Bad news for the 1,000mph car as Bloodhound SSC is shut down



Artist’s rendering of a rocket car screaming across the desert.

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Sad news, everyone. Bloodhound SSC, the British project to shatter the land speed record, is dead. Breaking the 1,000mph barrier with a ground vehicle is neither an easy feat nor a cheap one, and it was the funding side of things that proved to be an insurmountable hurdle.

This was not entirely unexpected news. In October, we reported that the project had entered administration, which is the UK counterpart to bankruptcy, due to a lack of funds. Six weeks later, the administrators have been unable to find anyone able to raise the $31 million (£25 million) necessary to take this extraordinary vehicle out to the specially prepared stretch of the Hakskeenpan in South Africa to begin building up to speed.

Rocket engine jet engine rocket engine jet engine

We first met Bloodhound SSC back in 2014. It was the brainchild of Richard Noble, who set a new land speed record in 1982 with Thrust 2 before spearheading the Thrust SSC program, which broke the sound barrier on land with RAF Wing Commander Andy Green behind the wheel in 1997.

Green was set to add several hundred miles an hour to his existing record using this latest creation, which combined rocket power (using a hybrid engine from NAMMO) and a spare Rolls Royce EJ200 jet engine from a Eurofighter. The vehicle had been tested at low speed—which in this case meant up to 210mph—but anything faster had to wait for the car to be transported to the wide-open space chosen in South Africa for the real testing to begin.

Any historian of land speed record attempts will tell you that coming up with the funding is as big a problem as the engineering.

Despite its high-profile and heavy STEM outreach in the UK, funding is what dogged Bloodhound SSC. Jaguar had provided some support, and in 2016, Geely came onboard as a main sponsor and automotive partner. But even its deep pockets were insufficient.

I blame Brexit

To get all ‘current affairs’ for a second, it’s pretty obvious that the continuing financial uncertainty caused by the lunacy that is Brexit had a strong hand in this mess. After all, who wants to invest in a land speed record attempt when you might be about to run out of food and medicine in a few short months? Ironically, the continuing slide of sterling relative to other currencies could possibly have helped things—thanks to a declining exchange rate, the project only needed $31 million this week instead of $33 million back in October.

Now, the administrators are calling time and selling off the various assets to repay creditors. The car itself is up for just $310,000 (£250,000), which seems like a steal for such a complex piece of engineering. According to a report in *Autocar*, about 20 serious parties were interested in taking on the project, but none of them was able to come up with the money in time for the administrator’s deadline.

I can’t hide my disappointment; although it was exceedingly unlikely I’d have been able to make the trip to see Wing Commander Green kick the tires and light the fires, it’s been far too long since someone set a land speed record like this. But Bloodhound SSC isn’t the only game in town. There’s the North American Eagle project, which we covered in 2016; this one uses a Lockheed F-104 Starfighter as its starting point. And if all goes to plan, you’ll soon be able to read all about Rosco McGlashan and the Aussie Invader here at Ars. In the meantime, if anyone happens to have £250,000 burning a hole in their back pocket and is looking for the ideal Christmas gift for someone, I have just the idea for you.https://arstechnica.com/?p=1426693