

# The Fastest Mini In The World?

by Don Racine



**Left to right: Don, Dean, Dave and Clint. Part of the Mini Mania team are all smiles for whats in store for these Minis.**

The Mini Cooper has long been a favorite entry level car for vintage racing, but would you ever consider it for an outright "land speed record" holder? Just as in vintage racing every car has it's class, so too in the land speed record books.

The effort on the record was undertaken by a pair of would-be vintage racers who thought they would simply get their Mini ready for vintage by first getting it set-up for the "flats". The logic was simple - safety rules are actually tougher on the flats than with most groups and engine prep, etc. would be similar and most importantly they live in Wendover, NV. Now, if you are going after the land speed record where better to live than almost on the exit to the famous "Bonneville Salt Flats". The plan was to build this simple little car and "test" it on the flats, set a record or two, and then get on with the real business of vintage racing! While the end objective has not changed, the time and effort required for this simple car to set a record or two has grown out of proportion.

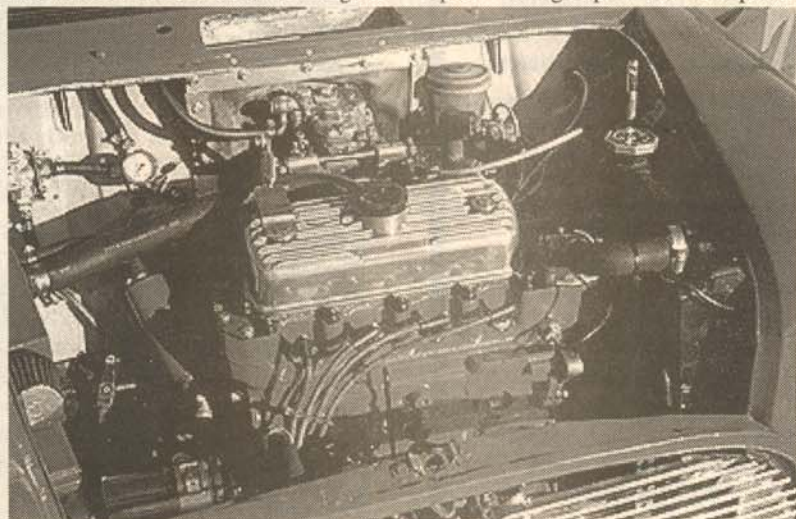
The guys that started this effort are the father and son team of Dave and Clint Crain. Dave has owned a Mini for many years and still drives his street "S" around Wendover all the time. The race Mini was brought with them as they migrated from Washington state a few years ago. It was a total wreck and has required enormous amounts of hard work to get it even looking like a Mini again, yet alone a race car. Dave and Clint operate the only real garage in Wendover and thus at least had all the expertise and equipment to do it. The "Wendover Garage" is also the only place in town for the "flat liners" (Bonneville Salt Flat racers) can go when they have failed to bring everything with them except the kitchen sink.

You need to understand that Bonneville is in the middle of "No Place". The flats themselves are enormous and are located 2 hours from the closest city (Salt Lake City). Wendover is the very small hamlet located on the border of Utah and Nevada that is probably more known for its two large casinos and as being the only place for help for the stranded motorist along a very long road of nothingness! The Wendover Garage folks are the only saviors for many thousands of broken down cars as they are often towed for hours just to get to the garage! All of these "location, location, location" factors also means that the guys at the garage have seen a lot of real land speed cars up very close!

The class for the Mini is under 1500cc in a production class. The Mini is down on cc and very down on aerodynamics when it comes to outright speed! The "flying brick" deserves it's nickname and thus is a real challenge to

make go really fast! The record holder in the class is a very sleek Karmen Ghia with a 1500cc engine!!

Dave as the chief mechanic did all he could do last year (they only get two or three attempts each year) and they got very close to the record. Clint as the driver and PR front for the team (Clint also is the face of the Wendover Garage to all the customers) decided to do what he does best-he started to promote their efforts. He contacted Mini Mania who had been supplying all the parts all along and convinced them that this should be a BIG effort! A few international phone calls later resulted in this truly international effort! MiniSpares, the largest supplies of aftermarket parts for the early Mini, was quick to join. British Motor Heritage, the arm of Rover responsible for the vintage cars of BMC, etc. also operates the now rejuvenated "Special Tuning Department"! The phone call



**A peek at what makes the Minis the fastest.**

to them resulted in a test of the absolute latest hi-tech upgrade for the Mini - the straight cut close ratio SIX (6) speed transmission! If the Mini didn't have enough horsepower - it would at least have enough gears! The other goodies include a Longman cylinder head and Manifold header! The English community really got behind the effort!

More Mini Mania help was found from one of the Mini Mania distributors. A long time real vintage racer from Denver, Dean Snipenger has been a Mini nut-case for some time and it took very little encouragement to get him involved. Denver is a little closer to Utah than Milpitas, CA (home of Mini Mania) and the dyno at Dean's shop would be a big advantage. And since the flats are at 3,400 feet elevation and Denver is at 6,000 feet, if we could make horsepower at that elevation we could make it lower. Learning to make a car breathe at 3,400 feet can be an experience, but making one work at 100, 200, 300+ MPH for 3 to 5 miles is an absolute challenge. Most every car of the 200MPH+ group leave the start line with billowing black smoke out the exhaust to get enough richness so that at the end of the straight they are not burning a piston. Not only does the sustained speed require an exorbitant amount of fuel but the air pressures around the carb at high speeds must be compensated for.

Dave's easy warm up for the "real" vintage races has quickly evolved into a world effort with two cars and no less than 5 records on the target list. The original "HPRO" (production) class, the "Blown Gas Altered Coupe, "H/BGalt" - under 1,000cc blown altered coupe, "IPRO" and I/BGALT". The process of setting the records seems simple enough, but the target of five classes meant an awful lot of effort and time was needed.

To qualify for the record the car must first beat the existing record by 1% on a "pass". A "pass" consisted of pushing your car from the pits to the grid but as this was typically a long way, the car had to be towed on a rope. No record car can be driven on the flats or raced and thus towing was mandatory even for a production class car. The "grid" is actually a very, very, long line of fellow would-be record holders that want to try the same thing. There is only one course and naturally only one car at a time can run - thus the wait between runs



The driver Clint Crain is all smiles as he waits for his turn on the salt

can be very long. Not only do you have to wait for the other guy to clear the end of the run, either 3 or 5 miles but if and when a motor is scattered, all the pieces must be found and thus time is at a real premium. Many times a car will continue to be worked on while on the grid. And even the record process is a real time consumer. After you qualify for a record (run 1 pass 1% faster than the record), your car is then held in impound until the "Record" runs are scheduled. This much smaller group only consists of 10 or 20 cars and can be run either the last group of the day or could be held over night and run the following morning. You are given one hour in impound to check your car but no further work can be done. The "record" run is then averaged with your "qualifying" run to establish the new record (if you can back-up your time that is!!) The actual speed record is measured as your average speed for an entire measured mile. In the case of the Mini this was from the 2 to 3 mile point on the course (note: this means it is not the maximum speed you can achieve,

but rather the average speed for a mile). The bigger cars (over 175MPH) are allowed to run the 5 mile course and measured between the 4 and 5 mile points. After a "record" is established the car must be returned to impound where the head must be removed and the engine checked for displacement. As you can imagine this is a very intensive process and while at first though, a 4 day event seems long, but our case as we intended to take numerous records with the same cars this meant engine swaps! Lots of late night work and hands were needed. While Wendover Garage works on ANY make or model of car, the only Mini mechanic on site is Dave and thus more help was needed. Randy and Dean from Denver and help flown in from Mini Mania in California would help Dave preserve his sanity.

Watching a record event is like watching paint dry! Imagine standing in a desert of salt with nothing more than cars slowly moving off the start line and fading away in the distance - you absolutely cannot see the 3 mile



**The Mini Mania team, Dean, Dave and Randy, do some checks and get the Mini ready for its run in the salt.**

point let alone the five mile. The land speed record organization is very impressive. They first must negotiate with the Bureau of Land Management for the site and government groups are always the same. Then they must predict the weather. A real challenge on the flats. When it rains as it often does the flats go

natural and return to a wet lake rather than a dry lake bed. In spite of all this to help with the paint drying process they own their own radio frequency and actually broadcast the event and thus it actually is easy to keep up with what all the competitors are doing. This is broadcast not just in the pits, etc. but can actually be heard on the various highways as you pass the flats - tune in the next time you are in the area.

Tech inspection is very critical of safety



**Dave Crain and Dean Snepenger step back and admire the Minis**

issues. The organizers cannot have corner workers stationed every quarter mile and 5 miles is a long way. Wheels and tires are a big deal - the proper speed rating is a must and thus the Mini is now running on Lear jet tires. The thinner the better to reduce drag and thus we have a set of 3.5 X 12", 14 ply tires off the front landing gear of the jet. The tires are so hard they hardly need air but the tough part is that they can be stretched over rims

favorite suppliers they will probably laugh at the number, say they never heard of such a thing - but they are made and needed to run the effort.

The actual record run is anticlimactic to all the efforts required to understand and participate in this effort. Team Mini Mania is now in the record books! We actually did better than most expected with a vintage brick. This is not a vintage event and thus a new



**After a long wait Clint Crain now has his chance to make his mark in the salt with the Mini.**

and thus special two piece rims had to be made. The time required to get help to a driver also mandates a very tough standard for driving suits. The best of the vintage groups will require SF15 rating (double layer, etc). In order to run in any class at the flats a SFI20 is required. If you call almost any of your

record could very well be set next year in a Honda with 16 valves, 12,000 RPM screamer with some mega horsepower state of the art engine. But it was a real experience that the entire Mini Mania team is pleased to have been part of. Thanks to Dave and Clint for starting this whole thing and we will watch for you in a local vintage race real soon.



**When it rains as it often does the flats go natural and return to a wet lake....**

## Historically Significant Bonneville Race Car Under Restoration

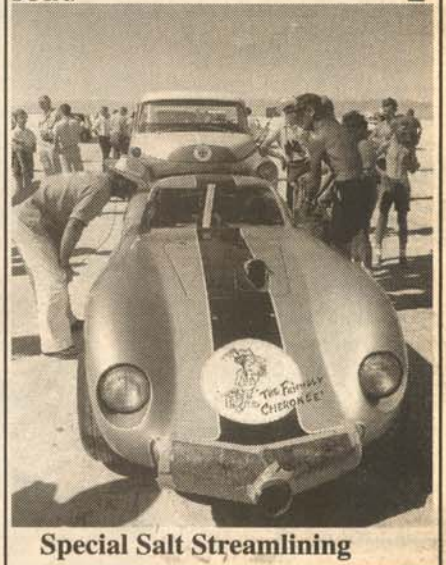
*story by Rick Cannon  
photo by Dean Batchelor*

Rick Cannon has acquired the Friendly Cherokee Bonneville Salt Lake race car. This car was built by the legendary Bill Burke (builder of the first belly tank lakes car), driven by Mel Chastain and set the B Modified Sports Racing record in 1963 at 206 MPH average. The highest speed recorded is a one way speed of 232 MPH in 1962.

This car is a Kellison coupe body made of fiberglass with a custom tubular frame. The Halibrand rear axle is bolted directly to the frame and is driven by a B&M Hydrostick automatic transmission. The 1953 324 C.I. Olds engine is bored to 360 C.I., runs on gasoline and is supercharged with a crank driven GMC 671 and injected with a two port Hilborn injector. A manifold that is approximately three feet long (from blower to heads) was built by Potvin. The engine is set back three feet from the front axle to allow room for the supercharger and radiator.

The Kellison Engineering and Mfg. Co. built both coupe and roadster fiberglass bodies and kit cars from the late '50's to the mid '60's. The coupe body stood only 30" tall (installed on a frame), was designed for a 5'8" driver and sold for \$605. Box type frames with Corvette suspension were also offered. Several were made and road raced in the '50's and '60's. Other versions of the body were called Panther and Astra.

Mr. Cannon is restoring the car to run at Bonneville again with the same engine and drive train but with updated safety equipment and structural requirements dictated by the SCTA.



**Special Salt Streamlining**