

THE COMPUTER WIZARD

Keyboard Kid

“This is very interesting,” says TK, “Look at these acceleration figures!” Jim and Ben take a look. “This data says the bike was accelerating harder than a jet being catapult launched off an aircraft carrier,” says Ben.

Nitro overhears and comes over. This fits in with a wild idea he has. “Tell me more,” he says.

“Well,” says Ben, “According to this information--which I have no reason to doubt after watching the test today--with this kind of acceleration and the amount of lift the bike has with its wings deployed, it could take off in less than 40 feet. Actually, quite a bit less, if it was taking off into a head wind.”

“Hmm, what about landing speed?” asks Nitro. TK runs through mega lines of data on the screen.

“Amazing,” thinks Nitro, watching TK manipulate the mouse and keyboard. Nitro notices that Ben and Jim are also watching in awe. TK stops at the information on stall speeds: “Here it is.” TK starts pulling out bits of data and running calculations on the screen.

By now Terry, Nail and Celeste have also come over and are standing there dumbfounded, with Jim, Ben and Nitro, watching TK run the computer.

“This new computer is really cool,” says TK, “It never crashes. We’ll have the answer in no time.”

Orville, Wilbur and TK

“Here it is,” he says. Even he’s surprised by the result. “Wow!” he exclaims, “The stall speed is a little under 44 miles per hour; 43.6842 m.p.h., to be fairly exact.” And TK likes to be fairly exact. “In fact,” he continues, while running more data and calculations across the screen at lighting speed, “it looks like with a few small changes in the design of the wings and underside of the lifting body, we could drop the stall speed even lower.”

“Where were you when they were inventing airplanes?” asks Ben, just shaking his head.

Terry says, “I think the hamburgers are ready.” After watching TK’s unreal demonstration on the computer, he thinks it would be good to do something that he can understand, something a little easier to deal with - like eating a hamburger.

Everybody else seems to agree with Terry and wander over to the barbecue. Nitro, once they have their burgers, corrals Ben off to the side to pick his mind a little, and find out what he knows about taking off and landing on aircraft carriers. Soon everyone is involved in the conversation. They still don’t know what Nitro has on his mind, but the subject is interesting.

Terry looks at the sky. It’s getting late, and it probably wouldn’t be wise to stay until tomorrow to try another flight, as they had originally planned. The military air controller will be keeping an eye over here now—no sense in being too noticeable.

“Why don’t you all come down to my place in Lancaster?” offers Ben, “There’s plenty of room to park your rigs. Lupé would love to see you all, and I have a pile of books and information for

TK.” Everyone accepts, especially TK.

Ben’s House

Lupé creates a super dinner, with Betty and Celeste helping and taking a Spanish cooking lesson at the same time. One small slip up by TK: he unwittingly allows Celeste to see him not only flipping out over Lupé’s Spanish cooking, but even having seconds.

Celeste thinks, “Maybe it’s time for TK to start eating a few things besides those awful Swiss cheeseburgers!” After dinner, the conversation about carrier flying resumes. Ben knows a bit about it, as at one time he worked on a project to develop more efficient methods of launching and retrieval.

Nitro’s Wild Idea

Nitro explains his wild idea. “Why not launch RocketBike off the top of the Bikester trailer? The trailer already has an elevator in it for lifting a vehicle up so you can store another underneath it. It could be modified to go all the way up to the roof, and the top of the trailer could be strengthened. It would be just like a carrier flight deck.”

“Interesting,” says Jim. “Fantastic,” adds TK.

“With all the lift and the low stall speed that RocketBike has, there’s no reason this won’t work,” says Ben. “The problem, as I see it,” he continues, “is landing on top of the trailer. With the amount of thrust RocketBike has, it could probably take off straight up, like a rocketship. But landing is going to be tricky, that’s a very small carrier deck.”

TK can’t contain himself. “If the truck and trailer were going forward at 44 miles an hour or so (43.6842 to be exact), the headwind would allow RocketBike to sit down on the top of the trailer at stall speed, wouldn’t it?”

“Yes, but it’s still a very small landing field.” answers Ben.

“It would be like landing on a postage stamp,” interjects Terry, “A three cent stamp!”

Nitro comes up with another idea. “How about having something that catches the Bike when it lands, like the cable they catch with a tailhook on a fighter?”

“Yes, that would help,” answers Ben, “It could stretch a little to help slow the bike down if it came in a little too fast.”

“It would still be kinda scary,” exclaims Terry. But things being kinda scary is what keeps attracting Terry to the races and projects like this, instead of being at the farm with Nerissa, watching the twins grow up. Somewhere he’d really like to be right now.

It’s getting late, and they make plans for the next day. Ben has offered a tour of Edwards Air Force Base in the morning, and TK can hardly wait, a chance to see some of the ultra experimental aircraft he’s been watching fly over the flats in front of Ben and Lupe’s house close up. After going to Edwards, they are all heading for home, except of course Nail, who is heading for the East Coast for several races. Nail is always on the road.

Secret Stuff

They are at Edwards early, and Ben can go anywhere on the base, so they get the full tour. They even get to see some of the very latest wing designs, which Ben figured TK would be very interested in. They look at a Space Shuttle and are even invited to go aboard and look around. Celeste is thrilled: her secret dream is to fly on the Space Shuttle. After several hours of seeing just about everything imaginable in the way of state-of-the-art aircraft, they go back to Lancaster for lunch.

Lunch at Lupé's

Lupé has outdone herself and lunch lasts late into the afternoon. It ends with everyone getting ready to head in their various directions - and making plans for where their paths can cross next.

Celeste has been in contact with a major racetrack in Florida. It looks like together they will be putting on a giant "Run What Ya Brung" spectacular in about seven weeks. It's still in the formative stages, and when they get back to the farm, Celeste will have time to sit down and put it together.

Jim, Betty, Ben and Lupé are already planning to travel out to Florida for the race in Jim's and Betty's bus, and Nail says, "You know I'll be there, I never miss a race, especially a big one."

Nail heads east, while Jim and Betty leave in the bus, aimed back towards L.A. As the Bikesters get ready to leave, Lupé gives them a big picnic basket she has fixed for the trip. "Some Gramma I got, huh?" says TK, beaming. Lupé gives him a big hug.

Thinkin'

Celeste and Terry share most of the driving as Nitro and TK spend a lot of the trip bouncing ideas and theory off of each other while figuring out the systems necessary to launch and land RocketBike off the top of the trailer. Ben was right. Taking off should be relatively easy. It's landing and stopping the bike that is going to be a trick. By the time they pull into the farm, TK and Nitro have put together a design for a rather basic set-up. It's going to be kind of low tech, but it should work, and it's a starting point.

Home Again

After getting settled back in at the farm, everyone falls into the routine of their own projects. Celeste and Nerissa are going full tilt getting the "Parking Lot Show" ready to go, and also upgrading the whole tee-shirt operation. The first orders have been sent to the new customers in California and they are already calling to order more.

Celeste is also spending lots of time on the phone, mostly to Florida, putting the "Run What Ya Brung Spectacular" together, and it's coming along very nicely. It looks like they will use the race for the public debut of RocketBike.

TK and Nitro are very busy, Nitro modifying the trailer so they can launch RocketBike off it, and TK working on the system to land back on the trailer and get the bike stopped. TK, with the help of Nitro, is also working on the paper to be presented to the Engineering Society. Terry is off with the twins working on "The Boat", a 43-foot cabin cruiser that Terry and the girls have been restoring for two years, and it's almost ready to go.

Gettin' Stuff Done

This break from the racing schedule has worked to everyone's advantage. Celeste has the "Parking Lot Show" ready to go. The jet hydroplane is all painted and the sign painter has just finished lettering it. Celeste has decided to call the whole promotion "Can-Am Harvest" because they will be collecting for the food banks both here in the U.S., and just across the border in the Vancouver, Canada area.

Nitro has strengthened the top of the trailer, modified the elevator and built a sliding door so RocketBike can be elevated to the roof for launching.

"It's cool -- just like a little aircraft carrier," says TK as they put the finishing touches on the

catch system for landing (the real trick part).

The best accomplishment of all is that “The Boat” is finished, and everybody is taking the rest of the day off for the inaugural cruise.

On the Boat

It’s an excellent day to be out on the water, clear, cool and crisp. They’ve packed a big lunch and lots of hot chocolate. There are whales and seals to watch. The twins take turns steering while everyone else just lays back and enjoys the day.

Can-Am Harvest

After a day of cruising everyone is recharged and ready to go full tilt, which is a good thing, because today is the first time out for the Can-Am Harvest Show.

Celeste is very proud of what they’ve created. The hydro looks great. The truck they’ve put together to tow the racing boat opens up into a small stage to display SuperBike or whatever else they’ve brought along. Behind the display platform is a large video screen. The video Celeste put together has footage of SuperBike racing, and the China Lake drug bust, with a spot for “D.A.R.E. To Keep Kids Off Drugs”, not to mention some really flash graphics and some information about the food banks. It should go over great. In fact, Celeste has made up her mind, this whole promotion is going to be a major hit.

This first show is going to be at a local shopping center. Celeste hasn’t put out any advance publicity. She wants to find out how people react to the promotion without knowing anything about it or what to expect.

Shopping Center

Before they even get the display set up, the hydroplane, with its bright colors and lettering, is drawing a large crowd.

In talking to the people, Celeste is amazed by the percentage who are not aware of how many people are without food, or the urgency of helping them.

Celeste feels “We are all brothers and sisters, and it is our duty to look out for each other, especially when someone is in need.” She makes a note to put even more information on the video about the hungry and the homeless. The video is only about two minutes long and plays over and over so everyone coming up to the display gets a chance to see it.

The show is a tremendous hit! Before the day is over they’ve sold all the Can-Am Harvest and Bikester tee-shirts they brought with them, collecting quite a large amount of money for the local food bank, plus they have enough food donated to fill over five barrels. Best of all, they have educated a lot of people about the need to give, in the process.

Celeste and Nerissa are ecstatic. This was a super success, but wait until they get some PR and advertising going. Then people will know about the show and where it’s going to be in advance. It will be easy to do twice as well.

Celeste knows it’s going to be a monster success, and will help keep the food banks in this area well stocked for a long time to come.

Back to Work

Celeste doesn’t have much time to revel in the glory of the Can-Am Harvest success. Besides

scheduling the next several months of appearances for Can-Am Harvest, she has to train several of Nerissa's students to handle the Can-Am appearances. There's also the Bikesters business and scheduling to stay on top of, and the big race in Florida to deal with, which is coming together very fast.

Some of the pre-race publicity is already starting, and it's rapidly shaping up as the 'Big Race' of All Time. There will be a full field of the very fastest and quickest fuel dragsters and funny cars, plus over twenty Jet Cars. The Grungers and all the other ultra quick drag bikes will be there, even a few from Europe and a large supporting show. The race will be televised world-wide live by satellite. The highlights will include SuperBike against the winner of the Fuel Funny Car Eliminations and then the Fuel Dragster winner in one round match races. The Grand Finale will be Terry on RocketBike against the top eliminator of the jet cars. This will be the first time the public will see RocketBike, and there will be a lot of people watching.

This race will be a showcase for drag racing worldwide, and Celeste thinks it will help make their sport as popular as Formula One and Indy Car racing everywhere. Racers like Terry, Bo and Nail, despite their differences, are drawn together by a common love of drag racing, and every racer is going all out to make this race a major success. This is what they've all been waiting for, a chance to show the world their sport at its best.

Chapter 9

Table of Contents