

Up From the Ashes: Recreation of the 1967-68 BFK AA/FD*
Rev. August. 9th, 2017 , includes BIR debut.

This story begins May 1968. The Becchetti-Fitzgerald-Kalvestran (BFK) AA/FD dragster with Dave Edstrom driving, had just returned from Colorado after a successful trip. We had set strip ET and speed records and were runner up at a NHRA Div. 5 meet (Fig 1). In Colorado we had run a special high compression 392 c.in. blown hemi (noted by its white cast-iron engine block in Fig. 1). But now back at our home strip, the former Minnesota Dragways in the north Minneapolis suburb of Blaine, we were running our “flatland” hemi. Still a high compression motor but less so than the mountain motor and with a different tune up. Dave had gone through several rounds and was in the finals against the Canadian AA/FD of Denny Darragh from Winnipeg. Both cars were close going into the lights at 200 mph when our slicks broke loose, the engine over revved (no rev limiters back then), and both cars lost their engines. The crankshaft came out of our car (despite the steel bottom-end cradle) and was run over sending the car off the track into the dirt and sand where it flip several times. I watched all this from the starting line and was expecting the worse but Dave survived with just a broken arm. The car however was destroyed. We built a new car and raced another year or so before most of us graduated from college (U. Minnesota) and went our separate ways. However the car we raced 1967- to early 1968, with Terry Kalvestran, then Dave Anderson and finally Dave Edstrom driving was the best handling and best performing of the several AA/FDs we raced in the 60s. During that period it set ET and speed records at several strips in the Midwest and Canada and was very competitive in the selected NHRA Div. 5 meets we ran.

The original chassis, built in 1965, was a copy of a 1960's Woody-Gilmore “flexy flyer” design. It was gas-welded by several of the team partners including the author. We annealed most of the welds to ensure suitable weld and adjacent tube strength. Later the car was extensively modified and lengthened by George Wepplo at Minnesota Custom Fabricators. All of the remaining original welds and critical tube sections fortunately held up during the accident, but watching a car flip several times with some welds you may have done can be unnerving.

In this Woody design the front engine supports between the top and bottom rails are not welded to the bottom tube but instead sit on a cradle resting on the bottom tube i.e. a slip joint, and there are few other vertical supports. This allows the top and bottom rails to slip, twist and move relative to each other resulting in excellent weight transfer and compensation for the engine torque on the chassis. The latter helps keep the front wheels on the ground under acceleration even with no or little added front weight. Thus it was seldom necessary to add weight on the front axle, resulting in a significant saving in weight as well as providing excellent handling under power, even with a relatively short chassis. We raced the early version of this car with partner Terry Kalvestran driving during 1965 and 1966 (Fig. 2).

As noted, the chassis was then modified and lengthened for the 1967 season to 182 in. by local chassis builder George Wepplo, who was SEMA

qualified as required by the new NHRA rules. (George would later build the double-hemi Gopher State Timing Top Gas dragster). Our 1967 BFK AA/FD was driven initially by Terry, and then by Dave Anderson throughout the Midwest including Canada most of the 1967 season (Fig.3). At one point, Dave being upset by too much oil coming back from the engine, insisted I drive the car so I could appreciate the problem. I did this a few times and got "oiled" during one run. After that we made extra modifications to make sure the engine wouldn't blow oil back.

The following year Dave Anderson, who owned a local speed shop, decided to race his own car sponsored by his speed shop. Minnesota native Dave Edstrom, who had come from California with experience in both engine building and driving, then joined us fall 1967 as driver and partner. Dave Anderson would later gain fame driving the rocket car "Pollution Packer", setting several class records at Bonneville and in the NHRA rocket-car division that had been formed. This included some of the first ¼ mile runs over 300 mph. (Dave would sadly later lose his life in a rocket car accident and NHRA soon dropped that division).

After our race team disbanded in 1969, Dave Edstrom would go on to build and race a rear-engine AA/FD. Dave unfortunately suffered from diabetes and would soon become blind. Amazingly he continued to race, now as the engine builder and tuner (!) with his son Mike driving their AA/FC funny car called "Bind Faith". Their car proved particularly popular with race fans and promoters given the story of the car and Dave. Dave Edstrom would unfortunately pass away in 1991.

Fast forward 50 years. Former partner Terry Kalvestran had just retired from a successful engineering career as VP at a major tubing manufacturer located in Minneapolis. Likewise the author (FB) had recently retired from academia (U. Michigan) after 40 yrs. of teaching and research (Applied Physics). We had both been following drag racing and reminisced about the good old days when amateurs like us could race and be competitive even running an AA/FD part time while attending college. Discussions about restoring the BFK "flexy-flyer" came up and now included Dave Edstrom's son and former AA/FC driver Mike Edstrom as a partner. We solicited key advice on the project from local nostalgia racer and motor-sports parts manufacturer Roger Stanke. Unfortunately former race partner Pete Fitzgerald (Fig. 1), who had been living in Texas, had recently passed away but we established contact with his widow and his brother.

A meeting in Minneapolis early 2016 finalized the plans for the project: Terry and the author would supply the rolling chassis and the trailer while Roger would be contracted to build the period-correct 392 blown nitro hemi at Stanke Motorsports. Mike would drive the race car, provide the tow vehicle (his pickup truck), and help with the build. We then contacted well-known and respected chassis builder Keith Burgan of Rooman Motorsports in Brownsburg, IN to recreate the 1967 chassis as close to the original as possible.

We collected the few remaining photographs of the original car we could locate (e.g. Fig 1 and Fig 3.) and provided those to Keith together with some personal recollections of the chassis details. (A note to present racers: Take

many pictures of your car, racing and otherwise, we didn't !). Otherwise we had to scale many of the photos e.g. using known valve cover or wheel dimensions, to get the car dimensions as they did not conform exactly to the dimensions of the original Woody Gilmore car we had "copied" and where prints or sketches exist. Likewise we had made many of the chassis components ourselves and duplicates could not be purchased and had again be custom fabricated at Keith's shop.

Construction of the chassis began early summer 2016. In parallel with the chassis construction, it was necessary to locate period-correct magnesium wheels, a rear end, and a 3rd member closely matching those used in the original car. A pair of Halibrand 16" x10" magnesium wheels was located on the West Coast together with a gently used early Olds narrowed 4.11 rear end, axles and magnesium M/T 3rd member. Trips to the Hot Rod Reunion at Bowling Green (late June 2016) and later Bakersfield (October, 2016) resulted in acquiring front wheels, a period-correct Schaffer magneto, and retro MH slicks. Likewise, Bredan Murry at Performance Motorsports in California helped supply many of the other retro parts we needed. These again all closely matched as much as possible the original components used on our 1967 car. The magneto was sent to Cirello Magnetos for refurbishing since it was intended to run the car as a cackle car with a nitro-powered engine matching the original as closely as feasible, at least in appearance. The latter however would not include machining adapters, blower pulleys, the flywheel, and other components on a lathe or Bridgeport mill as we once did, nor going to a junkyard or Army surplus store (that were still well stocked in the 60s), buying and then rebuilding a 671 GMC truck supercharger to run.

Since the car would be built from the ground up, it started as a rack of chrome-moly tubing, aluminum sheets, steel plates, and aluminum plates (Fig. 4). This was basically similar to all that was left of the original chassis after the crash. The rear end and 3rd member we had acquired were sent to Rooman Motor Sports and placed in the chassis fixed on the welding jig (Fig. 5 and 6) together with a 392 hemi engine block. The 0.058 in. thick 4130 chrome moly chassis tubing was then tack welded. The cockpit was made a bit larger than the original to accommodate the older, larger and slightly "wide-body" race partners. The Halibrand mags were sent to Shaun Dill in Brownsburg, IN for cleaning and application of Dow7 treatment to match the look of the original rear wheels. As noted Keith had to make many of the needed chassis parts based on pictures that were available of the original car. This included the VW type front torsion bar suspension, bell-crank and steering set up, etc. (Figs.5 and 6).

While we had originally built our own trailers, this time we contracted for the construction of a custom light-weight 7 ft. x 24 ft. twin-axle all aluminum Rance Lightning enclosed trailer. The dimensions were based on a sketch we did for the car trailer (Fig. 7) which Kevin at Rance Trailers, Elkhart IN, after a short visit, turned into a working design and then supervised the construction. The trailer was delivered to Rooman Motorsports late 2016. Since we are not racing the car per se, the trailer is smaller than might be used for a true race car

trailer. Instead it is designed for easy trailering and for a total weight with car inside to be < 4500 lbs.

After completion of TIG welding most of the chassis (Fig. 5), work started on the aluminum panels for the short body, seat and the gas tank (Fig.8). Again these all were fabricated by Keith to match the original car as close as possible (Fig.3) although the fuel tank was made a bit larger (ca. 8 gals.) to accommodate running the engine longer if needed. Finally in March 2017 the rolling chassis was complete and the car loaded in its trailer and taken to the Twin Cities (Figs. 9 and 10). After the ten hour trip back to Minnesota it was unloaded at Stanke Motor sports in St. Paul where the initial engine block installation and fitting of major components was done (Figs.11 and 12) before taking everything apart for chassis paint, body paint, chrome, and upholstery.

As mentioned the new chassis was made wider than the original by several inches, and this proved to be a problem as the early-Olds rear end we had purchased was several inches too narrow for proper and safe installation of the brakes and wheels without using thick wheel spacers. It was decided to send the rear end out to Mark Williams Enterprises in Colorado for widening and new axles. This also required some modifications to the side body panels.

In the meantime Roger Stanke and his sons worked on completion of the engine with acquisition and installation of the fuel pump, blower and injectors. A special Crower cam, period-correct Enderle injectors. Brooks rods, Venolia pistons, and a Crower 3 disk pedal clutch plus flywheel completed the engine set up. A set of custom 2 ½ in headers, matching the original set (Fig. 3) was made by Don Ross at his fabrication shop in Texas and would later join the other parts at AAA Metal Finishing in St. Paul for chrome plating supervised by Raul. Don also made the in-out box now required for cackle cars.

After assembly and check out of the short block (Fig. 13), the long block was assembled and mounted in the newly-painted chassis. The headers were mounted, checked for clearance (Fig.14), and then sent out for chrome. This was followed by installation of the blower and injectors (Fig. 15). The completed engine in the chassis went through a final check out and for installation of the parachute (a working chute), throttle linkage, and fuel lines in preparation of the first start up. Likewise, after one last check, the body panels were sent to Bryan Mahler and Paintworks in St. Paul for paint matching the original House of Kolor multi-color paint scheme (Fig. 3). The cowl lettering and pin stripping was then expertly done by Scott Berosik in St. Paul. The seat was sent out for upholstery and roll-bar padding to Jenny the StichBitch of Stillwater. Curt at Creative Metal Works helped with the final fitting of body panels. In the meantime a gently-used RCD starter was acquired along with the blower cogs and a Grand Prix Auto (Tulsa) battery pack. As usual, the start up procedure will include starting first on methanol and then switching to 90% or higher nitro mixture.

Finally after more than a year of building (and paying bills) the car was near completion end of June 2017 (Figs. 16 -18) and being prepared for the first start up. We are looking forward to showing the car this summer and fall at various events in the Midwest, now as the BKFE AA/FD reflecting addition of our new partner Mike Edstrom (Fig. 17). We hope to see many of the Nitro Madness

readers at these shows. We hope to meet those who might remember seeing our original car (or similar ones) racing over fifty years ago in the “good old days” of drag racing.

Update: August 2017

The car was first shown at Brainerd Intl NHRA Race August 20-21 2017. It drew lots of attention (see Fig. 19). Start up shortly we hope (Sept.2017) Posters we displayed with car shown in Fig.20.

Fred Becchetti

BKFE AA/FD (Partners: Terry Kavestran and Mike Edstrom)

* A shorter version of this story appears in the Fall 2017 issue of Nitro Madness magazine.

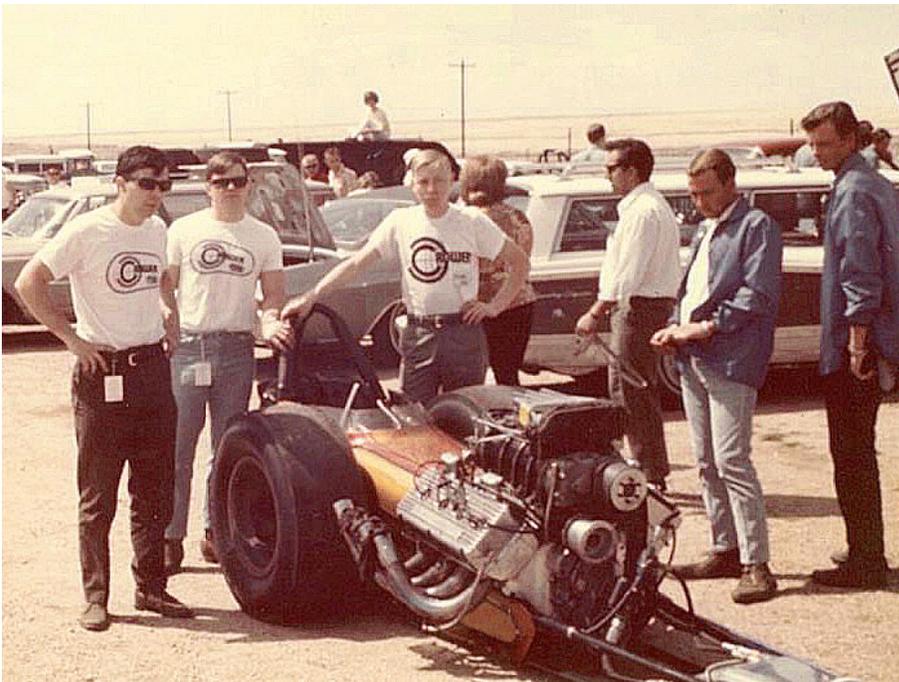


Fig.1: The author (Fred Becchetti, left); Pete Fitzgerald (middle) and Dave Edstrom (right) May,1968 at NHRA Div.5 meet in Colorado.



Fig.2: The 1965-66 BFK AA/FD with Terry Kalevstran driving, Minnesota Dragways. Colorized photo by Jim Cecil.

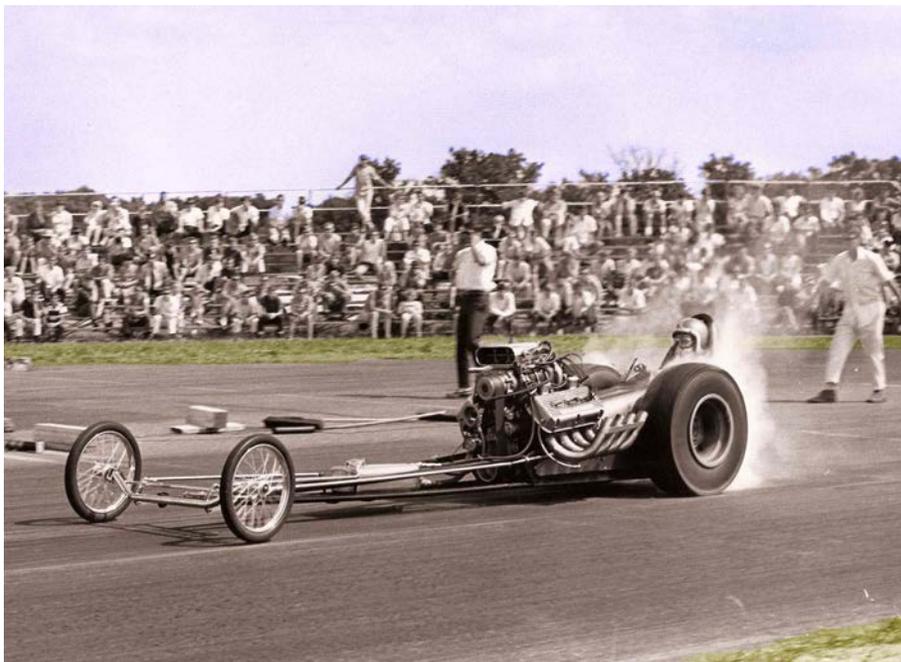


Fig.3: The 1967 BFK AA/FD at Minnesota Dragways, with the late Dave Anderson driving. Colorized photo by Jim Cecil.



Fig.4: Chrome-moly tubing, aluminum sheet, etc, at Keith Burgan's shop, ready to start the project.



Fig.5: Initial chassis and a 392 hemi engine block set up on welding jig at Keith Burgan's Rooman Motorsports.



Fig.6: Keith Burgan starting TIG welding chassis at his shop in Indiana.

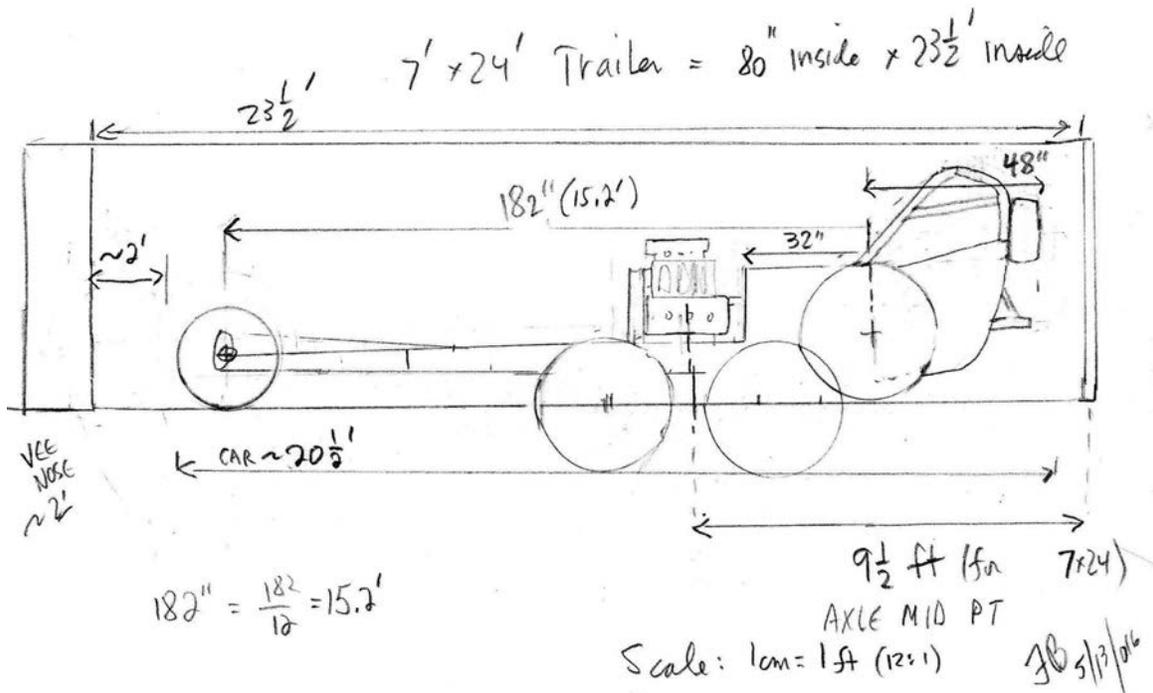


Fig.7: Author's Sketch of the car in the trailer used to design Rance Lightning 7'x 24' all-aluminum enclosed trailer.



Fig.8: Keith Burgan starting work on an English roller to shape an aluminum body panel.



Fig.9: Loading the finished rolling chassis onto the trailer at Rooman Motorsports, Brownsburg, IN, March 2017 with Terry Kalvestran (left) , Keith Burgan (center) and Nick Edstrom (right front).



Fig.10: Mike, Terry and Mike's son Nick, off to Minnesota with car after leaving Keith's Indiana shop, March 2017.



Fig.11: Preparing for initial fit of engine into rolling chassis at Stanke Motorsports shop in St. Paul.



Fig.12: Side view of chassis at Stanke Motorsports (Fig.K) for initial fitting of components.



Fig.13: Short block build near completion at Stanke Motorsports.



Fig. 14: Partner Terry Kalvestran checking fit and clearance of the Ross headers on the newly installed hemi long block.



Fig. 15: Partner Mike Edstrom checking the engine and clutch installation (April 2017)



Fig.16: Partners Mike Edstrom and Terry Kalvestarn fitting the painted and lettered body panels .



Fig. 17: Rear view of assembled chassis. engine and body (June 18th, 2017).



Fig.18. The BKFE LLC AA/FD partners with the assembled chassis, engine and body, June 18,2017.



Fig. 19: Car on display at BIR NHRA races, August 20-21, 2017

**Becchetti
Kalvestran
Fitzgerald
Edstrom
AA/FD**

Mpls. MN.



Recreation of
1967 BFK AA/FD
NHRA Div. 5
Best time 6.86 sec,
214 mph 7/1967
Minnesota Dragways
Dave Anderson, driver

Recreation:

Chassis: Rooman Motorsports, Brownsburg IN
Engine: Stanke Motorsports, Little Canada MN
Paint: Bryan Mahler-Paintworks
Lettering: Scott Berosik
Upholstery: Jenny the StitchBitch
Chrome: AAA Metal Finishing



...and thanks to: *thanks to*



**BKFE AA/FD:
Recreation of
mid 60's AA/FD**



History: 1964-1966 Partners Fred Becchetti, the late Pete Fitzgerald, and Terry Kalvestran build and operate AA/FD as BFK AA/FD. Gas-welded chassis made by partners as a copy of Woody Gilmore "flex-flyer" (Unwelded engine support cradle at front of engine). Raced out of Minneapolis, MN (NHRA Div.5) 354 ci. cast iron Hemi with 1/8 in. stroker. Later 392 ci cast iron Hemi; MH slicks; 85-90 % nitro. Terry Kalvestran driver.



1966-68: Car modified and lengthened to 182 in. by George Wepplo (Minnesota Custom Fabricators) to meet NHRA-SEMA specifications. 392 ci cast iron high-compression Hemi; rebuilt 671 GMC supercharger; two plate Crower pedal clutch; Crower cam; MH slicks; 80-90 % nitro.

Best time: 6.86 sec, 214 Mph, July 1967 at Minnesota Dragways-NHRA clocks

Terry Kalvestran (1966-67), Dave Anderson (1967) and Dave Edstrom (1968) Drivers. Car destroyed late May 1968 during race at Minnesota Dragways.



1968-69: Partners Becchetti and Fitzgerald joined by Dave Edstrom operate new George Wepplo-built front-engine AA/FD (NHRA. Div. 5) until group disbands in 1970.

2016: Remaining partners Terry Kalvestran and Fred Becchetti are joined by Dave Edstrom's son, Mike, to recreate period-correct 1967-68 car now known as **BKFE AA/FD** as cackle car (top picture).

Credits:

Chassis and body: Keith Burgan, Rooman Motorsports, Brownsburg IN
Engine: Stanke Motorsports, Little Canada MN
Trailer: 7'x24' All-aluminum Rance Lightning by Forest River, Elkhart IN



... and thanks to:

Don Ross Fabricators: In/out box, headers, linkage
Cirrelo magnetos: Rebuilt Schaeffer 60's magneto
Jenny the StitchBitch: Upholstery
Bryan Mahler- Paintworks : HOK paint
Scott Berosik : Lettering
Curt-Creative MetalWorks: Additional body work
AAA Metal Finishing : Chrome

Mark Williams: Axles and rear-end modifications.
Brendan Murray: Locating period-correct parts.
Hotheads: M/T Valve covers and accessories
Shaun Dill: Wheel treatment
AeroComp Trailers : Trailer upgrades

...and finally:
Our families: Letting us take on this project !



Fig. 20: Posters shown with car at BIR debut of car.

First engine start up on nitro-
Oct. 2017

