

BY LARRY LAWRENCE

THE TEXAS CEEGAR

In the mid-1950s a small group of Texas hot-rodders built a streamliner, stuffed a Triumph Thunderbird motor into the creation and set off to the Bonneville Salt Flats. The shoe-string effort eventually resulted in two motorcycle land speed records, set up a battle with a German motorcycle manufacturer and inspired Triumph to name one of its new motorcycles in honor of the effort. The Texas team, headed by builders Jack Wilson (a service manager for Dalio's Triumph in Ft. Worth) and Stormy Mangham (an airline pilot) with veteran AMA racer and former Texas State Champion Johnny Allen handling the riding, ran into controversy along the way, but in spite of pushback by the international sanctioning body (the FIM), the Triumph land speed bike, nicknamed the "Texas CeeGAR" (aka The Ft. Worth Flash), became part of Bonneville lore and forever an integral part of the history of Triumph motorcycles.

German maker NSU established the first post-World War II motorcycle land speed record in 1951 with road racer Wilhelm Herz going 180.29 mph on the Autobahn. That set off a land speed record battle that raged through the mid-1950s. The NSU record held for four years until Russell Wright went 184.83 mph aboard a Vincent-HRD in New Zealand. And then the Texas group with Johnny



Allen riding went 193.730 at Bonneville.

This did not sit well with the Germans and after much wind-tunnel work the NSU came to Bonneville in '56 where Herz became the first man to ride a motorcycle at over 200 mph, with a run of 211.4 mph.

The Texas team was back in Bonneville in 1956 with a revamped streamliner, taking direct aim at the NSU factory record. Allen turned in a two-way average of 214.4 mph. However, the FIM, citing concerns with the clock certificates, refused to ratify the new record. The AMA officially recognized the record, however, and that was good enough for Triumph's Ed Turner. Turner decreed that every Triumph leaving the factory would proudly be stamped "World Motorcycle Speed Record Holder." Turner did this in the face of threats from the FIM, which he defiantly ignored.

Allen's record set off a massive advertising campaign by Triumph and eventually lead the launch of the Triumph Bonneville, named in honor of the land speed record, in 1959.

There were possibly a number of political underpinnings behind the FIM's decision. At the time the AMA was not affiliated with the FIM, much to the chagrin of the international body. It



is also possible that the FIM was doing its best to protect the interest of NSU. The German manufacturer had long been one of Germany's most famous marques, along with BMW and DKW, and it had longstanding relationships with the FIM by way of its international racing endeavors.

At an early 1950s FIM congress gathering in Dusseldorf, NSU hosted a lavish dinner party for the delegates, so undoubtedly the ties were strong between the entities.

And this is pure speculation, but one might assume that the FIM may have looked down on the effort put together by a small group of Texas enthusiasts. The Texas group most certainly had nowhere near the budget of NSU, and even though they quietly got technical assistance from Triumph, it's possible the FIM may have looked down their noses at the small American team's effort.

The FIM's decision not to ratify Allen's 214.17 mph run in some ways may have actually increased the exposure of the accomplishments of the team and the Triumph Streamliner. Jack Wilson thought so anyway and said as much in an old video interview.

"Edward Turner and Wilbur Cedar both agreed that they got more publicity out of it, being unapproved, than they would have if it had been approved," Wilson said.

Wilson also gave credit to a small group at Triumph who were behind his team's efforts. He felt that Turner might have actually been against the idea initially, later to come around when the record was established.

"I don't think Mr. Turner liked the idea," Wilson explained before mentioning some names of those affiliated Triumph who helped with the effort. "Ivor Davis, Syd Shelton, John Nelson and Frank Baker really came through for us. Some of the things they did for us, if Edward Turner would have known about it he would have probably fired them."

After the streamliner sat in mothballs for years, Wilson was especially grateful to British Na-

tional Motorcycle Museum's Roy Richards, who sought to bring the Texas Ceegar out of years of storage to be displayed at the museum in England. Wilson spoke on the occasion of the Texas Ceegar being put on display at the museum and the celebrations that surrounded it.

"I want to thank Roy Richards for giving the old streamliner a permanent home where everybody can see it," Wilson said. "It was hanging in the rafters here full of rats when we took it down to send it to him. I am so sorry that Stormy and Johnny can't be at the celebration with the rest of us. It would make it one great day."

Unfortunately, the original Texas Ceegar was lost to the tragic fire that destroyed hundreds of priceless motorcycles in the British museum in 2003. The good news is that Save Our Streamliner (S.O.S.) was founded by a group of Triumph fans, the North Texas Norton Owners associations and a dedicated group of old friends of Wilson. The S.O.S. team brought the remains of the streamliner back home to Texas for rebuilding and restoration.

The engine and transmission were replaced since all the aluminum parts had melted. The badly warped, bent and twisted frame was painstakingly straightened and the body was recreated from the original fiberglass molds that Mangham never discarded. One of the members and reconstruction experts was Ed Mabry who has a long history of setting records at Bonneville. Keith Martin at RPM Cycle, who worked with Jack Wilson over 12 years, reconstructed the engine and gearbox.

In 2004 the restoration of the historic machine was completed and it was returned to the restored museum in England.

Long will be remembered the small group of Ft. Worth enthusiast who shocked the world with their speed exploits 60 years ago. **CN**

*Subscribe to nearly 50 years of Cycle News
Archive issues: www.CycleNews.com/Archives*