

Kia ora. My name is Te Taka and the following is my experience of attending the Land Speed NZ event at Reporoa on the 8th of April 2018.

Background & Motivation

Although I was brought up on a farm I would not consider myself a petrol head. My wife Ari is similar, she has a background driving, but isn't an avid motor sports enthusiast. That changed somewhat in 2016 when Ari and I had the opportunity to buy a Ford Mustang.



We purchased a 2017 model, it has a 5.0 litre V8 Coyote motor, with 435 horsepower and it has an automatic transmission. It is painted Ruby Red and while it has some exterior upgrades (mufflers, spoiler, tinted windows, number plate) the motor is unmodified. We joined the local Mustang Owners Club and met a whole lot of good people who are Mustang enthusiasts.

When we brought the car we decided we were going to drive it as much as we could. It is our only car, so we pretty much have to anyway. We have taken it around the South Island and most weekends we are driving it somewhere in the North Island. With all the travelling that we have done we have always wondered, how fast can our Muzzie really go? It is difficult, and illegal, to test this out on the motorways in the Waikato. Both Ari and I have reached around 200kms on the track in Taupō, but have then had to brake for the corner at the end of the straight. So how fast can our Muzzie really go?

When we heard about a Land Speed NZ event, it was the perfect opportunity to answer this question. 5.7kms of straight road with an official speed test over 1/4mile right in the middle.



Arrival on the day

We had to get up early, to leave at 5am to get to Goudies Road by 7:00am. I had been pretty much nervous about this event for the week leading up to it. And the nerve level only heightened when we got there. It was great to meet the race organisers, register and hear all the safety arrangements at the briefing. A really nice bunch of guys running a professional event, with safety the prime concern, and then having a hell of a lot of fun the 2nd criteria.

There were around 30 vehicles there, broken into two groups, each group consisting of 2/3s bikes and 1/3 cars. Most of the other riders/drivers appeared well versed at this, and knew what they were doing. To say that I was a novice at this would be an understatement. My racing equipment consisted of a new pair of welding overalls (\$80), an old pair of cycling gloves and a new \$100 helmet that was scrutinised and met the required safety standards.

As I was in Group 2, Ari and I got a chance to watch from the side lines while Group 1 had the first run. We went over to the fence by the road, and were totally amazed at the speeds those vehicles went racing by at. A couple of nervous toilet stops and I was as ready as I was ever going to be.



Run One

There were butterflies in my stomach and my heart was racing on arrival to the venue and this only intensified as our group were called for our first run. I was vehicle 6 of about 15 and I saw my hand shaking a little as we starting lining up to exit the pit area. The pit area was just a place in a paddock where everyone had parked, unloaded, and set up their gears. Following the others in my group to the start point I had absolutely no idea on what I was in for. But I thought, oh well, I am here now, I might as well give it a good shake.

Each run consisted of two drives, one from South to North and the other from North to South. Pre-race advice was to not go over 200km/h on the first pass and not go over 250km/h on the 2nd pass. This was to give you an opportunity to test out the road. Never having raced or driven in any speed event before I thought this was sound advice so attempted to follow it.

I watched the first car, and 4 bikes go in front of me then I was motioned up to the start line. I remember thinking, 'Jesus, it's all on now!' I put the Muzzie in Sports Mode, I got the all clear, and put my foot down, but a little too heavily as there was some wheel spin. So I eased off a bit then sped up to 100km/h, 150km/h and then 200km/h. With all the excitement everything was feeling good, so as I got to the timing section I put my foot down a little more and raced through the timing section at around 215kms. I was surprised in the run as I did have to hold the car on the road more than I had expected to. It wasn't simply a matter of pointing the steering wheel and putting the foot down, you

do have to hold the car on the road too. Part of this was due to the road, although very straight with little contour it was a country road with some very minor undulations. It wasn't as smooth as some of the motorways or race tracks that I have previously travelled (somewhat) fast on.

When I got to the end of the timing area I took my foot off the accelerator and let the car reduce speed without braking. I noted that the car slowed down, on its own with still about 1.5 km of braking road left. So certainly no need to use brakes when coming down from 200+kms. At the end of the run the marshals showed me where to pull up, beside the other vehicles, while we waited for the rest of the drivers in our group to complete their run. Walter, who had ridden just before me, came up to me and asked me how it went. I am not sure if I gave a sensible answer, I was still freaking a little bit. I did notice at the time that there was a great camaraderie amongst the other 'need for speed freaks'.
[1st official time: 217.44km/h]



On the 2nd pass I decided to hit 250km/h. I got a clean start, no wheel spin, ramping it up to 200km/h, then I put my foot to the floor. I held on tight to the steering wheel and concentrated on keeping the car in the middle of the road. I took a momentarily glance, with my eyes only, at the speed on the radar detector and it said 242. But when I glanced back to the middle of the road that momentary shift of focus, at that speed, scared the heebie-jeebies out of me! Again, another pre-race advice was to focus on the road in the far distance; by checking out your speedos you are not doing this, and for a novice like me that makes it more dangerous. I instantly resolved not to look at my dials while going full tit again. As I sped along I used peripheral vision to note when I had gone past the start time marker and stop time marker. In my peripheral vision I saw a bunch of people and cars to my right, I figured it was the pit area, so removed my foot from the accelerator and started to reduce speed. Then I came up to another bunch of people and cars to my right, this was the real pit area, the other area was the timing area, I had reduced speed too soon. Dammit!

At the end of the run I talked to some of the other guys and some had made a similar error, beginning too slow down too early. When travelling at those speeds it is difficult to tell where the timing area starts and stops. I resolved on my next run to go faster for longer. Still what a rush. My heart rate was ridiculously high and remained that way all the way back to the pit area.

[2nd official time: 234.44km/h]

Run Two

After a break we were back on again. We got the call and then our group were back off to line up again. I was determined this time not to slow down too early. The marshal motioned me to my take my turn at the starting position, I moved forward and put the car into Sports Mode, he got the all clear, he signalled me to go and I was off. The car sped up until around 200km/h, I waited until I got to the 2km sign, then put my foot to the floor as hard as I could and held on tight. I was holding on to the steering wheel so tight, then I remembered some advice I had once been given to not hold a steering too tight and tried my best to relax my grip. Thanks goodness for the cycle gloves! I barely noticed the start and stop timing signs and just held the speed as best I could until I noticed the 2km (braking) sign. The 1km and 2km speed up and slow down signs were larger and much easier to spot in peripheral vision, so I decided to use them instead. I eased off the accelerator and the car began to slow down, and the tenseness in my body started to calm a bit. When I got to the end of the run, I parked up and stepped out of the car to shake down my limbs a bit. The adrenalin was coursing through my body!

[3rd official time: 251.87km/h]



On the second pass of this run I was determined to do a similar thing. Hold the pedal down right through from the 2km mark, pass the timing marks and continue past the crowd in the pit area. I was aware that by slowing up so early on the previous North-South pass the Muzzie had gone past the people relatively slowly and I wanted to put on a better show for those watching and for Ari. So, get the call to line up, put the Muzzie in Sports Mode and wait for the signal. When given the thumbs up, ramp up to speed quite quickly, see the 2km sign and floor it. Then try the best to hold the car on the road, adjust if it starts to slightly head off with the some of the minor bumps, keep the accelerator foot down hard, keep looking in the distance, past the timing signals, past the first crowd, past the second crowd, see the 2km sign and foot off the pedal. Because I went so far on this run I had to brake lightly but just around the 150km/h and then again at the 50km/h. I wanted to make sure I was going really slowly past the finish into the waiting area. I parked up and got out. I noticed a hint of a burning smell coming from my tyres, so I felt them but they weren't excessively hot. I hopped back in

the car and checked all the temperatures, and gauges including the tyre pressures. Everything was normal, the Muzzie hadn't even raised a sweat.

[4th official time: 251.23km/h]



When all our group had finished our run we drove back to the pit area. I was still so amped that I had to drink a can of Red Bull to calm me down! There was a bit of a break while group 1 were having their 3rd run which gave me a chance to watch some of them zinging by and check some of the times out. The speeds that the bikes were doing and some of the other cars was just ridiculous, +300km/h, +350 km/h!

Run Three

While I was lining up for the first pass of Run Three I happened to be speaking to Walter again. He suggested a few adjustments to the Muzzie to see if we could get more speed out of her. So I switched off the radio (it was turned low anyway) and turned off the air conditioner. We also put the mirrors in, to help reduce drag. Then at the line up again, get the signal, ramp up to 200km/h wait for the 2km sign, put the foot down hard, and hold it and the car in line until we get to the other 2km sign. Then ease off, and tense off a little bit as you can feel the adrenalin flowing through the body. Park up at the other end, try and calm down, have a chat to the other guys while waiting for everyone to finish and then get ready to do it again.

[5th official time: 251.92km/h]



The Muzzie has a Sports Mode that you can activate through the gear lever and another that you can activate from the panel switches. I have never found out the difference between the two. But in this run I decided that I was going to activate them both. So as I lined up for the next run, I switched them both on. I got the signal, accelerated up to speed, saw the 2km sign flash past, put the accelerator hard to the floor, looked in the distance, held the car on line, kept the accelerator hard down until I went past both sets of people, saw the 2km sign then removed my foot from the accelerator again. [6th official time: 251.33km/h]

I noticed in this run I started to get a bit jaded. I had a couple of late nights leading up to this and then a really early morning wake up to get to Reporoa on time meant there was a chance for me to be getting tired. As I was hammering it at the end of the run I noticed my eyes starting to strain a little for the first time and I had to specifically concentrate on staying focussed. As our group arrived back at the pits, we were offered one more run for a single pass of the course. Because I was starting to get fatigued I decided not to, better to play it safe. And besides I had set out what I wanted to do. I had found out how fast I could go in our Muzzie.

When I got to the pit area Ari asked me if I had used the paddles? I felt a little bit stupid when she asked me this. Using the paddles in Sports Mode pretty much turns the automatic into a manual. Clearly being able to red line the gears a bit more would have meant a faster speed. When I am driving the Muzzie normally and I suddenly want to drive aggressively a flick into Sports Mode has always supplied ample enough power. So much so that I call it Angry Mode. Consequently I have never needed to use the paddles and have only tried them out a couple of times. I guess, in retrospect, you don't want to try a new driving method at 251km/h.



Epilogue

So what have I learnt? I have answered the question, how fast can our Muzzie go? Or perhaps better how fast can I drive our Muzzie? It is was surprisingly consistent at 251km/h, this is over 156mph, which to be fair is moving! The changes I made in the last couple of runs had no effect on the top end speed. But is that really the fastest? If I practised using the paddles and then had another go, could I make her go even faster? This is a new question that has arisen. I would like to try and answer this question at the next Land Speed NZ event, however I will not be able to. Ari wants to be the driver at

the next event! So it is going to have be the event after that where I will see if by using the paddles I can make our Muzzie go more than 251km/h.

Another thing I have noticed is that I feel like I am a different person, from having driven that fast. This is hard to explain but something I guess the other speed freaks are well aware of. I look at speed, and high speed a whole lot different now. I am certain it has made me a better driver, I know that I certainly don't have anything to prove on the roads now.

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A big thanks to John Seccombe and Mike Wilkins who accepted our submission to this event at late notice, and who have organised and run a life changing event! A big thank you too to all the officials, time keepers, track support crew and local community who made this event possible. A special thanks also to Steve Knowles and his family for capturing and supplying these photographs, and to Craig Dawson for his photograph.

Ari and I look forward to seeing you all again in the very near future!