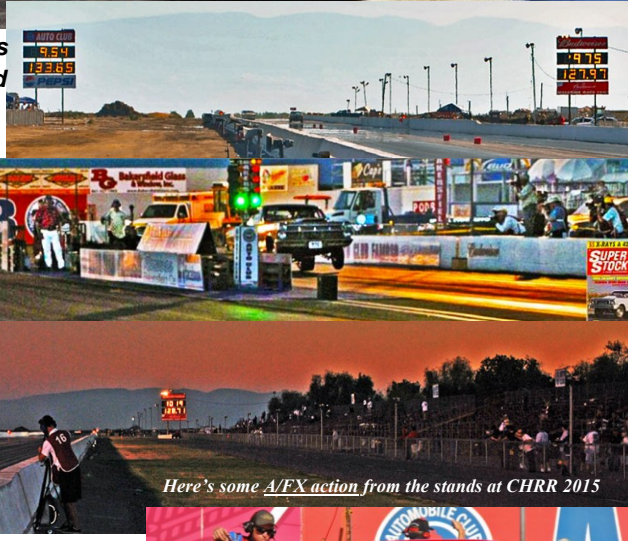


Not so much dazed and confused, j'st kinda lost in an AFX Q session; twin 4-barrel carbs searing eyeballs already burning from the wild paint job looking more like a 21st century die cast model of a Hemi Shootout car! Then my lil' green pal and wild eagle came to the rescue in a cacophony of alien sounds, both screaming to me above the 426 Hemi rumble, "If it fits the rules, race it!"

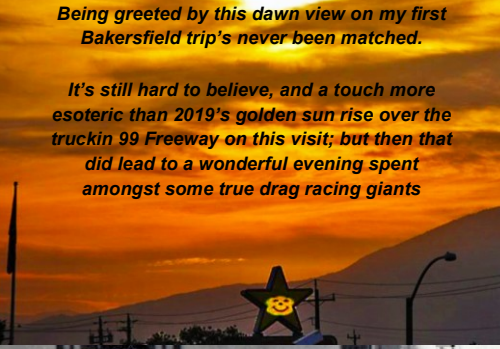
words & photos
mike collins



Yeah right! But its NHRA SS lettering had me bemused for awhile; to my mind it was totally unlike any of the myriad AFX classics seen spread round the pits in 2010 and since; this 2012 oh-so-cool race between a pair of 9-second monsters coming to mind. "Ernie the Attorney" qualified his 351 '67 Fairlane's 9.62, 140 on the pole and David Franklin's 429 Ford Galaxie, the first AFX to burble past on my maiden pit stroll at Famoso in 2010 ran a 9.72, and it was good to see Old Yeller running angry at last on my 2nd trip; sadly for David, an .084 light wasn't enough. "Ernie the Attorney" ran the "Fast '61" Old Yeller down by over a tenth, clicked off to an easy 127.97mph, and also made it to the finals that year, held late at night with only a few fans left in the bleachers on a warm sunny evening, no doubt all Ford fans; Doug Hampton's 427 '66 Fairlane on a 10.25 index left first with an .088 while "Ernie the Attorney," dialled in at 9.75 had a tardy .157 light, hiking the front end of his 351 '67 model, the air filling with sounds of powerful Detroit dinosaurs blasting down the quarter mile side-by-side to a double break-out; Hampton's 10.19 taking the win over Ernie Algorri's 9.63 at a charging 136mph. Drag Racing Online's Jeff Burk, later wrote that the 14-car AA/FD class "was responsible for 2 & 3/4 hours of track repair from oil-downs..." Considering these cars generally race for less than 6-seconds, that's not a very good win - loss ratio!" By contrast, only a 1/2 hour of down time came from a huge field of Fuel Coupes! Meanwhile, back in 2019 here's some AFX cars gettin' it up for the gals; Cliff Lozis' '69 Mustang ran a 9.603, 138.80; Joel Miner's '65 Coronet's 10.621 DNQ'd. Ron Kissner's '68 hemi looking even less like an A/FX from the rear was 5th with a stout 9.73, 139.82 but ran too quick!



Here's some A/FX action from the stands at CHRR 2015



Rich Wood's '62 Nova screams "early AFX" j'st like the Chevy II I rode in 1968, but quicker at 9.43, 140.42 for 3rd - j'st love Todd Hoffman's bitchin' 426 Max Wedge '64 Plymouth Sayonara, 12th at 10.380. His rickshaw artwork's cool too; but perhaps a tad prophetic seen beneath this shot



SAYONARA
Hot Rod Sherry, Joe Sherk and Janet
special friends that passed, living on in so many happy memories


from 1950s Hong Kong 'cos you j'st know there's gonna be an almighty pile up in a couple seconds! Meanwhile back in 2019, "Ernie the Attorney" Algorri once again put his '67 Fairlane on pole with a stunning 9.062 at 148.99 top speed for the class; but enough about fast door slammers (and in case you missed it!), let's go back to [the Thursday before](#) when Andy and I headed out to the Elks club and then he got lost in the parking lot...





In truth this sunrise put a golden glow on our day that lasted all the way through until way after dark...

A BENCH RACIN', TACO-TASTIN' CELEBRATION OF TOM SHELAR



THURSDAY OCTOBER 24th
The Elks Lodge
1616 30th Street
Bakersfield, CA 93301 **NO-HOST BAR**
 TACOS 5:30 TO 7:30 REMEMBRANCES AT 7 CLASSIC ROCK 8:30

IN LIEU OF FLOWERS PLEASE MAKE A DONATION IN TOM'S NAME TO WORKSHOP FOR WARRIORS WWW.WFW.ORG

WORKSHOPS FOR WARRIORS



Never saw the mini poster 'til we were back home in the cold, but on that warm October evening we walked into a foyer leading to a packed room. Eventually we moved with others towards a door, were given a wrist band asking us to "Enjoy responsibly"

before we joined a line heading for some food, passing all types of goodies including the wildest chocolate fudge you're never tasted! Soon we had plates filled with tacos and exotica, sitting down just before the lights dimmed and we were all welcomed to what certainly was a "Bench racin', taco tastin' celebration of Tom Shelar" enjoyed with the family and friends of a much loved man who'd driven the High Speed Nostalgia Top Fuel team to the pinnacle of our sport, giving Mendy Fry the ride of her life. Along with her husband Cole Cooce they organised a memorable evening that saw the big room packed with "close to 400" folks a young lady from the Elks club'd told me and agreed it was wonderful seeing them all enjoying the evening. While at the lectern Mendy displayed as commanding a presence as she does at the helm of her High Speed AAFD; and all the speakers, friends and family alike, told tales of Tom that made for a truly memorable occasion. During this time ol' Nitro Nostrils, who's been to every Reunion at Auto Club Famoso Raceway, knows her better than many from the USA; thanks to their friendship we get to enjoy her beautiful smile again. It was kinda incredible walking amongst so many giants of our sport, and a true buzz when Mendy embraced me and whispered in my ear, her hug once again bringing tears to my Bausch & Lomb shielded eyes – yes folks that's one of the reasons for wearing 'em 'cos this ol' dude has a soft streak and is not ashamed to let emotions flow behind the mirror lenses! And then we laughed, and as you can see in Andy's great shot, when Mendy smiles for a friend it's pure magic. Shortly later I was blown away when the legendary Kenny Youngblood offered me a copy of this wild NitroFired artwork he'd completed this very day, a gift making me more than happy to be here, and getting behind the team as they did battle for the CHRR title. The presentation of this awesome artwork



Photo by Andy Willsheer



Photo by Andy Willsheer

featuring Tom's favourite tippie was made during the evening; folks loving it, laughing at the line "Not actual size. (Too bad.)" With Mendy in this Bob Brown shot are Tom's son Patrick and his brother Rick, both of whom regaled us with magic memories from the past. Loved the tales an' the tacos, enjoyed a couple bottles of real Coors made with genuine Rocky Mountain water; we met and spoke with friends old and new. All the while the crowd was thinning and then suddenly it was over and we were soon back at the Motel, reliving the magic of the evening as we prepared to work on the morrow. As I mentioned last month we were up with the sun, had breakfast and then hit the track where we joined the race teams and fans alike in the age old game seemingly beloved by all drag racers called "hurry up and wait..." And what an amazing race it turned out to be for the High Speed team from the very first, off-the-trailer Low ET of the weekend we all knew they were more than just on top of their game; not that it's ever that easy, but Tom was



BOB BROWN PHOTOS

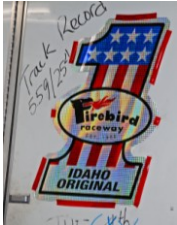
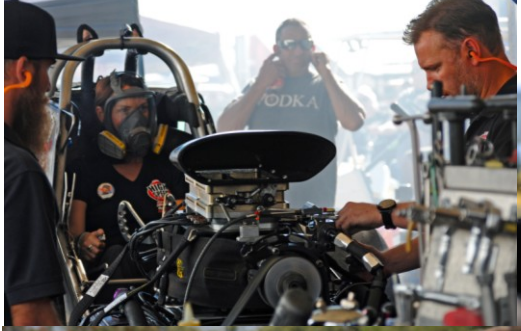
beaming down energy that filled everyone in the High Speed pits with positivity, and some hugs came with such sincerity they almost hurt, not physically but emotionally. While chatting with Cole, thanking him for what they'd done for Tom's memory, I happened to mention how often conversations with Tom's many friends and fans, from a gracious Gran'ma to the young Top Fuel interns had me tearing up the whole weekend (just as they still do, even now), at the words and emotions shared, and would you believe it, the dude hugged me like a big ol' grizzly bear, his voice filled with warmth and his arms gentle. In fact using the word "gentle" with a Gran'ma in the fuel coupe pits while talking of him had set her tears a-flowing an' she hugged me like we'd known each other for ever. Tell you somethin' folks, no matter what, where or when, you just can't beat moments like that! "Yeah right, but let's go racing Mike!"



Okay pal, but first you've got to get the car ready; yeah it's the crew's job, but Mendy has to pack the chute (which always seems like hard work!), warm-up the car, mix the fuel and fill the tank; and often other things should there be any major problems as you may recall from our March Meet coverage, but she's more than happy to muck in having worked on many cars for her dad amongst others. Judging by Mendy's half a grin and other expressions; it seems there is indeed a problem



Yep; it's not too long before the valve covers are off and adjustments being made



The trailer wall had this memento of another new track record, a 5.59, 254 at Boise, Idaho

Shortly later Mendy's suited and booted, exercising her right foot as they tow the car to the start area, maybe for their first pass with hopes of a good full pull and this powerful tall tyre burnout certainly bodes well...



Actually, here they're en route for the finals!

This has got to be close to a perfect AAFD launch!



At the drags happiness always comes with a low ET, and Mendy's off-the-trailer 5.595 stayed top qualifier; being clicked off to only 237.42mph was also good news! Here's a new 2019 hand-cut High Speed NitroFire AAFZ mix to fit with my original 1987 beach mix of Mendy, who's now got an Arizona eagle soaring over her head.

1987 Newport Beach wipe-out by Bo Bertilsson
2019 Mendy Fry portrait by Andy Willsheer

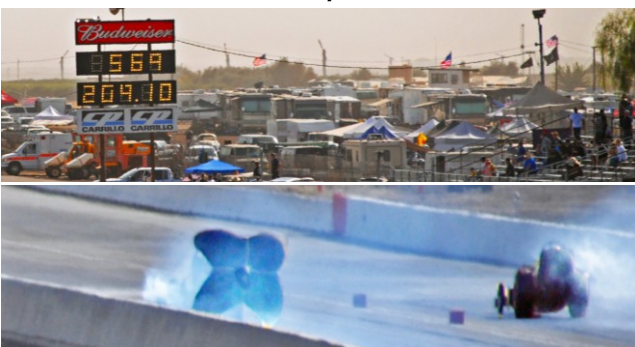


Mendy et moi, history 101 in case you don't surf to Eurodragster; after ol Nitro Nostrils introduced me to the delightful Mendy Fry in 2015 at Famoso (her smile radiant despite having just endured a massive k'boom!), he'd said she was "A real sweetheart," and that was oh-so-true. Mendy was driving the Darkside Fuel Coupe as seen on a bonus page found in our regular [Eurodragster Street Machine/Hot Gossip](#) preview along with a Dale Emery tribute, a shot of them together and others; I'd also written that the first time I'd seen her was in 2012 at Famoso when I shot the white High Speed car (page 2) and Mendy getting this great hole-shot at the helm of the Forever Young fueler below.



On June 28, 2015 Mendy Fry ran a best ever 5.72 at 252 mph

(and also for an Arias Hemi-Chevy powered Fuel Coupe!), in "[Smokey's Darkside](#)" Challenger during "Good Vibrations Saturday Night Nitro" at Auto Club Famoso Raceway - and got her first AAFC win! Then she came back for the CHRR where, after her ground-pounding burnout above, was bit by the Razor's Edge and [it went k'boom!](#) But then she won NTF for Tom Shelar at the March Meet in 2017 and again in 2018! And the rest is history, so let's get back to the future and see Mendy get lucky in the 1st round; Bret Williamson's hole shot had problems down track, the High Speed car winning with a 5.69 at 209 to 5.84, 200 from the Forever Young car.



Dan Horan Jr red lit in the 2nd round, Mendy powering to a 5.522 at 256 while Horan kept on it for a 5.80, 252. Back in the pits everyone's cool, radiating positive vibes, the cook offering me a taste of his fine food, the car gleaming and all set to rumble, Mendy smiling before saying "It's time to get ready," on her trucks tailgate with a pair of pals as I had thoughts of a cool beverage before the finals, walking over to offer "Good luck out there Mendy," turning to leave as she put her hand on my shoulder, "Come here you," giving me another hug and again whispering in my ear, her words making me tear up yet again, chuckling around "Thank you," as she moved off to change while I gave thanks for my Bausch & Lomb lenses again!



Just love the power of a tall tyre burnout



Mendy also raced Pete Wittenberg for the 2017 March Meet title!

Click it to enjoy Mendy's first CHRR win and Heritage series title in 2018!

[We'd all seen the red light](#); Mendy's pals and crew celebrating a 2nd straight Heritage series win and a dominant CHRR victory for Tom! She set Low ET in each round with a pair of 5.52s, and not seeing Pete Wittenberg's .254 red light, she thundered, set top speed of the meet at 264.91, yet still behind at the 1320 mark and sure that she'd lost! In [Drag Racing Online Brian Losness](#) wrote; Fry was mortified. She'd let the team down. "I got out of the car and just walked over into that field and didn't want to face anybody," she admitted. However, a voice of reason spoke up, in the form of NHRA Nostalgia Tech Inspector Ken Gentry. "Mendy, he was red." Fry spun around "Don't f^*#% with me, Ken. Are you sure?" Enjoy this truly magic moment in full on Don Ewald's [We Did It For Love](#) website; with stunning action shots and more après race images capturing the true passion Mendy Fry has for her High Speed Top Fuel team. J'st hope she forgives me for not saying goodbye to 'em; Sunday night Famoso was so f*ckin' cold it froze my mind...



Sadness lifted!

Team salutations aimed high on their win for Tom!



"Blood did it" 24 October 2019

Wishing all of you the best in these parlous times; the sun's goin' to rise on a better day soon! Stay lucky, keep well and God bless...

Thanks Mr Ewald, this is truly worth a 1000 words!

Don Ewald Photo

Don Ewald Photo

Ewald Photo