Orange Thunder rules at Bonneville

Above, Orange Thunder, a stock, (meaning no functional alterations have been made except those for safety) 36 horsepower, 1958 Volkswagen Beetle, tears across the Bonneville Salt Flats, setting a new world record in its category of 73.492 miles per hour.

Class of 1960 members Dan Durie, (left in group photo at left) Allen Leggett (middle) and Glenn Patterson restored and raced the car as the BeaverGeezers Racing Team. The trio met at Oregon State in 1956 as freshmen pledges of Kappa Sigma fraternity. Leggett eventually graduated with a bachelor’s degree in business administration, while Durie and Patterson became engineers.

Patterson recruited the other two to the racing team in February 2008, after discovering Bonneville’s Speed Week “36 HP Challenge” for pre-1960 VW Bugs. They quickly committed to a record-breaking attempt in the “Stone Stock” class. After spending a lot more time and money (about $20,000) than planned — and some possibly excessively speedy testing on California highways — they hauled their orange VW to the 2009 World of Speed at the salt flats, where Patterson picks up the tale: “Our goal was to beat the Bonneville record for our class, which was 70.670 mph, set last year,” Patterson wrote. “The world record of 73.006 mph was set at sea level and was considered unreachable by us at the horsepower-robbing high altitude (almost 4,400 feet) and high temps of Bonneville.”

All three racers took turns. The Bonneville record fell right away, and then Patterson won and briefly held the world mark until Leggett topped it. Durie did not set a record, but his partners credit him with most of the work on the project. Rumor has it that the street-legal Orange Thunder can go quite a bit faster near sea level when the Highway Patrol isn’t looking. PHOTOS COURTESY BEAVERGEEZERS RACING TEAM