

STP's Record Return

STP sponsorship of the BLOODHOUND 1,000mph World Land Speed Record project follows a rich STP legacy of record-breaking and motorsport involvement that stretches back 50 years

By the end of the 1950's, STP's owners had already started to showcase the brand by backing motorsporting endeavours. This catered especially for a vibrant and fast-growing 'need for speed' as prosperity increased amongst America's youth and youthful.

Bonneville Salt Flats, in Utah, became the destination for the power-crazed, a place so vast and open that one can see the curvature of the planet; so barren that not even the simplest life forms can exist.

It was here that Britain's Sir Malcolm Campbell was lured to compete for the World Land Speed Record and, in 1935, claimed the title at 301mph.

Through the decades, a succession of home-built vehicles, from sophisticated, through weird and wacky, to downright terrifying, had aimed to make their mark in the speed record books at Bonneville.

By the late 1950's they were joined by awesome, jet-powered cars, whose drivers had their sights firmly fixed on the ultimate title of the fastest man on earth.

One of those was Athol Graham of Salt Lake City, who was the first to carry STP branding in an attempt on the World Land Speed Record, at Bonneville in 1959.

In common with so many would-be record-breakers, the enterprising Graham fashioned his car around redundant war-surplus parts, as there were plenty around....He bought a P-51 US Air Force fighter for \$2,500, removed the cockpit for his car, and re-sold the rest for \$2,000.

He then bought two fuel tanks from a surplus US Air Force B-29 bomber and fashioned them into the car's bodywork... and shoehorned a supercharged 28-litre Allison V12 engine in the space in the middle to provide the motive power.

The car, 'Spirit of Salt Lake', cost Graham just \$2,500 and, to offset the \$1,000 a day cost of running for the record at Bonneville, STP funded him \$3,500.

Graham successfully reached 344mph at Bonneville in 1959, but tragically was killed in August that year when a wheel broke away whilst he was in pursuit of the ultimate speed record.

Despite the disaster, STP's owners were not swayed in their belief that motorsport was the way to promote the brand, and thus the die was cast for an increasing STP focus on sponsorship.

By the early 60's, as the US was increasingly gripped by an ever-growing following for a speed and the fever of record-breaking the arrival, in 1963, of Andy Granatelli as CEO was the starting point of the huge growth of STP and its foundation as the world's best-known, best-selling engine additive.

A superb engineer and lover of speed, Granatelli took the bold step in the 1960s of spending a large part of his advertising budget on STP decals

The STP decal literally became a part of world pop culture. It appeared on bedroom doors, walls, notebooks, lunch boxes, bicycles, scooters, tanks in Vietnam, tractors, refrigerators and much, much more.

At one time, over 30 million cars were estimated to be bearing STP decals. And a measure of the advertising genius of Granatelli was confirmed by the New York Times' famed cartoon, depicting Neil Armstrong landing on the moon, where the first thing he saw was an STP decal!

Back on Bonneville Salt Flats in the 60's, inspirational car enthusiasts and daredevil racers, brothers Walt and Art Arfons from Akron, Ohio, picked up the mantle from the late Athol Graham and became record-breaking pioneers.

Mid-decade became a frantic period of record-breaking, with the Arfons brothers trading the outright Land Speed Record between one another and arch-rival, Californian, Craig Breedlove.

During this period, the holder of the 'Fastest Man on Earth' title changed hands by the week as the speed went up and up, each time creating massive awareness and visibility for STP.

Walt Arfons took the record to 413.2 mph in 1963 in his car, 'Wingfoot Express' before retiring shortly after.

Walt's partner, Tom Green, took the record to 413mph in the re-built car the following year, but just two days later, Walt's brother Art, hoisted it to 434mph in his STP-branded 'Green Monster', which, like the late Athol Graham's car, was largely build from ex-military parts

Art carried on the next year, lifting STP's presence and the World Land Speed Record to 536mph.

And brother Walt again got in the act by loaning his 10,000hp jet dragster, 'The Avenger', to STP-sponsored Paula Murphy, who claimed the World Land Speed Record for Women at 243.44mph in her first ever run in the car (with a cushion to prop her up in the open cockpit, and on a wet salt lake!).

In November 1965, Art Arfons pushed the World Land Speed Record with STP to 576mph but, going later for 600mph, he crashed as a wheel sheered at well over 500mph.

This turned out to mark the end of STP's high-profile World Land Speed Record breaking journey, but fortunately, not the end of Arfons' (who passed away peacefully in 2008).

But it far from signalled the end of STP's focus on motorsport as a means of promoting the brand.

Indeed, the late 60's triggered an ever-increasing tempo of STP involvement in the sport, which subsequently saw the brand forge to the very front of sponsorship in elite motorsport events and formulae, including the Indy 500 at Indianapolis, NASCAR and F1, whilst maintaining an immensely active STP presence in amateur motorsport.

And Granatelli designed and competed STP's own inspirational racing cars – the famous Lotus gas turbine 4WD Indy cars. They caused a sensation when they appeared on track at the Indianapolis 500 in 1976.

STP motorsport facts

STP has committed to longer continuous sponsorship in motorsport - 50 years - than any other company worldwide.

STP has the longest continuous team sponsorship in motorsport - 37 years - through the association with 'The King' of NASCAR, Richard Petty.

STP first entered the Indy 500 with Bobby Allison in 1964 and went on to win with Mario Andretti in 1969 and with Gordon Johncock in 1973.

More than once, STP has won the USA's most famous races - the Indy 500 and Daytona 500.

100 million STP decals were distributed in 1968 alone, to continue to build international brand awareness.

STP began sponsorship in 1971 of the NASCAR Winston Cup stock car series, which was, and still is, the second biggest sports entertainment draw in the USA - second only to American Football in attendance and TV airtime.

Richard Petty was signed by STP in 1972, to compete in the NASCAR Winston Cup. He won the first time out, at Riverside California.

STP won the NASCAR highlight, the 500 mile Daytona 500, in 1973, with Richard Petty.

Petty went on to win the Daytona 500 a further three times with STP including 1984, in so doing scoring his 200th NASCAR victory.

Richard Petty won a record seven NASCAR Winston Cup Championship titles with STP backing.

After Richard Petty's racing retirement in 1992, STP retained sponsorship with the Petty family and via Richard Petty.

During the brand's history, STP sponsorship has included cars of the following top drivers:

Jeff Andretti
John Andretti
Mario Andretti
Michael Andretti
Art Arfons
Walt Arfons
Bobby Rahal
Jim Clark
Wally Dallenbach
Wally Dallenbach Jnr.
George Follmer
Atjhol Graham
Roberto Guerrero

Bobby Hamilton
Graham Hill
Gordon Johncock
Parnelli Jones
Joe Leonard
Juan Pablo Montoya
Paula Murphy
Ronnie Peterson
Kyle Petty
Richard Petty
Art Pollard
Sam Posey
Don Prudhomme
Brian Redman
Jochen Rindt
Swede Savage
Jo Siffert
Tom Sneva
Danny Sullivan
Dider Theys
Al Unser
Al Unser Jnr.
Bobby Unser
Jim Vasser
Alex Zanardi

And, perhaps the ultimate accolade, STP has been referred to by Homer Simpson in an episode of “The Simpsons.”