

## HOW PLASMA BOY GOT HIS NAME

*Or, John Wayland's Remarkable Adventure with Artificial Ball Lightning*  
As posted on the EVDL, March 1998

By now, many of you have heard stories about our pre-race excitement, where we had a slight "mishap" with my drag car, White Zombie. In the interest of sharing the information, and in the sincere hope of helping others prevent such a catastrophe, plus for the entertainment value of the whole thing, I offer the following tale.

As is usually the case, there was a lot of last minute work to be done on the race vehicles, and they were far from being race ready. Besides these two specialty vehicles, I had also been working on two other EVs, and with the shop filled with race stuff, I was forced to work outside in the weather - rain, hail, wind, and cold - what fun!

With only two weeks before race time, I unfortunately caught that bad flu or cold bug that was going around (is it any wonder?). It hit me hard and knocked me out of commission for five days straight, effectively wiping out a whole week of work time. This left one week to get everything done, and all during that week the remnants of the flu continued to plague me, as I coughed and hacked while trying to build race machines.

The afternoon of Tuesday, March 3rd, John Bryan arrived in Portland, after a long drive from his home in Boise, Idaho, and he was ready and excited to join Bruce Meland and me on what would prove to be an electric odyssey of exceptional EVents. Bruce and I had already put in a long day, and John's arrival was a welcome one, as we both knew he would jump right in and get his hands dirty.

The plan was to have the work done on both race vehicles and have them loaded up on the trailer by 5:00 PM on Tuesday, so that we could all get in a restful night's sleep, and be off early the next morning at 5:00 AM, for the long road trip that would take us from Portland, Oregon, through Sacramento, then on to Palo Alto, and eventually on into Phoenix, Arizona and the NEDRA Saturday Night Electric Desert Drags.

I had worked on the Zombie's latest improvements all week, but at 6:30 PM the eve before we were to depart, we were still hooking things up. While Bruce was slaving away on his motorcycle, John Bryan and I were both inside the the Zombie putting the final touches on the 336 volt Genesis battery pack. We had removed the racing seats from the front of the car, so that we could get at the rear seat area battery compartment easier.

Frank "The Metal God" and I had designed the main power lead connectors for the potent, high voltage array, so that they could be easily accessed and worked on in a safe manner, away from the multitude of solid copper bus bars that interconnected the 28 high current AGM batteries. Since these batteries are very small, they are placed like so many bricks, one against the other, as they snake their way around the battery box. The batteries' terminal connections often pass within inches of each other, so all the solid copper buss bars are necessarily closely spaced. This makes for a great low resistance current path, but it also makes the likelihood of a short circuit with something like a dropped tool or even a large washer very high. As such, whenever I worked in the battery compartment, I laid a thin mat of dense foam rubber over the batteries, to offer a safety insulating barrier while using tools in the area.

A clear Lexan cover completed the package and it covered the entire battery compartment (once it was all connected and ready to go), both for insulation and to protect me from molten lead and acid spray, in the event of a blown battery during a high current blast down the quarter mile.

With my trusty companion John Bryan at my side, and with both of us crammed inside the small car working together, the moment had finally arrived to make the last connection - the twin 1/0 negative power leads. In all the excitement of the moment, I had a temporary brain short circuit, and instead of utilizing the safety aspects that I had designed into the connector system, I instead attempted to make the connection inside the battery compartment - wrong thing to do!

In one hand I held a solid brass clamp bar that I had painstakingly created at the metal shop. In the other, I had a T handle Allen wrench. I was slipping the bar under the negative-most battery terminal support bracket so that I could tighten the gold-plated screws that secure the twin StreetWires 1/0 cables, when I lit the fuse that would start a chain reaction melt down! Maybe it was because we had worked non-stop, perhaps it was total fatigue, or maybe just plain stupidity on my part, but whatever the reason, it happened.

In a surrealistic situation that is still vivid in my mind, all hell broke loose - and I mean HELL! I fumbled and lost control over the brass clamp bar, and in a moment of horror, it tumbled away and onto the tops of the Genesis batteries. As is usually the case in situations of this kind, it all seemed to happen in slow motion.

Ca-Clank ...Ca-Chink ...

"Hey, maybe it's just going to flop around and come to rest in a safe place."

Ca-SNAP!

"Oh-oh, this is not good!"

Then, another Ca-Snap. Then, CAAASSHHOOOOOOSHHHH, as an intense arc appeared!

"Oh, no!!!! This is **REALLY** not good!"

I reached towards the arc in a futile attempt to fix the problem, but the light was so intense that I couldn't look at it. I looked over at John. His mouth was wide open. We were both in a state of shock, and then the next phase of the meltdown began. Suddenly, the arc flashed into a higher state, and a brilliant blue plasma ball, maybe 6 inches in diameter, formed and seemed to float just above the batteries. It was as if an alien being had taken over the car, and it was scary as hell!

An intense heat was radiating from the intruder. One of the interior side panels began to melt and the car filled with smoke. Looking over at JB again, he was so brave and courageous, and it was as if he was the captain of a sinking vessel, determined to go down with the ship! With our skin about to peel from the heat, I shouted at him, "GET OUT, GET OUT OF THE CAR!" Bruce was also screaming at us, "HURRY UP, GET OUT OF THERE!" In what had to look like a choreographed exercise, we both bailed out with a synchronized panic leap.

Now a safer distance away, for a brief moment, we were totally dumbfounded. We stared in disbelief as the Zombie was being devoured by this demon from within. All I could think about was that all the hard work and years of nurturing this car into a race vehicle were going up in smoke before my eyes, and that I would be letting a lot of people down who were counting on us being at the drag races. It was all being destroyed right in front of me!

Bruce had grabbed a nearby towel and had soaked it in the standing rain puddles, then threw it over the plasma ball. But like an insatiable monster, it ingested the fabric and the wet towel was vaporized in an instant.

Minutes before this all started, I had talked with John about the warning labels atop the stout little Genesis batteries: "Extremely High Current, Do Not Short!" Now I was thinking that at any instant, the plasma ball should go away, that the little 16 AH batteries would surely be exhausted soon. But the quasar continued, and the strong Genesis batteries indeed seemed to be creating a whole new entity inside my burning car!

I ran for the fire extinguisher, and as I passed through the house (no extinguisher out in the shop!) I yelled to my fully-assembled family, "The car's melting down!" Running back to the car, I unloaded the contents of the extinguisher into the battery compartment, but the plasma ball refused to quit and kept on plasmizing (Is that a word?). It was relentless and unaffected by our attempts to kill it, and it continued to flare for about two straight minutes.

Finally, it went super nova, and shrank back to a white dwarf - but then, FLAMES erupted! With my family now gathered around the inferno, I exclaimed, "God, now it's on fire!" My daughter in her classic teenage sarcasm, looked at me totally seriously and said, "Why, are you an idiot?"

Taking instructions from my wife Cheryl, my daughter's close friend Heather dialed up 911 and summoned the fire department. I could see thick black clouds of smoke pouring out of the front windows, and the flames were licking the headliner, causing it to drip into the flames and refuel them. I doused the fire with the entire contents of a second extinguisher. Cheryl arrived with two boxes of baking soda, and I dumped the full contents on the flames, but they bounced right back. A garden hose was running water, as containers were filled with water and thrown at the blaze - but it just kept on burning!

Bruce and Cheryl were thinking much more clearly than I at the moment, and they began taking action to get the burning Zombie out of the shop, for fear of the whole shop going up in flames as well. There were two non-running EVs behind the Zombie in the shop driveway, plus another gas vehicle behind them, and they all had to be moved in order for us to be able to push the Zombie out of the shop. There must have been a lot of adrenaline flowing in everybody, as the cars were moved up and out the driveway in seconds, and with a clear path, we were able to shove the well-done Zombie out of the shop. With all the commotion, and with my concerned neighbors and a few onlookers now present, I was into a total overload state of mind.

Within minutes of the call, the sounds of a siren and bright flashing lights signaled that the fire truck had arrived. The firemen immediately began to take action, and after they learned just what they were dealing with, one of them donned protective equipment, including a gas mask, and bravely climbed into the interior of the car that was enveloped by the thick, dark smoke. Through the blackened side windows, I could see him ripping loose the specially-made copper bus bars that Frank had expertly formed with the metal brake, and it was terrible to see these items that Frank had so carefully shaped being destroyed by the fireman. Just as firemen take their axes and chop through expensive or ornate front doors of a burning house with more regard to saving lives than in not ruining the door, this guy was simply trying to save the car and my home, without any regard to the hand-crafted connectors and the terminals of the expensive batteries. Still, it made me sick to watch our work being mutilated! The fireman talked to me as he tried to figure out which jumpers to remove, and with his gas mask on and the sound of the pressurized oxygen supply, he sounded like Darth Vader. "Caushhh ... Caushhh ... Luke ... Caushhh ... I'm your father." OK, he really didn't say that, but it is how he sounded!

Finally, the flames disappeared, and the fireman emerged from the Zombie. In an attempt to put a little levity on the situation, one of the other firemen asked me if I knew Tim "the tool man" Taylor. My wife wasn't laughing! Yeah, it was a pretty awful!

It was getting late, and we were all past our dinner time, so we went inside the house. Bruce had gone back out to check on the hulk, and he came back inside proclaiming, "It's on fire again!" Back outside we all went, and with flames again leaping out of the charred battery compartment, I held my breath and went inside with a ratchet wrench to remove a few more jumpers. I found the one that was still passing current, and removed it. This seemed to slow the reaction, and when I poured more baking soda into "ground zero," the smoking mass finally gave up.

I was devastated by what I had done, and felt completely drained. All around me were sad faces, and the reality of what had happened was really sinking in. One fatal error, and all had been ruined! Why did I do something so stupid?

We returned to the house and had something to eat, as we all talked about the incident, and counted our blessings that no one had been hurt, and that the shop was still standing. The look of disappointment on everyone was tearing me apart, and for about a half hour or so, I was pretty much speechless (hard to believe, huh?). Then it hit me. I wasn't going to let this get the best of me, and I blurted out, "We're going racing!"

I told the guys that we would load the Zombie onto the trailer as it was, and that some how, some way, we would fix it on the road, and get the motorcycle running, too. Bruce's and John's faces lit up with happiness, although my wife and kids looked at me like I had really gone off the deep end!

I sent off two urgent emails, one to EV List member Mark Bahlke, and one to my good buddy Otmar Ebenhoech. The one to Mark was to let him know that we would be late for our scheduled meeting in Sacramento. The one to Otmar was more of a distress signal, as I asked him to be prepared to perform a miracle.

We hit the road with one unfinished electric motorcycle and a drag car that looked as if it would never run again. The interior of the car looked like the surface of the moon. The battery compartment was toasted, the headliner was melted and charred, the interior side panels were ruined, the carpets had water and smoke damage, the dash and gauges were blackened, and everything was covered with baking soda and fire extinguisher debris. But still, we were on the road and on our way to Phoenix!

On the road and on our way towards Phoenix, the night before still seemed like a nightmare to me, and I was questioning my sanity about even trying to race a car that had been devoured by fire and smoke. Even still, it

felt good to be with my EV friends together on yet another electric road trip.

Bruce, John, and I fit nicely in the Toyota Tacoma's XtraCab, but under the canopy, the bed of the truck was absolutely stuffed full - a motor and adaptor setup, spare Genesis and Optima batteries, tools, chains, come-alongs, luggage, motorcycle parts, boxes of spare EV parts, a controller or two, banners, chargers, wire and connectors - you name it, we had it back there! The tandem wheel trailer was loaded up with the yet-to-be-completed motorcycle, a 5 kW generator, and the White and black Zombie. In all, the Toyota truck was really being put to the test. What a load! But the 142 hp big four just kept on chugging along, and we were able to cruise effortlessly at 75 to 80 mph.

As we headed south through Oregon, the weather was fantastic, without a bit of rain, and lots of sunshine. The mountain passes were breathtakingly gorgeous, and with the end of Winter and the early arrival of Spring, Oregon's beautiful wild daffodils seemed to be saying to me that everything was going to work out.

The miles flew past, and things began to feel better. We talked about our strategy for getting both EVs ready in time for Saturday night's drag race. It helped knowing that Otmar's electronic workshop was fully set up with all the best tools and equipment, and that he and his crew of talented EV experts would be ready for us when we hit Palo Alto.

This wouldn't be the first time that Otmar and I would perform last minute surgery on a vehicle together. I remembered the other times he and I had worked around the clock on stuff together - stereo installs, battery pack swaps, controller overhauls, race repairs, etc. I knew that when the chips were down, I could count on my zany friend, even if he was a Californian! I knew that he would be up to the challenge, and that he would assemble the very best and most capable people to pull us through this mess. I also thought about all the crazy stuff Oat and I have done whenever we have gotten together, and I knew that a visit to Oat's place would be a nonstop roller coaster ride - as if the night before hadn't been exciting enough! In a demented way, I was looking forward to the total mayhem that awaited us in Palo Alto.

We were also looking forward to the first stop of our journey, the one that would take us into Sacramento where we would rest up and sleep over at EVCL member Mark Baulkey's home. We were to meet up with members of the SEVA EV group and talk EVs over dinner, and we had originally hoped to be in town by 5:00 - 6:00 PM. Because of the long night before, we had gotten off later than planned, and we were concerned that we might get there too late. Pulling the 4,000 ft. mountain passes, the Tacoma's big four performed well, and although we had to use the transmission wisely, for the most part we were able to maintain 40 mph or better on even the steepest grades, where even bigger rigs were slowing down, too. On the milder climbs, the Toyota stayed right with the traffic flow.

Northern California was beautiful, and Mt. Shasta greeted us with a magnificent snow-covered brightness. Off to the right in the plains grasses, I saw a lone Coyote stalking something - very likely an unsuspecting rabbit or field mouse.

As we moved further south into California with our electric vehicles in tow, we received many thumbs up from curious drivers who had noticed the Zombie, bestickered with all its electrical logos and such. Some would get us to roll down the windows, and ask if the car was electric. If they could have only seen inside the car, they might have thought it was a giant toaster with wheels!

At a refueling stop, I called Mark to let him know we would be hitting Sacramento at around 8:00 PM. He had not yet seen my email, so he wasn't aware of the Zombie meltdown that had occurred. I gave him a brief rundown on what had happened, and he was very sympathetic. It was great to hear his warm welcome to California and the talk of getting together for dinner.

Twelve hours after we had left Portland, we arrived in front of Mark's home at around 8:30 PM, and were met by many EVerS, who like us, were hungry and ready to go eat. John and I rode in a new Honda EV Plus on our way to the restaurant, and while it wasn't the first time I had been in one, John certainly was thrilled to have his first ride.

We had a great a French Vietnamese dinner, and the camaraderie with other EV enthusiasts served to calm my anxiety over our fire trauma. It somehow made me feel convinced that we would be able to get both the

Zombie and Bruce's motorcycle race ready by the time we hit Phoenix. Many thanks to Mark and the SEVA club for dinner, and to his family for putting the three of us up for the night in their home.

In the morning, after a hearty breakfast with Mark, we left Sacramento to head off to Palo Alto, with a planned stop midway at Dean Grannes and Stephanie Masumura's home. The sunny weather we had enjoyed up to this point had turned, and it was beginning to get grey and misty. Was I back in Oregon?

The mist had turned into a light rain by the time we got to Stephanie and Dean's home. They are in the middle of a Rabbit conversion, and I had brought with us an ADC XP-1263 8" motor and adaptor set to personally deliver to them. Stephanie was home from work and greeted us with that bright energetic smile of hers. She gave us a quick tour of the Rabbit project, and it was fun to finally see it up close. They have two really cool dogs, and I enjoyed fighting with them over what was obviously one of their favorite "tug of war" toys. I also loved their gorgeous orange tree in their backyard, absolutely covered in bright orange fruit.

Back on the road, we had a few more hours of driving before we would reach Palo Alto. It was now raining pretty good, and it probably helped to wash away some of the fire and smoke debris from the Zombie's dirty white paint. Coming into Palo Alto, it was ironic that the main road to get to Oat's shop was the Oregon Expressway!

The rain was still coming down as we pulled our ragtag affair in front of EVCL, Otmar's "electronic / fabrication / innovation / inspiration" shop. I was expecting Otmar and his "band of gypsies" to be ready to greet us with all sorts of sarcasm and jabbing about my meltdown episode, and they certainly didn't let us down! As we stepped out of the truck, I heard Otmar exclaim, "They're here!!!" With that, they came running out, each with a marshmallow on a stick, as they excitedly surrounded the Zombie still sitting on the trailer, and pretended to roast them by the heat of the car!

We quickly unloaded the car and motorcycle so that the rebuilding process could get started ASAP, and all the time we heard jokes about how we had brought "Oregon weather" with us. Oatflake Ebenhoechenhieferhafenenhooper assumed that I would be hungry (I almost always am), and we were treated to freshly-roasted hot dogs. As I reached for a juicy, tantalizing dog, Oat stopped me short and said, "Oh no, John, this one here has been specially cooked just the way you like it." He pointed to a dog that was blackened, blistered, and charred beyond recognition! I was thinking, "Great. They're all going to keep this up the entire time I'm here!"

As David Coale (another EVCL member) turned and headed off in another direction, I could see that he was wearing a special shirt. It was one from last year's Woodburn electric drags, the one with the motto, "Let the Tire Smoke Begin!" However, David had modified it just for me. With the word "Tire" crossed out, it now read, "Let the Zombie Smoke Begin!" Funny guys! As I wandered through the shop, at every turn, I was reminded of the meltdown mishap. There was even a "Zombie Warning" poster on the back of a door.

However intense the sarcasm and jabbing was, there was no escaping the fact that we also surrounded by the best and most creative dudes on the planet. Amongst the levity and fun, there was an undertone of seriousness and bee-like efficiency as Oat's team swarmed over the charred Zombie, taking cues and commands from Oat and me, and throwing their own great ideas in, too.

It was a scene that was hectic but incredible, and inside the shop was every tool and machine to build anything imaginable that one could ask for. No, the shop wasn't super high tech, as in a wafer fab cleanroom or mega-dollar machine shop or a spotless factory assembly line. Rather, it was a place I immediately felt at home in - kind of warm and fuzzy, yet cutting edge at the same time. Happily, I saw powerful Macintosh computers everywhere, one of them with a sign above it, "The instructions said, must use Windows 3.1 or better, so I bought a Macintosh!" Yeah, I felt right at home!

Here's a snapshot:

On a work table, there are copper bus bars, and Hershey's chocolate bars.

Over on a counter, there is etching solution, and bottles of Coke.

On this table, there are various IC chips, and Nacho Cheese chips.

And the best part, good rock music being played through a sound system.

Does this paint a picture of an unprofessional place? Hardly, this is THE place where very creative products are created - unique machines like "Godzilla," the monster 0.4 megawatt DC motor controller under the hood of the Zombie. This is a shop where in spite of the off-the-wall fun attitude, great things happen, and it was fun and inspirational to be there.

Words can't express how hard everyone worked. John Bryan worked his fingers to the bone, disassembling and cleaning every part of the interior of the Zombie, and his heart-felt efforts to restore the car back to where it had once been did wonders for my attitude. As the hours passed by, he transformed a frog back into a prince, and he didn't even kiss anyone!

After digging through the debris that was once a pristine battery tray, we removed all of the batteries from the charred mess, including "ground zero" - four batteries that had been ravaged by the plasma ball and had melted and formed one big T-shaped battery mass. Arthur Hebert, EVCL's skilled machinist and all around talent, and his sister Jessica Hebert, took on the job of hand washing each of the salvageable Genesis batteries - no small task! John Bryan continued to clean and detail, even removing the rear windows to scrape off the charcoal coating.

The washed batteries were then sorted into three groups - ones that looked good, ones that were damaged and partially melted in spots, and ones that were "Damit Jim, they're dead!" (Star Trek talk for those who are confused). In all, a total of eight batteries were damaged, four of them totally destroyed, two working but a melted mess, and two were ugly, but very functional. Good thing Hawker had given me 6 new spares!

We had brought several of the Guest modular chargers with us, and after all the batteries were voltage checked to see which ones had been discharged and which ones had not, we used the Guest chargers to replenish the exhausted ones. After a few hours on charge, the batteries that had been badly depleted were load tested (to make sure they would stay together), then put back on charge. It was great having the modular chargers, as we were able to walk away from them and keep doing work elsewhere, knowing that none of the batteries would be over-charged in our absence.

Arthur took instructions from both Oat and me, and was able to recreate many of the copper bridging bars, bus bars, and yes, the once totally vaporized negative lead clamp bar, too. He made new parts for a changed-over pot box that looked like they had been factory equipment. He also took a good deal of ribbing from me, and was able to hold his own!

John Hardy was a do-all kind of guy, and he had a super neat attitude about everything! It seemed like whenever I needed a tool, or a part, or an extra hand, or a better idea, he was there. I felt like royalty, and as if John had been assigned to make sure my every want and need was attended to. He somehow managed to bounce between the motorcycle and the car, and help everyone.

Despite his intense roasting of me whenever the opportunity presented itself, David Coale was an absolute lifesaver. I swear, he did the work of three or four people at once. It was also David, who besides doing major work on the Zombie, took on Bruce's motorcycle and never gave up readying it for the Saturday races. John Widmeyer was also instrumental in getting the Kawashock II up and ready, and he worked on the motorcycle battery hold downs and battery covers - no small task, either!

As we were working together on the Zombie, Oat and I would discuss and decide what things needed to be done, and whoever was close at hand would simply say, "OK, I can do that." With everyone scurrying about, doing whatever they could to help us, Oat was freed up to continue with his verbal abuse. Of course, I was happy to dish it right back at him! Occasionally, I'd lose him, as he was easily distracted by the stray females who would wander onto the scene.

The afternoon turned into darkness, and the rain really started to pour down. At one point when John Bryan and I were in that all-too-familiar position in the back seat area working over the battery tray again, we paused and just listened to the sound of the rain pelting the roof of the Zombie. Were we crazy? How in the world would this

car ever be ready to race?

Two dinners later (pizza and Chinese), we were all still working on the two electric drag machines at 12:00 Midnight Thursday, and after 12 continuous hours, things were finally shaping up. The motorcycle had been brought in from the rain and David and a dedicated crew were working on it in the shop's front entry room. Outside, Oat and I continued to repair, reshape, and rebuild the Zombie. Arthur was like a mini factory, using his machinist skills to churn out any and all custom metal parts needed. Still, there was a lot more work to be done. We all just kept at it - we were like ants trying to save the Queen.

Sixteen and a half hours of nonstop frenzy later, at 4:30 Friday morning, the motorcycle was 90% done, and Oat and I were ready to test fly the Zombie on the rain-soaked streets of Palo Alto. Oat and I piled in and with the tireless crew watching, I eased the Zombie out in front of the shop, and took off - first gear with a gentle ramp up, then a quick shift into second with my foot planted - an immediate power rush, sideways a bit - hit the brakes - YES, it's alive!!!! Oat called me a wimp, and commanded me to get out of the driving position, exclaiming that he'd show me how to do it! As I was left standing by the road, he nailed it up to high revs, then banged second, then a quick third, throwing massive rooster tail water sprays in the crisp night air. Rocketing way too fast for the approaching stop sign, the car came to a sliding halt, just feet from the intersection. With a Cheshire Cat grin, Oat leaned his head out the window and said, "Not Bad!"

Exhausted, we parked the car for the night, and buttoned up the motorcycle, knowing that it could be finished at the track (fingers crossed mode). Time to go grab less than two hours of sleep, so we could hit the road by 6:00 AM.

Totally exhausted, but also totally elated in knowing that the Zombie had been salvaged and that Bruce's motorcycle would most likely be able to run at the Saturday night drag races, we all went seeking a place to crash for the night - or was it day? Bruce walked through Otmar's living room, and sort of teetered over, landing on a nearby couch. He was out in an instant. Being the adventurous types, John Bryan and I decided to wander out behind behind the house and sleep in Oat's outrageous stretch VW bus. Doesn't everybody have a stretched VW bus in their backyard? At nearly 5:00 AM in the chilly and wet Palo Alto morning, the bus was cold and damp, and although I ran a small ceramic heater while we slept our whole one and a half hours, it did little to help warm the expanded interior of the mutated bus - not a very good morning / night's rest for John W., but for John B., being the VW freak that he is, it was total bliss to actually be sleeping inside Oat's famous creation. He was out in minutes, snoring away and dreaming of a certain electric Karman Ghia with smoke billowing out from its rear fender wells!

We were all up by 6:30 AM or so, and after tethering down the motorcycle and the car to the trailer, we hit the road at 7:30. Phoenix was still a long way off. We wanted to get there in time for the Wilde EVolutions' "Wilde Wing Night" gathering at the sports bar in Chandler, but it would be a hard goal to meet.

The drive was long and tedious, with the three of us trading off the driving duties. One would drive, the other would stay awake to keep the driver awake, and the third, usually the previous driver, would catch a few hours of sleep in the XtraCab back seat area.

At each refueling stop, I would take a few more stickers and attach them to the race car, the very first one being the large and in-your-face 'SUCK AMPS!' that I affixed to the rear window. This bold statement really caught the attention of motorists on our long journey to Phoenix, and as they would come around us on the highway, we could see a look of total curiosity on their faces, as I'm sure they were wondering what the phrase meant.

As the miles went by, we were really starting to feel exhausted from a lack of substantive sleep, and all the stress and physical strain from the ill-timed fire / frantic repair / assembly of the past few days had taken its toll. At the refueling stops, we'd pick up quickie-mart-style snacks and drinks to refuel our bodies as well, and it helped to keep us going.

As we approached the Arizona border, nighttime had been upon us for several hours, and at 9:00 PM it had become obvious that we weren't going to make it to the "Wilde Wing Night" feast in Chandler. We threw in the towel and stopped for a pizza dinner. I reluctantly called the sports bar and dragged Wilde EVolutions' Bob Rickard to the phone to let people know we'd just have to hook up with everybody the following Saturday morning at the track. Specifically, I told Bob that instead of "Wilde Wings," we were having "Plasma Pizza"! It

had been 14 hours of pretty much non-stop driving, and without a real stop-over for lunch, this was the first sit-down meal break in the long driving regime. After the welcome dinner rest, we were back on the road again, and with an additional 2 hours of driving time, we were finally at our hotel near the race track in Arizona at midnight.

The next morning we were refreshed after a good night's sleep in real beds, and we headed out early to the track. It had rained the night before, and for me, it was the first time that the Phoenix area was this cold at the March EV races.

At the track, we immediately started to meet up with various friends and EVDL members. I was also greeted by Anna Vavloukis and her video crew, who were there to capture the whole EV drag racing scene and excitement. There was still a lot of work to be done on Kawashocki II, and with a lot of help from others, we once again rolled up our sleeves and dug in to get the electric motorcycle up and running. Anna's crew took video of the trackside preparations, and caught the feel of the last minute assembly.

Knowing that I was still rattled by thoughts of flames, sparks and the like, Bill Dube' saw an opportunity and ran full bore with it. As I would connect high current wires, he'd stand just out of my view behind me and yell "BANG," as he jostled me with precise timing to his audible alarm. The first time was maybe funny. The second time he almost ate a wrench!

Both the motorcycle and the White Zombie performed well, and although we fell short of the 1/4 mile time and speeds we had hoped to see, we still had a good night and felt glad to have even made it to the races at all. Special thanks again to the SEVA members for the great dinner, to Mark Bahlke (I even spelled it right this time) for his hospitality and for putting us up for the night, and to Otmar and the gang at EVCL for the miraculous effort, and of course, that delicious oven-roasted hot dog!

Late Saturday night, after all the electric drag racing was behind us, we met up with the racing gang at the sports bar for fellowship, food, and fun. After a long night, the three of us returned to our motel and collapsed in our beds, to get rested up for Sunday's EV fun at the track. David Erb would be piloting Clare Bell's 914 EV around the track and knocking heads with the best of them, and we wanted to be there.

The weather was becoming more Phoenix-like on Sunday, and it was sunny and clear for the day's racing. Clare's #13 ran beautifully, thanks to a healthy stack of Yellow Tops, and to the hard work of Mike Slominski, Paul Compton, and of course, Paul's mascot "Speed Bear." But it was Dave's expertise behind the wheel that brought home a solid third place, right on the heel of the two high dollar AC cars. Congrats to the team, with a special thanks to Robert Salem for all his help, too!

At the day's end, we had packed up the Zombie and Kawashocki II, and were ready to leave for more fun. We had been invited to be at two places at once, so we decided to split things up. In the late afternoon / early evening, Bruce, John, and I drove out into the countryside to hang out with Dennis Berube' at his home. What a fun time! We were happy that Jim Ludiker, the newest NEDRA competitor and owner / driver of the full-sized electric rail "Circuit Breaker" was invited to hang at Berube's, too.

Dennis and Jim were out in the shop when we got there. Dennis had already disassembled his drag rail, and was showing all his trade secrets to his fellow electric drag rail competitor, Jim. Is that cool EV fellowship, or what? It was fantastic having Dennis tell us all that he had done and changed, and hearing him talk about things he has planned, too. Once Jim has his machine fine tuned and up to speed, it will be great to have twin electric drag rails out there spreading the EV gospel!

Dennis also gave us a full tour of his - get this - solar-powered horse trailer! The trailer had been offered to us as a place to sleep before we had left for our trip, but the thought of sleeping in a horse trailer was about as attractive as Oat's offer to put us up in his weirdo bus. Although we kept it open as an option, we ultimately passed on it, in favor of the motel we had stayed in. However, seeing it in person confirmed that it would have been a great choice, as this thing is buff deluxe! Yes, there are solar panels atop the super clean, Berube'-modified horse trailer, but it's the bank of five Genesis batteries that are charged by the photovoltaic array that caught my eye. Of course, they're ones that have survived serving torturous duty in "Current Eliminator," Dennis's big, bad, world-record-holding, electric drag rail. The trailer also has an AC inverter on board, and with household wall socket power abounding, Dennis has all sorts of toys hooked up everywhere,



including a color TV and VCR.

We next went inside the Berube' home for treats and to review the videos of Dennis' runs. It was inspirational to hang with Dennis, and help critique his runs, but it irritated the hell out of him when I beat him while playing an electronic game that tested reaction time. :-)

After saying our goodbyes, we split from rural Phoenix and headed back into the Chandler area where we met up with more EV friends at the sports bar. I won't attempt to name all who were present, but let it suffice to say there were a lot of tire-smoking aficionados gathered to talk about the NEDRA Event.

Monday morning, we checked out of our motel to hit the road for another 16 hour blast on the highways. We left Phoenix around 6:30 AM and headed North towards Jerome, where we wanted to hook back up with Bob and Rod, so that Bruce and John could see the Wilde EVolutions operation (I had been there before), deliver a few batteries, and pick up a few goodies, too.

As usual, hanging out in Jerome with the Wilde boys was a riot, but going into all that we did while in Jerome is enough fodder for another post, so I'll end it here and simply say that this was one EVentful trip!