



John Jans- In his own words

I first became involved with Denis Manning and his quest for the motorcycle land speed record in 1992. I was looking for a set of pipes for my Triumph TT 120, when I was directed to Bub Enterprises, which happened to be located nearby in Grass Valley. I went to his shop which was located in his barn, discussed pipes, and quickly found out that Denis was obsessed with racing motorcycles at the Bonneville Salt Flats. He then revealed to me his intentions of building his own engine to pursue the unlimited land speed record for motorcycles. I thought that this was quite ambitious, given the lack of facilities for such a project. When I mentioned that I owned a CNC machine shop, Denis made me a "SURE FIRE, MONEY LOSING PROPOSITION". I had always been interested in anything that went fast, but had never had any interest in doing any low level competition. Here was a chance to compete on a world class level, all we had to do was invent, design and build a machine that could defeat the likes of Harley Davidson, Suzuki, Kawasaki, Yamaha, Triumph, BMW, Vincent and any other manufacturer that had preceded us. It turns out that Denis had already been collaborating with Joe Harralson, an engine designer, with considerable experience in two stroke engine design, but not a lot of experience in designing a four stroke engine.

Thus the Sierra Design/Bub engine was born. Denis and Joe determined that a "Big Bang" V-4 of 3000 cc capacity was the most likely configuration to do the job, and set about designing a package that would not only be powerful and reliable enough, but it also had to be compact enough to fit within an extremely compact aerodynamic package. When Joe finished the design work on the engine, they went out to find a pattern maker to make casting patterns. It was quickly apparent that a pattern maker was going to be very expensive and the budget would not allow this expenditure. Joe then set about making the patterns himself. About this time Denis was able to convince an old friend, Mark Thomas of Beta, to cast the pieces from the patterns that Joe had made. Mark rose to the challenge, as his crew had never done anything as complicated as this before and it was another "SURE FIRE MONEY LOSING PROPOSITION".

About the time that I received the first castings to begin machine work on, I was able to con my brother, Bruce Jans of Procam Productions, into documenting this whole ridiculous project on video. We told him that if we ever got the Land Speed Record, that he would have the rights to any future earnings we might realize. That sounds like a "SURE FIRE MONEY LOSING PROPOSITION". Since that time Bruce has shot hundreds of hours of video showing the building, testing and running of both Tenacious II and "7".

While I am busy machining the engine pieces, Denis is busy building the chassis for what will become Tenacious II . This is to be a steel tube framed chassis with a fiberglass shell similar to Denis's previous streamliners. As work progresses Denis meets Jeff Boyle, owner of Boyle Future Tech. Jeff is a Bonneville nut, having competed there for years on a BSA. Jeff signs on to do the electronics, opening a can of worms, the likes of which he has never seen before. It quickly degenerates into a "SURE FIRE MONEY LOSING PROPOSITION"

As more engine pieces take shape, I start to take them across the street to RPM, owned by Richard Farmer. Richard is a highly successful engine builder who specializes in small block Chevys for sprint cars. At first he is skeptical, we don't have enough parts, this is all untried and we couldn't possibly know what we are doing. But my persistence pays off, and by the time we accumulate enough parts to assemble an engine, Richard is hooked. Yet another "SURE FIRE MONEY LOSING PROPOSITION".

In February of 1996, after many false starts, we are finally able to get the engine started. The Champagne flows and we do a little victory dance. This is quite an accomplishment, but it is only a step down the road that still looms ahead of us. At this point Rocky Robinson, an employee of Bub and noted flat track racer volunteers to be our rider. In the summer of '96 we are ready to start running Tenacious II. We get off to a good start, and we are going over 285 MPH by the end of the summer. We are beset by minor problems, transmission not shifting properly, electrical gremlins, reluctant skids, etc. but overall it runs pretty well, only one problem, it won't go fast enough. For the next four years we sort out various problems and make some headway, and in the winter of 2000, in Australia we attain our highest speed, 297 MPH. Our first engine failure occurs at this point, not due to the engines fault, but errors on the part of the guys operating it. Upon returning to the U.S., Joe informs us that if we want to go really fast we need to make some major changes.

What we need to do is simple, lose 500 lbs., make more horsepower, and improve our aerodynamics. Denis sets about designing a new shape, inspired by fish and the NACA Handbook. We then realize that in order to lose the required weight we need to explore different methods of construction. Since we know almost nothing about Carbon Composite construction, other than the fact that Formula One and Indy Cars are built that way, we decide to jump in with both feet. Denis, Jeff and I spend the next 3 years building the structure that will become "7". It is a true monocoque without any framework; the loads are all borne by the skin. We do attain our weight loss, as well as about a 40% increase in torsional rigidity, and an aerodynamic package that looks quite good.

In the summer of 2004 we are ready to begin testing again. After a number of adjustments for alignment and balance we are finally able to make the bike handle, and we can start going fast again. While testing in Oct. of 2004, at speeds approaching 300 MPH we have an electrical problem that causes the fire extinguisher to go off on it own. This causes Rocky to have big problems, as he can not see because his face shield is covered in foam. When he finally gets the streamliner stopped, the brake rotor is red hot and causes the brake fluid to ignite, which in turn causes the rear tire to explode. Fortunately no one is hurt, but the bike is severely damaged. Now we return to Grass Valley to figure out what went wrong and to repair the damage. In addition we also installed a turbocharger as this is how the engine was initially designed, and we feel confident that the engine is ready for this development.

Summer 2005 rolls around and we resume testing. We soon discover that we have a severe clearance problem with the rear tire, and are forced to sit out the '05 International Speed Trials by Bub. In the fall, Rocky parts company with Bub Enterprises, and is no longer our rider.

In the winter of 2006, Denis issues a press release stating that he is looking for a qualified rider. Of the forty or so responses, one quickly rises to the top. Chris Carr, 7 time AMA flat track champion, and former Harley Davidson factory development rider. Chris comes out to Grass Valley along with his father Jerry, and long time tuner Kenny Tolbert, to see if this project is for real. We apparently pass muster with Chris and his crew, as does Chris,

with our crew. June finds us at Bonneville for our first round of testing and teaching Chris how to operate our machine. Not only is Chris a quick learner, he brings a level professionalism that raises every one's level of performance. In late July on his sixth powered pass, Chris finally gets our machine past the 300 MPH barrier. This is an extremely important mark for us as we had been bumping up against this number for years. Things are starting to work. In fact, Joe finally says that we are ready to go fast.

September 5th, 2006 The International Speed trials by Bub begin with a bang. Rocky Robinson, now riding Ack Attack for Mike Akatiff, has obliterated the current record of 322 MPH with a two way average of 342 MPH. Our crew is not scheduled to arrive till Monday evening, so all we can do is congratulate Rocky and Mike and wait. Tuesday morning we are all there and prepared to run. No one on the crew thought it would be easy to better the mark set by Rocky, but no one thought it was impossible either. As we had not run since July, Denis told Chris to take it easy, just try and run a comfortable 325 MPH and see how everything feels. Course conditions were close to ideal, we had 11 miles of hard, smooth salt with no wind. Chris took off and soon found he was going over 330 MPH and he was still a mile away from the measured mile. He backed off the throttle a bit and waited till he was closer to the start of the mile, but Chris being the racer that he is, couldn't wait any longer, he flattened the throttle and went through the timing lights. Upon stopping, the AMA steward advised Chris that he actually gone over 354 MPH and he had better prepare for his return run. Needless to say we were excited. We prepped the bike, packed parachutes, checked safety items and got ready for our return run, which had to be completed in less than 2 hours. Everything was ready, the wind was up a bit but still within limits, and Chris took off in an attempt for the record book. This pass resulted in a speed of 346 MPH, for a 2 way average of 350.884 MPH. This established a new world record, all we had to do was hold on to it till the meet was over. Amid much drama the cut off time of 12 o'clock noon Thursday arrived and we were still the fastest motorcycle in the world.

Perhaps the most often asked question about this endeavor is, "How much did it cost?" While there is undoubtedly a fair amount of cash required accomplishing something like this, we all still have day jobs, and we work to support our habit. The most important prerequisites are dedication, determination and a willingness to do or learn whatever it takes to achieve this goal. The other key ingredient to success is help from a lot of people. Among those who helped along the way are Mark Thomas of Beta, Richard Bendell of Motec, Jim Dewar of Megacycle, Jim and Will Kibblewhite of Kibblewhite Precision Machining, Perry Sands of Performance Machine, Steve Storz of Storz Performance. Also vital to success are crew members past and present who help prepare the machine before going to Bonneville and help to operate it once we are there. A partial list includes Howard Carte, Pete Davis, Rick Voliva, Glenn Macdonald, the late Vern Brown, Jim Moser, Arch Owens, Peter Manning, Eric and Delvene Manning, "Shiska" Paul Florentzu, Greg Lane, Keith "Stampy" Stamp and many others who said they were interested in helping and then backed it up by being there and helping. Thank you all. That's my story and I'm sticking to it.