

Supersonic car reaches halfway mark in quest to hit a mythical 1,000 mph

Bloodhound LSR, the UK-based team that made its public debut in September 2015 with an ambitious project to design, build, and run a vehicle capable of achieving land speeds in excess of 1,000 mph, is now halfway to that goal. Under the blistering Kalahari sun in South Africa this week, the team's car hit a speed of 501 mph (806 km/h), securing its place among the 10 fastest cars on the planet.

It's a remarkable comeback for a team that was on the verge of shutting down last year after its funding ran dry. Though it got a lot of people intrigued and excited, it failed to secure quite as much funding as it needed, which forced the project to go into administration in October 2018. But thanks to an 11th-hour acquisition by an entrepreneur based in Yorkshire, the Bloodhound team got the reprieve it was hoping for and is now able to press on toward its record-smashing goal.

That goal is to break the land speed record of 763.035 mph set by driver Andy Green in 1997. Green himself is back again in the drivers seat at Bloodhound LSR piloting the team's jet-powered car in an attempt smash his own record.

"To be honest, it's like we've never been away," Green told *The Verge* in a phone interview from the Kalahari Desert after reaching the 500-mph threshold. "I can still remember very clearly what it was like driving ThrustSSC out in the Black Rock Desert in Nevada."

There are a lot of similarities to between the car Green drove

in 1997 and the one he is driving for this latest effort – but also a lot of differences. This time around, the Bloodhound LSR is using an EJ200 Rolls-Royce jet engine that is also used in the Eurofighter Typhoon combat jet that started production in 2003.

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But it's the team's ability to reach a global audience via social media and the internet that really sets the two record-breaking efforts apart, Green said. He recalled receiving an email from a couple in the UK recently whose five-year-old is following the team's exploits with fascination.

“That's exactly the effect we're looking for,” Green said. “That five-year-old is one day going to be one of the people who builds [and] lives in the high-technology, low-carbon, energy-efficient world of the future.”

He added, “This is the first straight-line racing car of the digital age.”

The most recent test didn't go off entirely without a hitch. During the engine shutdown procedure, a fire warning alert went off in the cockpit, the group said in a release. Green called “Fire, Fire, Fire” over the radio and quickly evacuated the cockpit through the hatch. Rescue trucks were on the scene in seconds.

But a quick inspection by fire officials revealed there to be no fire. The alert was triggered by a fire wire which is designed to burn and break at 160°C. The afternoon sun was 36°C, which, combined with the heat soak from the jet engine, triggered the alert.

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The project is now split into two phases. Phase one's target is to break the world land speed record. This is necessary to understand how the car behaves as it enters the transonic-stage and then supersonic speed levels. If they're successful, the team will review the data and technical challenges before embarking on phase two: 1,000 mph.

"Ideally, we'd like to try for that next year," Green said, "if we get all the technology and get the rocket set it in time. That'll depend on our technical partnerships and quickly we get things done."

<https://www.theverge.com/2019/11/7/20951850/bloodhound-lsr-supersonic-car-500-mph-land-speed-record>