

**POPULAR HOT RODDING MAGAZINE, JUNE 1994
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By Scott Oldham

In the past 25 years, we've gone on some wild rides with Gale Banks. The kind of rides you write off as side effects of immaturity. Rides you're amazed you lived through. Rides that make this job worth doing.



The most stupid of all had to be the time we had a 600hp twin-turbo '82 Trans Am going 170 mph on the I-5 freeway at 4:30 in the afternoon. The least stupid was the time we killed a lunch hour by doing 200-foot burnouts in a 454 Camaro Banks Engineering was testing for the Chevrolet Raceshop. By the way, both times Gale was driving.

He's a hot redder building hot rods, pure and simple. "It's the speed," says Gale, with a reminiscent look on his still boyish face. "It's always been the speed."

Gale Banks Engineering now occupies a 55,000 square-foot, surgically clean facility in the Los Angeles suburb of Azusa, California. But it wasn't always that way. When Gale was 12 years old and bought a 1931 Model A coupe Ford for \$35, he didn't have 50 employees or a custom-built, computer-controlled Teledine Pine's tube bending machine (the only one that bends up to 3½ -inch tubing). He had desire, and just enough money to enter the car at Lyons Dragstrip. "It ran 48 mph in the quarter," says Gale. "So I mowed lawns and saved money for two years. I bought a Riley OHV head, two Windfield carbs, a Wyco magneto, an Isky cam, Jahns 4:1 pistons, Durant connecting rods, an Auburn clutch, a synchromesh '39 Ford transmission and Ruxtall two-speed rear end. Then I went back to Lyons and ran 68 mph. In the 1/8 mile, that car was an animal. But I eventually blew the rear end and my dad sold it for 35 bucks."

Gale spent most of his time hanging around at Bell Auto Parts and Automotive Balancing Service, both in Lynwood, California, and just up the street from his house. If you were a hot rodder in L.A. in the late '50s, you bought parts at Bell and had your motor balanced at Automotive Balancing Service—the first balancing service anywhere. It was at these places where Gale met men like Ed Iskenderian and Howard Johanson. They'd talk, he'd listen.

The quest for speed continued. "I bought a '41 Chevy coupe for \$65. It had a GMC 270-cube six in it, bored and stroked with a Wayne head on it. That car ran low 90 mph in the quarter. Hell, that sucker would blow off a '57 Chevy." Soon the Chevy was history and Gale was driving a '37 Buick Straight 8 coupe. "It got its normal hot rodding," Gale says matter of factly. "And ran 100 mph in the quarter.



"I got into Studes in '57, when the '53 Studebaker coupe was the Bonneville car of choice," says Gale shifting his frame in his large office chair. "George Salih, who built the Ford Foyt Indy V8, and Leo Gruteson, who was the first Miller employee, teamed up and were building '57 DOHC Studebaker V8 heads. And I got some of them, and built my first engine. I was 15."



In his dad's three-car garage, Gale and his dad built the Studebaker motor and put it in a '32 Plymouth coupe. They sold it in 1958 for \$1100. "That was the beginning of the business," says Gale.

It was just a step in his quest for speed. That quest took him off land for much of the '70s when Gale concentrated his efforts on marine applications. The Cal Poly graduate built the 2000hp twin-turbo 454 that won the '74 Jet Boat Nationals. That really put him on the map.



In 1977 his company built 14 turbo automobile prototypes for Volvo. This led to his first twin-turbo smallblock Chevy automobile engine in 1978, and his company's return to the forefront of on-land performance.



In 1982 Banks built a limited number of specially prepared Camaros and Firebirds he called Twin-Turbo GT's. In 1984 he pegged the boost gauge. A Banks Twin Turbo 454 powered '68 Corvette ran 240 mph to become the World's Fastest Passenger Car, and a Banks Twin-Turbo GT Trans Am became the first 200mph street machine with a 204 mph run by the editors of Car and Driver.



Banks was back at Bonneville in 1986 with a Twin Turbo Trans Am that became the World's Fastest Passenger Car, clocking 268 mph. In 1987 that same car broke its own record with a 277 mph flying mile and 283mph terminal speed. Between these quests for speed, Gale Banks Engineering has somehow found time to develop many emissions legal light-truck turbo systems for diesels and "PowerPacks" (intake and exhaust systems) for gas engines. This began in 1982 with the first for the GM 6.2 liter motor, then the Ford diesel turbo system the following year. Gale has never forgotten that to go fast, you first have to tow the racecar to the track. His tow vehicle packages have been his most successful money makers, from his wastegated turbocharger upgrades for Dodge trucks with the Cummins turbo diesel to the new "Sidewinder" wastegated turbo system for Ford's diesel.



Gale's most recent trips to Bonneville were in 1989 and '90, both with GMC's V6 Syclone project



that GB Engineering prepared. The truck went 210 mph to become the World's Fastest Pickup Truck, and was the first pickup truck over 200 mph.

Gale Banks is sitting in a large chair behind a large desk, in a large office, in the large building that houses his large company. Out in his large parking lot is the SS454 Chevy pickup he drives to work. You'll never see this guy in a Lexus. He leans back in the chair "I always wanted to go 200 mph," he says. "ETs have never meant anything to me, it's always been the speed." Gale's comuter will soon have a 502 and 1200 hp.

HERE'S WHAT ELSE THEY'RE SAYING ABOUT GALE BANKS ENGINEERING:

"You have the comforting feeling that he (Banks) is doing everything right."
Speaking of power, well, Gale Banks and his engines do that.'

CAR AND DRIVER MAGAZINE

When it comes to turbo power, Gale Banks Engineering has earned industry-wide respect."

FOUR WHEELER MAGAZINE

"The premier home of turbocharged vehicles and engines of all types, Gale Banks Engineering..."

HOT ROD MAGAZINE

"The acknowledged guru of high-performance Turbocharging".

BOATING MAGAZINE

"Banks is a wizard at making quick vehicles quicker and turning slow vehicles into quick ones."

PICKUP VAN & 4WD MAGAZINE

"He's (Banks) made his mark, time and again, all over the go-fast industry, somehow always managing to have a comfortable edge over the competition."

OFF-ROAD MAGAZINE

"Banks owns leading edge technology these days."

MOTORWEEK (PUBLIC TELEVISION PROGRAM)

"Bale is one of the most knowledgeable turbocharging experts that we presently know. Not only can he develop and design but he can modify too."

"Gale's credits and customer feedback speaks for itself."

SUPER CHEVY MAGAZINE

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