

NEW ATLAS

<https://newatlas.com/remarkable-people/jessi-combs-death-land-speed/>

Land-speed tragedy as Jessi Combs dies in jet car accident

By **Loz Blain**

August 28, 2019

TV star, metal fabricator, off-road racer and land speed record holder Jessi Combs was killed in a tragic jet car crash yesterday



Jessi Combs - Facebook

We often cover extreme motorsports events on New Atlas, where people put themselves in positions of incredible risk in pursuit of goals that might seem purely an abstract numbers game to people who aren't involved. Land speed racing is a perfect example; to etch your name into the record books like Jessi Combs did back in 2013, you've got to spend insane amounts of money and time, and expose yourself to the possibility of catastrophic failure at unimaginable speeds on the salt flats.

But some people are built differently to the rest of us, thank god, and Combs was a perfect example, with a list of life achievements, skills, talents and experiences most people wouldn't even dare to dream of. A wickedly talented metal fabricator, she also had the looks, personality and gift of the gab to become a TV star on spanner-heavy reality shows including *Xtreme 4x4*, *Overhaulin'*, *Truck U*, *Spike TV*, *Two Guys Garage* and *All Girls Garage*. When *Mythbusters'* Kari Byron went on maternity leave, Combs landed her biggest role yet as her replacement host and fabricator for a season.



She was just as adept at thrashing vehicles as she was at building them, managing several class wins in the grueling King of Hammers and a handful of other Ultra4 off-road races, and bringing home a couple of class second places in the Baja 1000 off-road rally.

And then, of course, there was the land speed business. The North American Eagle (NAE) project was a crazy and audacious idea conceived when the team found a Lockheed F-104 Starfighter that the US Air Force had decommissioned and sent to the scrap heap. Once flown by Chuck Yeager and used as a chase plane during development of the X-15 and SR-71 Blackbird aircraft, the team saw a highly aerodynamic chassis with a monster jet propulsion system on the back, and set about converting it into a car with the addition of pure billet aluminum wheels to go salt flat racing.



This was the jet car that took Combs to her title of "[fastest woman on four wheels](#)," back in 2013, breaking a 48-year-old record as she put in an official two-way average speed of 392.954 mph (632.39 km/h). You can see that incredible run in the video below:

Jessi Combs Sets Womens' 4-Wheel Land Speed Record: <https://youtu.be/z3J646EBxe0>

But the NAE machine and its 52,000-horsepower jet engine (which produced double that power on afterburner) was capable of much more. The team's eventual target speed was a shocking 808 mph (1,300 km/h), or 1.058 times the speed of sound.



The North American Eagle land speed racer
NAE Project



It was not to be. Combs and the NAE team were at the 13-mile (20-km) Alvord Desert track yesterday looking to incrementally extend her speed record with a target over 600 mph (965 km/h), or roughly the speed at which an international airliner cruises. Something went wrong – details are yet to be released – the car was destroyed, and Combs died in the wreckage on the Oregon salts.

Her partner Terry Madden was first to the scene, and farewelled her publicly in an Instagram post:

It's a tragic ending to a story nobody could ever describe as ordinary. Combs died reaching for speeds few humans ever get close to on the ground, in a vehicle that would freeze lesser mortals with horror, in the prime of a life very few would dare to live. And it's a reminder to the rest of us just what these wild men and women are risking when they set out on such extreme paths. We'll let Jessi Combs herself have the final word, in this Facebook post she made on Saturday.

