a few waves with." We knew just what he had in mind. Perhaps one with a little flavor of the 16-foot outboard he did a 180-degree loop with at the Lake Havasu races when he got a little too much air under the bow at 80 mph.

The subject changed. "We could have done a lot better at Bonneville. Smokey had two 3-mile straightaways and two 2-mile turns and there's not as much tire drag or scrub. You can really fly down those straightaways." Craig had a point. In Texas he didn't want to risk high-speed blowouts with no crash rail, so the tires had to have inner liners. But Goodyear doesn't make inner liners for the super-narrow-tread-Bonneville-record skins, so maxi-width sticky 10.25 x 15 Trans-Am tires had to be used, and despite high inflation pressures they looked like big black chunks of almost congealed rubber cement. They even increased the frontal area of the car a little bit.

"Because of the altitude at Bonneville you have a little trouble with carburetor jetting but the air is also thinner and I think the lower drag more than makes up for the power loss." From this you get the idea that if American Motors ever tries a record session again it will be at Bonneville. "It's a good thing we had the inner liners," Craig breaks in. "Lee had a flat at 153 when the movie helicopter blew sharp stones on the course and she thought it (the car) just felt a little loose."

When we get out to the garage and the test track, we find the two AMXs in one corner being worked on by some of the same crew that broke the Land Speed Record: Paul Nicolini (crew chief), Wayne Ewing, Charlie Jackson and George Klass. Except for

Charlie Jackson we could be in a shop somewhere in the San Fernando Valley.

American Motors' advertising wedge is that these cars are stock — at least stock-bodied — though it is hard to tell if the proportions have been violated because of the red, white and blue vertical paneled paint jobs. The cars are not as radical as Grand Nationals, closer to the Trans-Am Javelins that American Motors will campaign this season. "We just completely blueprinted the car," Craig said. "It arrived on the 17th of December (1967) and we had six weeks to get it ready. Our cars were not lightened because we felt static weight would be better than a trunk spoiler and a shovel (front spoiler or air-dam) like Smokey used. The test track is a 5-mile banked circle, and it seemed at the speeds we were going that the centrifugal force would keep us pretty much glued in.

"It's just a neat package. The car is built so well. You know, when I first started hot rodding I had a '34 Ford 3-window Ford coupe and that's what the AMX reminds me of. The car handles real well — no bump-steer and there's good roll stiffness," Craig added in a final burst of brand enthusiasm.

As a point of fact, those good old American engines were helped along about as much as Smokey Yunick's Chevrolets were. The only requirements the car really has to meet are that it be closed, have the correct number of cubic inches and retain near production dimensions. For everything else, if it has a part number, it's legal. Breedlove just flat didn't have the time to customize his AMX much, but since Smokey ran at the flats with the same car SCCA rejected for 21 infractions at the Riverside Trans-Am, you get some idea how liberal things may get in the record business.

Smokey of course built his own powerplants whereas Traco manicured the ones for the Breedlove blast. The engine foundry at American Motors

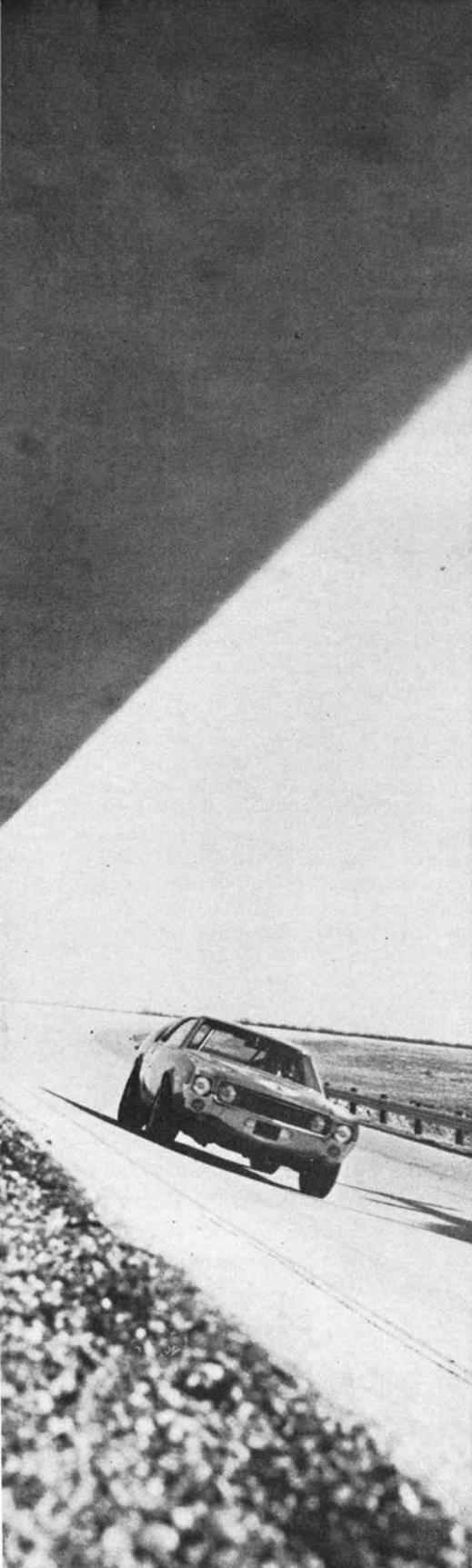
A behind-the-scenes look at how Craig Breedlove, his wife Lee and companion Ron Dykes took all those international kilometer records away from Chevrolet. Soon to be playing at a theater or drive-in near you.

by Eric Dahlquist

Craig, his wife, Lee, and Ron Dykes played musical cars, hopping from one to the other, but still triumphed.



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never had it so good. First off, there were two engines, a 304 CID bored 290 for Class C and a 397, 390 for class B. Both had Avioid 8-quart, trap-door, windage-trayed oil pans and Belanger headers (32-inch leads, 1 3/4-inch in diameter with 3 inch diameter collectors, 4-feet long). Pistons were Forged True with Dykes-type rings and a Schiefer clutch-flywheel assembly whirled on the end of a fully balanced, radiused, shotpeened crankshaft.

We never did discover what kind of camshaft was used but an American Motors-hired photographer snapped a shot of the M/T aluminum rocker arms — a frame that was later mysteriously censored out of the contact proof sheets we received. Somebody would have probably preferred not to have us know how much horsepower Traco got out of these units either, but since an automotive paper had already published 374 hp (@6800 rpm) for the 304, and 443 (@5800 rpm) for the 397, there was no real point. We'd have been proud — even with an Edelbrock R4B medium high-riser manifold and 681 Holley, that's pretty respectable output.

Making the movie seemed more hassle than breaking the records. There is no great trick to driving around this course except that you must be in excellent physical condition because it wears away on your stamina like a fine abrasive. Even with the last-minute, crash-building program Craig and Ron Dykes had been prepared, and about the only thing that threw the show out of kilter was that the oil pressure suddenly went away and then, later, the alternator.

"When I ran with Carroll Shelby up on the Salt two years ago, his Cobra only used a quart of oil in 12 hours. The AMX had the oil-cooler and the deep-sump pan totaling 10-12 quarts and I just didn't see how we could have run out. At about the 11th hour (of the 24 hours) Ron was driving and just happened to look at the gauge when the needle fluttered and dropped, so he cut the engine and coasted in. We weren't expecting anything like this and only had two quarts of oil warmed and ready to go in. There was a real panic for a few minutes when it didn't even register on the dip stick and no more oil was

right around. I called Jim Travers (Traco, Travers & Coons) the next morning and he said, 'Oh, yeah, I meant to tell you about the rings — they're the same kind we use in the Trans-Am cars and they use a lot of oil'."

The alternator was another deal. Somewhere a short developed in the system and there wasn't time to find it. So, backyard engineering triumphed. They just switched batteries every three or four laps, quick-charging the replacements in the meantime. Of course, this took 27 or 28 pit stops. But what the heck, it worked didn't it? They got the record, and now if someone does rebreak it and AM wants it back, they'll know where to trim about a good 15 minutes right off the bat. We missed all this and not the filming. Joe Petralli and his USAC timers didn't, but they're pretty blasé about the record business anyway.

Through the whole episode Lee Breedlove, Craig's wife, listened and worked and drove and didn't say much. She's quite attractive, you know — fine, chiseled features, long black hair and — we'd judge — a volatile personality under the placid veneer. The husband-wife bit makes good copy for all the adventure-starved broads across America. Everything gets old, though — this not quite as fast as the dumb suburban housewife gambit but the luster wears off when you watch the time go down the drain . . . safely through another wasted day. All the period we are there, Lee's car, the Class B AMX, is waiting for its engine to be put back in. Or is it Craig's car? It is really getting confusing because an old sign painter has been changing the names and the numbers back and forth for the movie people, at least twice a day.

Late Thursday afternoon, Feb. 8, the 304 engine blows when Craig goes for a couple of short records he didn't get the first time. It wasn't a bad engine; it had lasted over 4000 miles and that must be some kind of record for such a powerplant. Craig mentions it in the motel that night. He does not have the boyish glow of 1964 when he and Art Arfons were playing tag with each other setting and rebreaking the World Land Speed Record as if it were some trophy dash. The talk turns to jets. "When thrust meets

Beyond the credibility gap Craig Breedlove roars to erase all those records set by Yunick.

drag," he says, "you stop accelerating like you ran into a wall. I felt it in both my cars." And he's doing all this gesturing with his hands showing where the thrust and drag curves meet.

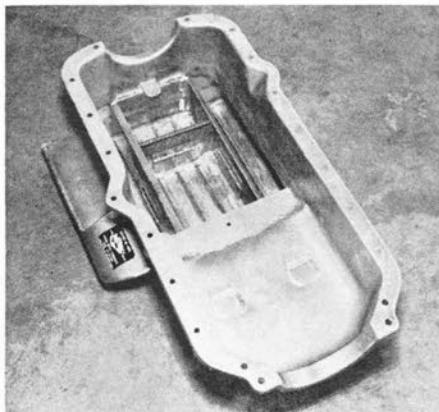
"I don't think a turbine engine belongs with a piston engine at Indy. If it is allowed to run (in other words, if Granatelli should win his suit) there are a lot of other space-age,

'science' powerplants being developed that put out way more horsepower and USAC will be in trouble."

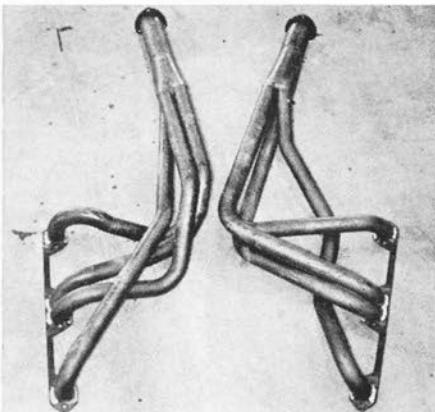
You have not noticed it before because of the noise and confusion but now, in the quiet of the motel room as Craig sits expostulating on turbine engines, the next Land Speed Record car and his plans for Indy — oh yes, he's got plans for Indianapolis — you notice he speaks in kind of a nasal

monotone with an adolescent-like determination that all things are possible if only you have faith. His credo is the credo of the American dream: work hard, persevere and you will overcome. Craig Breedlove is a classic example of his own, the nation's own, philosophy. Horatio Alger in a firesuit. Perhaps some day a psychology professor will come and take a picture of him.

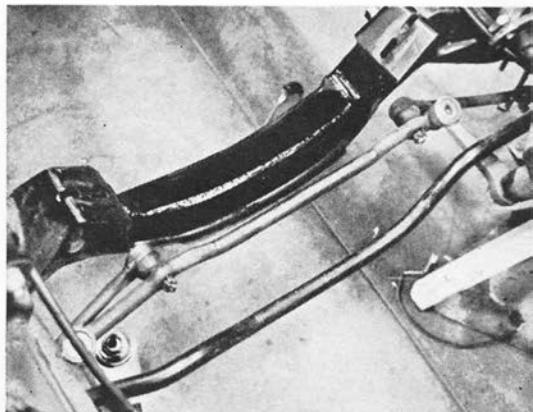
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That's an Aviaid oil pan, sport. Everybody's got 'em these days because they keep the oil from sloshing away from the pickup, right?



These aren't exactly what you'd call stock headers but it's okay for breaking international records. Belanger made this setup.



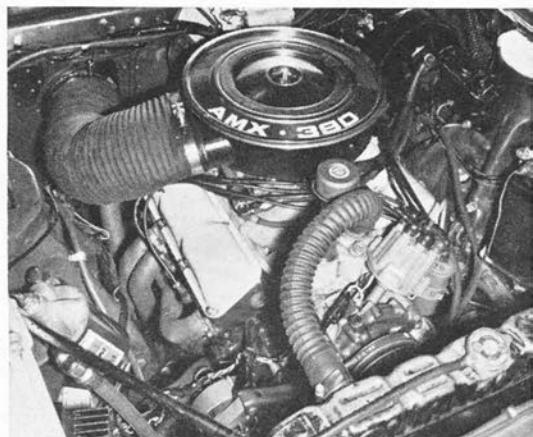
Front crossmember of AMX was notched slightly to allow easier removal of oil sump. Fat anti-sway bar is another reason car handles.



Extended high-speed running of AMX demanded oil cooler to keep temperature in prescribed zone. Cooler is aluminum cored.



Boy, just look at all those gauges; that's what Stewart-Warner likes to see. Co-driver Ron Dykes kept his eyes glued to dash.



390 American engine was really 397 Traco built for the project. Both car and powerplant follow theme of Trans-Am program.

CLOSED SEDAN RECORDS CLASS B

Distance	STANDING		FLYING	
	(old)	(new)	(old)	(new)
75M	171.690	—	172.160	174.295
100M	171.273	173.004	173.989	—
1000K	148.702	156.548	148.738	156.708

CLOSED SEDAN RECORDS CLASS C

Distance	STANDING		FLYING	
	(old)	(new)	(old)	(new)
25K	149.564	152.192	152.708	158.556
25M	150.664	154.799	152.554	158.730
50K	150.939	155.464	152.592	157.917
75K	151.600	155.529	152.535	157.499
50M	151.720	155.669	152.439	157.536
100K	151.618	155.967	152.105	157.438
75M	151.307	156.314	151.460	157.609
100M	150.747	156.993	150.766	158.006
200K	150.007	157.547	149.685	158.265
250K	149.453	153.355	149.651	154.191
300K	146.030	150.146	146.096	151.051

Distance	STANDING		FLYING	
	(old)	(new)	(old)	(new)
200M	146.220	150.439	146.086	150.420
250M	146.002	151.233	145.931	151.742
400K	146.002	151.212	145.931	151.724
300M	145.987	151.907	145.924	152.340
500K	145.979	152.030	145.920	152.456
400M	144.925	150.996	144.890	151.313
500M	145.125	151.754	145.092	151.996
1000K	144.788	150.675	144.767	150.853
1000M	144.449	149.928	144.437	150.038
2000K	143.837	149.392	143.825	149.481
3000K	—	144.971	102.840	145.025
2000M	—	144.711	102.800	144.669
4000K	—	142.635	102.310	142.385
3000M	—	140.184	101.800	140.214
5000K	—	140.543	101.720	140.576
1HR	149.453	153.342	149.569	154.187
3HR	145.009	151.482	144.967	151.764
6HR	144.692	149.687	144.672	149.808
12HR	143.676	146.044	143.664	146.047
24HR	—	140.757	102.310	140.790

K=kilometer M=mile HR=hour

