

# A One Horsepower Soapbox by David Seidel

In my formative years which seemed to go on forever (approximately 1950 to 1960) the news was full of Sir Donald Campbell and his record-breaking land speed record attempt on Lake Eyre. These events all inspired (or conspired) me to make my own land speed record.

## How to build a Soapbox

I longed for something more than my cherished BSA pushbike to satisfy my lust for four wheels. The soapbox period was looming. My dad had a large workshop to service tip trucks and therein was a smorgasbord of tools, nuts and bolts, benches and an oxy set, all of which I was allowed to use with care. This I did. Now to gather the pieces needed and build a soapbox.

In the course of dad's sand and metal carting business, my younger brothers and I would accompany him to one of the sand washing plants, one of which adjoined the local rubbish dump. There we would find many treasures in abundance – old prams (steel framed of course), old motorbike goggles and many other interesting antiquities such as snuff boxes.

For the purpose of soapbox building, the English prams were the best as they had wheels with ball bearings, so off came the body and we used the frame as a chassis.

The basic box layout was a frame with back axle and wheels, a wooden box to sit on and a long centre section to which we attached the front axle together with a crude centrepoint steering and a piece of rope.

## Road Test

To road test these often-fragile contraptions, we fixed a long rope to one of my brothers' pushbikes and then he pulled this around the neighbourhood while I steered for some evaluation. Now to really make this a better test we found an alternative solution.

Our family owned a little black pony called Bonny. She was a good-natured animal and I noticed that on the rear of the saddle were some spare hitches. Then a light bulb moment came to me – why not just hook the tow rope up to these unused devices, put on my old motorcycle goggles and gee up! Wow!



David Seidel on Bonny = 1 horsepower

Away we went as one of my brothers took the reins of the pony. Our little dog Bob ran alongside and joined in the fun. Now I fully understood the meaning of horsepower.

## Never Stand Behind a Horse

One day while we were attempting to break all speed records with our one horsepower well-oiled machine, an unforeseen emergency stop had to be made and I ran into Bonny's back legs. Then whack! She gave an almighty kick and up went the soapie and myself into the air. I can still remember the soapbox passing me on the way down. We had to curtail this idea for a while and think of another form of motive power for safety reasons and also because mum was convinced that this would never have happened if we hadn't been playing about on a Sunday.

Then bingo! Another lightbulb moment.

## Downhill Run

There was a steep road not far from our home which was well paved and not too built up. Well, this proved successful until a second attempt at our speed record came undone. I had made an extra platform on the rear so that after giving me a push start my little brother could jump on and squat down. This he did, and away we both went. At the half-way mark of our adventurous downhill run, I suddenly remembered that to our

left were stables for trotting horses and on weekdays the trainer would walk them across the road for weekend race preparation. Guess what?

Today was one of those days, and lo and behold there was one crossing directly in front of us. Too late! I couldn't stop. I steered expertly between the handler and the horse's front legs and yelled at my brother to keep his head down. We continued on this epic quest for speed, and the attempt was our best ever. I can still hear the words of excitable encouragement echoing down the hill from the handler (although some of the words I had never heard before!)

## Time to Pack It In

Even though we had success, we had to abandon our curled-up fritz and tomato sandwiches which we had left at the top of the hill in our lunch bag. We felt this was a small price to pay for our successful speed attempt and I suggested to my brother Robert that it may be best to go home a different way, which we did.

We celebrated in a slightly subdued manner with a tall glass of lemonade each, hoping that the trainer hadn't recognised us and that mum wouldn't find out (we weren't even playing about on a Sunday!).

So much for horsepower.

David Seidel