



Insane Speed

When Pal-Arvid Blytt from Bergen Norway thunders thru the desert of Nevada in 358 kph it's for one special reason:
An old worn out video-cassette.



Morning tired rattle snakes along Highway 318 don't have a clue what's going on. It's early Sunday, a long time before the sun of Nevada starts the daily frying of the brown desert, when the silence is torn apart by tens of thousand horsepower that suddenly screams by the cactuses.

Maybe the snakes should have known that today, this Sunday, the Silver State Classic Challenge, according to the Guinness Book of Records, the worlds fastest car race on normal roads. Like a Woodstock for grown up car freaks, with plastic bracelets, and most likely a t-shirt from a previous race. The difference being that the bands playing are 130 expensive Corvettes, Ferraris and Lamborghinis. And then an old Pontiac Trans Am, with Norwegian plates, that yells of hasty work.

But first let us go back in time. Back to Monday the 13 of August, in a workshop in Godvik outside of Bergen in Norway.

- There are only 3 things we need to do: The first is to win the race. The second is to get the highest measured speed. And the third is to get the highest average speed of all. That one is the hardest one to get, says Pal-Arvid Blytt (36 year). The engine builder, which always goes under the name of Polly, just sent the car to the US, after months of testing and fixing. And just had a small victory: a test run at the Mercedes owned test track, where he with an insane speed of 394.2 kph smashed Mercedes own record by 40 kph, with a broken fifth gear.
- Because it was wet on the track, I think it was good. But I had hoped for 410 kph, he says sitting in his office.
- I do really like to get my hands on that average speed record. Speed records have been my thing since I rode my bicycle.

Since Polly got his 1986 Pontiac Tran Am seven years ago, he's been rebuilding it into a beast. Not many parts are still original. The car is so high-tuned that it won't run on idle and sounds more like a fighter plane from Second World War than an everyday streetcar with Norwegian plates. It's not just a crazy 8.9 litres V8, more than six times bigger than a normal family car, it's also equipped with a supercharger and develops 1407bhp.

For several years, the car has been the fastest street car in Norway. But this is another thing. In the SSCC-race 2000, Chuck Shafer did a world speed record on a public highway with an average speed of 331kph. With temperatures up to 40 degrees Celsius in Nevada and the race is at 2000 meters altitude will not make it better for the performance of the motor.

But to set a new record is not just difficult, it is also very dangerous. Two participants have already died in SSCC.

- Regardless on how you look at it, this is the most dangerous form of car racing there is. The race is on a normal public road, and if something happens, at the speed they are going at, well there is no time to do anything about it.

- Have you thought about the dangers?
- We think about. But people go parachuting to. Many things can happen there to.
- And if a tire blows in 300 kph?
- Then it's straight into the air, says Gunnar Skjerve, co-pilot and employed at Polly Motorsport.

Four five hours northeast of Las Vegas, a long time after cell phones stopped working ,is Ely, the east end point for "the loneliest road in America" – Highway 50. A sleepy mining town with about 5000 habitants, no taxis and a gas station that sells music cassettes and where Ely Times front cover about the race is written by the race people themselves.

The small town can't show of many attractions. Except two times a year. When the motels neon signs yells "No Vacancy". When the streets are full of the sound from thundering race cars covered in ads for products they don't even use themselves. When 145 kilometers of Highway 318 is cleared and banned from normal traffic.

Days before the race, Ely gets full of Lamborghinis, Ferraris, Porsches and even an Ultima. Exclusive cars, that usually creates enormous interest and a buzz around town. But this year its Polly and his evil homemade brew that is the talk of the town. It's not just half of Ely that talks about the crazy Norwegians, he gets intervjued by TV, and everybody wants to know more about this strange thing from the northern parts of Europe. He even creates a small tourist invasion in Ely. The magazine Amcar (short for American Cars), the sponsor Polly, had such an interest for the race that they arranged a holiday trip to this speed crazy town in Nevada. In total there are over 50 persons from Norway in Ely, including family, employees and Amcar-readers.

It's not a walk in the park to get the car to Ely. When Polly delivers the car to the port in Drammen, it's on route for Hamburg Germany where it should be reloaded on a ship to Los Angeles. But in Hamburg, the shipping company manages to forget the car on the dock. It gets loaded on another ship to LA. Problem is that the ship will arrive in LA three weeks to late. Off with the car again and loaded on a ship for New York, where the car will be on a train to LA. When the ship makes a stop in Southampton, Great Britain, they discover that it says Los Angeles on the car. That's not correct, they say, and leave the car in England, to Polly's growing despair. At this

point they plan to send the car on an airplane to US, but a price tag of more than \$25.000 stops that idea.

So the car gets loaded on a fourth ship to New York, where Polly gets hold of it – 2 minutes before customs closes for a long weekend. That's not all, to drive a 3 ton trailer across the American continent, the team has rented a big strong Dodge at the rental agency in advance. But instead of a Dodge there is a – Kia waiting for the Norwegians. It's not just possible to haul a heavy trailer with that. And on top of it, Team Polly driving a Kia won't look good for Amcar magazine, the sponsor that's going to do an article about Polly and the race. So the team has to go to Philadelphia to get a proper car and mount the rig for the trailer before they can return to New York to pick up the trailer. When all of that is done, they are finally ready to start the many day long drive to Los Angeles.



POLLY AND THE CREW: Raymond Nielsen, Gunnar Skjerve, Pal-Arvid Blytt, Arne-Christian Kaland and Jostein Skjerve.

-This is probably the most perverse car here, says Gunnar Skjerve, when he checks out the competition.

Many of the drivers are older cigar smoking guys in Corvettes, one of them even has oxygen hoses in his nose. But for many of them it's serious business and already on the first day the drama begins. A Dodge Viper crashes during the acceleration test. The next day another Viper ends his race, and a high tuned Mitsubishi Evo blows the motor in 300kph, not a dream speed when oil is covering the car and front window.

It ends like it always does: with a big pile of crashed car parts.

This is not the first time for Polly in Ely. He has been here before to qualify. Seven years ago, he went to LA, rented an expensive Dodge Viper for three days. Enough days to rip out carpets and unnecessary interior, drill some holes for the fire extinguisher and a 5-point safety harness and finally drive the race in the 265kph class. After the race he removed the safety items and redid the interior and returned the car with a big smile on his face.

Polly's dream of doing the Silver State Classic Challenge hasn't been cheap.

When others can pay a couple of hundred dollars for a new tank, Polly has to spend thousands of dollars on a cell tank, designed for airplanes. Rim manufacturer BBS had to stop their production to make a set of rims based on Polly's specifications, and the tires are filled with nitrogen instead of compressed air.

- Tires are a huge problem. Most producers have tires that run up to 300kph. But if you want tires made for 400kph they won't sell you any, says Polly.

Cars that can drive in 400kph are hard to find. Bugatti Veyron is one, with Norwegian plates it will clear your wallet of around \$2.5 - \$4 million dollar. Polly called Bugatti:

- Everything went smooth, until they asked for the VIN of my Bugatti. After that, they didn't speak to me any more.

Since Pal-Arvid Blytt in his young days got his hands on an old Ford Granada with a wanna-bee V-8 motor, he has the need for speed. According to his sister Kristin, also in Ely, the need for speed didn't always go by the book.

- We have all done our tricks. On racetracks and challenges there was a lot of rule and/or law breaking. A lot of things could have gone wrong those days, he says.

It was probably because of that his mother was ever so happy that in 1991 Polly went to Molde and studied mathematics. With that, the kid should grow up and forget all about cars, his mother thought. Not quite!

In Molde, Polly met a friend with a passion for cars and racing. It was at his place that Polly got to see a low-quality VHS-tape of an open road race in Nevada.

- At that point I said "I'm going to drive that race". Not many people believed me, because I drove an old Volvo 240. But I couldn't get the race out of my head. Every time I see that tape I get goose bumps all over.



CAR FANATIC: – It will be fascinating to see whatever Polly makes of it, says Sigrid Flateras (26), head of Os Amcar Club. She is one of the 51 Norwegians that came to Ely. The night before the race, she spends at a borrowed workshop on Aultman Street, where Polly & co. changes the rear axle on the Trans Am.



ON MAIN STREET: It's not any wrecks that are parked outside of Hotel Nevada in Ely: Shelby Mustang GT500, Ultima GTR and a high tuned Chevrolet Corvette. These cars drive in the slower classes, and made one of the competitors say "it's like going to the warehouse and shake your hand".

Out in the desert of Nevada the race has begun. The slower classes go first. When most of them has finished and complained about the sponsors stickers stuck on the cars paint, and the wicked expensive, world record breaking Ultima GTR broke down somewhere in the desert, a black, low Trans Am shows up at the horizon.

SSCC is a race for the competitors, not the audience – the race itself is hard to follow. The speed they are going at makes it difficult to see what's racing by.

- It's incredibly insane, says Gunnar Skjerve, seconds after the Tran Am touches down in the finishing area, lots of litres of race fuel lighter, and a pound of dead bugs heavier.

Skjerve is sweating as much as he is excited. Partly because it's 31 degree Celsius in the desert, the sun is shining, no ac in the car (steals power), and both of them uses helmets and fireproof racing suits.

- I have never been in a car that drives that fast. Extremely exciting, you just sit there and focus your eyes straight ahead, you know that the tires are hot, and you never know what's about to happen.

Everything is on the limit all the way, and then the car just behaves incredible well.

- Scared?

- Yes, a couple of times, says Skjerve.

- And the boss himself?

- No, but I wouldn't like to sit beside. It tingles in the body when you go airborne over a top at 320khp, says Polly when he removes the helmet.

- We had some problems. One shock broke, and the rear axle temperature went over the top. So we had to slow down to 320khp. According to our GPS, we drove at 370kph. But then again, we don't know where the official radar controls where made, Polly says.

He has no ambitions to break the records anymore.

- The first third of the race, we drove faster than anyone has ever done. But we had to slow, and I am quite happy for that. Our rear tires looks like someone used a shotgun on them.



NO STOP: The parade on Aultman Street before the race is a must. From the first car, a civilian police car, they are throwing candy to the kids. Not that safe since the kids run around in the street when the car passes.



THOUSANDS OF HORSEPOWER: Over 130 sport cars participate in this the twentieth Silver State Classic Challenge. But only one of them reached 358kph.....



EVIL FORCES: There is not much space for more stuff under the hood. But a 8.9 litres V8, with a supercharger that develops 1407bhp might be enough. From left, not counting the tourist in the background is Gunnar Skjerve, Pal-Arvid Blytt and Arne Christian Kaland.

When the results are published, at the dinner in Las Vegas the same night, Polly is beaten by Richard Hille, a sheriff from California that never let any bad guys drive away from him. Polly and his team got an average speed of "only" 292kph, while Hille in his Chevrolet Camaro had an average of 319khp.

- It's remarkable that first time drivers manage to finish the race, says Hille. He knows what he is talking about, this was his 13th race, but he has only finished 4 for of them.
- And also, my relatives are from Norway, so Norway did win the unlimited class, Hille says to make it easier for Polly.

And to make it even better, Polly was one of the two competitors that accelerated from 0 to over 320khp in 1 mile. Plus, the team from Norway wins first price for the highest speed with their 358kph.

It will take a long time before the rattle snakes has the guts to cross Highway 318 again.



THE DREAM IS OVER:

- It tingles in the body when you go airborne over a top at 320khp, says Polly. I wouldn't like to sit beside, says Pal-Arvid Blytt just after he passed the finishing line in Nevada's desert. To the left his sun burned co-pilot Gunnar Skjerje.