

Land Speed Records (with few exceptions), attempts took place anywhere in the world where there was more-or-less suitable terrain and a sanctioning body.

The first motorcycle streamliners weren't like those of today, which are long, low and cigar-shaped, built around custom frames. The early ones frequently had fat, rounded fairings completely surrounding production motorcycles, with a fish-tail vertical surface at the rear. These fish shapes were invented in the late '30s. German Ernst Henne set a World's Motorcycle LSR piloting one of these fish, which was powered inside by a blown 500-cc BMW. It achieved 173.373 mph, on a Frankfurt highway, closed to ordinary traffic for the occasion. Because of World War II, Henne's record stood for 14 years. Only in 1951 did another German, Wilhelm Herz, succeed in going faster on a motorcycle. Henne, long since retired from LSRs, was there to watch the national honor upheld, this time without the official swastika with which his 'liner had been decorated. Herz's was a big-bucks NSU factory effort with a shell similar to Henne's, wind tunnel-tested and with a longer tail. He went 180.17 with his 500 twin, also blown, this time on the Munich autobahn.

Next to own the motorcycle LSR after Herz was the only Vincent to best Dave Matson's records. In 1955 a couple of New Zealand racers got together for a successful effort. Robert Burns (originally a Scot, of course) had a supercharged 998-cc Black Lightning, and Russell Wright painstakingly copied the Herz 'liner shell from photographs, thereby saving a bundle on wind-tunnel costs. Wright piloted the bike to 185.15 mph on a reportedly "wet, bumpy, winding" road. This was almost the last LSR to be set with an old-style 'liner. A Texan, Johnny Allen, ran 193.72 at Bonneville right after that, using a 650 Triumph with a cigar-shaped 'liner. Herz came to Bonneville the next year and spent a lot of marks to go 210.64. Allen stayed on at Bonneville after Herz and Co. confidently returned to Germany, increasing his Triumph record to 214.46. All subsequent Bonneville 'liners used the more modern shape.

Having succeeded in being the runner-up to this bit of Vincent history, and having obtained the desired records, Matson went for it on Friday, loading the veteran twin with 50-percent nitro. With the chemical assist, the big, punched-out engine went 195.016 mph, beating the time of every Vincent ever, including Burns and Wright's supercharged, streamlined factory racer. Matson's old iron did not sur-

vive the feat due to strain wrought by the nitro, but since there are a few thousand of its relatives left, maybe another year Matson and one of these engines, given good salt and no wheelspin, will make it into the exclusive club of those who penetrate the 200-mph barrier at Bonneville.

In these latter years, the condition of the salt is ever more dependent on favorable weather and skillful grooming. Although unverified, we are told that in the early days, the salt didn't even need preparing. It was just there, glistening, white, smooth and ready for wheels. But ever since WWI

and then at an increasing pace, the Flats have been mined for potash. And, unfortunately, the salt goes away with the potash brine, ending up on the floors of a series of evaporating ponds south of the highway. The white coating over the mud is now of much smaller area, thinner, rougher and not so pristine. During several of the last few years, the course was long and smooth. This year was expected to be a good one for the salt but uncommonly heavy August rains flooded the flats unseasonably (they're normally flooded in winter and spring). By Speed Week, the

Continued

BONNEVILLE: 1980

VANCE BREESE, on his Sputhe-equipped Sportster, came home with a very impressive record in class PS-AG-1300. Partially streamlined gas-burner went 176.615 mph.



BIG DREAMS from little racers. Son of Jim Langer straddles dad's A-AF-1300 machine. Best time of air-shifted big-bore was in 160 range against 174-mph record.



JIM BUTTS campaigned his supersano 1937 ULH flathead just for kicks. Record for A-AG-2000 class is 161 mph; Butts ran 110 mph. This bike to be featured in upcoming CUSTOM BIKE issue!

