

First wheel-driven car to pass 500 mph

TEAM Vesco Turbinator II drives past 500 mph at Bonneville Salt Flats

By "LandSpeed" Louise Ann Noeth

TEAM Vesco's Turbinator II, owned and built by Rick Vesco and driven by Dave Spangler of Dana Point, California, has had quite a season. Powered by a Lycoming T3 turbine tuned by Advanced Turbine Services, the craft's engine feeds a bespoke reduction gear case that distributes its blistering horsepower to all four wheels simultaneously. At Southern California Timing Association (SCTA) Speed Week in August, it earned the *Hot Rod Magazine* Top Time Trophy with a 463.038 mph in Class 3/T. Bigger news would follow.

During the World of Speed time trials hosted by the Utah Salt Flats Racing Association (USFRA) on September 14-17, TEAM Vesco was the top record setter, with a blistering 482.646 mph certified National Record in T-3 Class, exceeding the team's own existing World Record of 458 mph, set by Don Vesco in October 2001.

Team Vesco was not done. Spangler's top one-way speed of 492 mph had put the team within eight miles per hour of its 500 mph goal, which would be a first for a wheel-driven car.

"We have the power with our 5,000-hp Lycoming internal combustion shaft turbine engine and will attempt to finish the job at the SCTA's World Finals," said driver Spangler of the upcoming October 2-5 event. "We have a good chance to reach our magic 500 number."

And this they did. When the team returned to the salt in October, driver Dave Spangler and the TEAM Vesco Turbinator II roared into history as the first wheel-driven automobile to exceed 500 mph on Utah's Bonneville Salt Flats, averaging 493



Driver Dave Spangler and crewman Bill Lee after making history above 500 mph in the Turbinator II.

mph in the measured mile and recording a 503.332 mph mark as it exited the timing lights—indicating the car was still accelerating.

"Dave drove the car straight and true," said jubilant Team matriarch "Jinx" Vesco. "We have looked over everything, and nothing was hurt. We are ready for our record run! It's been a very long time in coming."

A return run would be needed to satisfy SCTA requirements, with the second run averaged to determine any new National Record. A hundred participants had made 112 runs, and 25 qualified for records. Unfortunately, the rest of the meet



was rained out, and they never got to make the back-up or "return" runs.

Thus 458 mph from 2001 remains a World Record, despite being slower than the new 482.646-mph National Record set in September. It's very

SCTA time slip with Turbinator II's historic 503 mph speed recorded October 2, 2018, at 11:04 am MST.



rare for that to happen, but salt and weather conditions rule, and this year it was the weather that kept any new World Record from being certified.

Top speed before the rains hit was the Turbinator II's 503 mph. Also noteworthy was Ed Umland, who ran 403 mph on pump gas in his hand-built streamliner powered by an LSX engine he yanked out of his daily driver hot rod.

SCTA president and World Finals race director Pat McDowell says, "Our organization is very glad to part of history. The is an epic event."

"And amazingly, 500 miles per hour DOES look different than 400."

You can see the 503-mph run—complete with one parachute ripping off at 478 mph—as "First 500 mph Run" on Jinx Vesco's YouTube channel.

Due to an extremely dry spring and summer, the halite salt crust presented a concrete-like hard surface, lending itself to great traction racing. The amateur racing community agrees the 2018 track has been the best racing surface in two decades.

However, "people need to remember that the salt surface remains very thin," Vesco cautions. "Decades of BLM mismanagement has allowed evaporative mining operations to pump away millions of tons of salt for more than 50 years. We trust that the Save The Salt Coalition's multi-tiered and multi-year restoration plans will rebuild our 13-mile International Raceway to safe racing conditions."

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