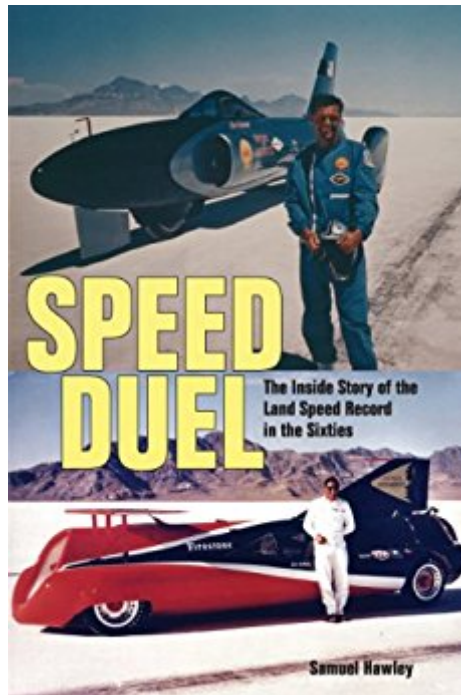


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# Speed Duel: The Inside Story Of The Land Speed Record In The Sixties



## Synopsis

The quest for the land speed record in the 1960s and the epic rivalry between two dynamic American drivers, Art Arfons and Craig Breedlove. "Interesting and complex. . . .The best job I've seen done on the subject so far." -- Craig Breedlove Until the 1950s, the land speed record (LSR) was held by a series of European gentlemen racers such as British driver John Cobb, who hit 394 miles per hour in 1947. That record held for more than a decade, until the car culture swept the U.S. Hot-rodders and drag racers built and souped up racers using car engines, piston aircraft engines and, eventually, jet engines. For this determined and dedicated group, the LSR was no longer an honor to be held by rich aristocrats with industrial backing -- it was brought stateside. In the summer of 1960, the contest moved into overdrive, with eight men contending for the record on Utah's Bonneville Salt Flats. Some men died in horrific crashes, others prudently retired, and by mid-decade only two men were left driving: Art Arfons and Craig Breedlove. By 1965, Arfons and Breedlove had walked away from some of the most spectacular wipeouts in motor sport history and pushed the record up to 400, then 500, then 600 miles per hour. Speed Duel is the fast-paced history of their rivalry. Despite the abundant heart-stopping action, Speed Duel is foremost a human drama. Says author Samuel Hawley, "It is a quintessential American tale in the tradition of The Right Stuff, except that it is not about extraordinary men doing great things in a huge government program. It's about ordinary men doing extraordinary things in their back yards."

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## Customer Reviews

Speed Duel is an great book about what many consider the most fascinating era concerning the elusive Land Speed Record. The LSR had been owned by the British since the 30's, but as the 60's dawned, it had attracted the dreamers of the American Hot Rod world. The author does a great job of bringing the decade alive as the focus shifted from wheel driven cars powered by piston engines to the jet and rocket powered cars. The book pays special attention to the years from 1962-66 when Craig Breedlove, the Californian with the Hollywood looks, battled the Arfons' brothers from Akron Ohio, with their backyard ingenuity. Breedlove and the Arfons traded the title back and forth between them several times as the record was increased from 400 mph to 600 mph in just a couple years. The book also covers those who tried and failed, sometimes while losing their lives in the process. Finally, the author attempts to discover what motivated these men to spend all the time, effort, and \$\$\$ to attempt such a dangerous mission for frankly little financial gain. I have been a racing enthusiast for many years, and while of course, I had heard about Art Arfons and Craig Breedlove, I really never was all that interested in the LSR before now. I decided to buy this book to learn more, and am glad I did as it gave me a strong admiration for these men and what they accomplished. Great book and highly recommended.

This is an outstanding book about an amazing era in motor sports. During the 1960s, a few American back-yard mechanics and hotrodders dominated what had been the preserve of British sportsman, the Land Speed Record. The book chronicles that time, focusing on the duel between Craig Breedlove and Art Arfons. These two men were quite dissimilar in terms of personality and upbringing, but they were remarkably similar in one way: They were willing to sacrifice their financial well-being, their careers, and even their lives in pursuit of the LSR, a pursuit that killed a startling number of the competitors. And they did this for glory, since there really wasn't much money in it. Indeed, they were victimized by Goodyear and Firestone, the companies that provided most of what little sponsorship money that was available. One of the most astonishing things about the story of this time is that the LSR competitors were literally cobbling together their machines in small shops and backyards, sometimes using junk parts. Unlike today's multimillion dollar, fully sponsored efforts, these were cars created by guys who wanted to go fast-- REALLY fast-- and figured out how

to do it on their own. Think about it: Going 500 MPH in a homemade car with a jet engine the military had discarded. The book is well balanced. There's enough technical information to satisfy most readers, but the focus is really on the people. By the end, you'll feel that you actually know these remarkable men. The book is also very well written. It's a you-are-there narrative with can't-put-it-down urgency. This is an outstanding book, and I recommend it most highly.

To put it simply, this is a marvelous book. I purchased it because of my longstanding interest in the technology behind the land speed record. It covered that well, but then went far beyond a chronology of record runs. The author's portraits of the men (and women) who pursued the LSR are engaging. This human element makes this book one of the best motorsports titles I have read. The contrast the author draws between the Hollywood flash of Craig Breedlove and the taciturn Arfons brothers from Ohio is fascinating -- as is his description of the complex relationship between the feuding brothers. While the exploits of the successful LSR racers are well known, the author also brings to light those who were not successful, including several who paid the ultimate price. Anyone who visits the Salt Flats after reading this book will feel the spirits of Athol Graham and Glenn Leasher. Great storytelling about a great subject!

A super book! A must for all those who are interested in the Land Speed Record, especially the competitive years in the 1960s. I grew up during this time and as a kid I thought it can't be that hard - just put a bigger engine in and drive the car straight for a mile, turn around and do it again. It seemed simple. Reading this book showed me how naive I was. The technology needed to push the limit to 400, 500 and then 600 MPH was cutting edge in these years and sometimes it failed with fatal consequences. Throw in the politics of tire giants Goodyear and Firestone sponsoring the competitors and it only adds to the drama. Samuel Hawley did a great job with this book. It was hard to put down when I knew that I had to get up for work the next morning. I would absolutely recommend this book!

I really learned a lot about the Bonneville salt flats racing. There were lots of mechanical, aerodynamic and propulsion failures at speeds approaching 600 mph. Even death. How different it was for the "Blue Flame" rocket car, produced by alumni or workers from the Illinois Institute of Technology. Over one week, it went 622 mph, without any mechanical or aerodynamic failures. The Blue Flame was designed to go 1,000 mph, but the rocket engine designer was afraid of killing someone, so he did not accompany the IIT teammates, that week.

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