



Studebaker Avanti at Bonneville, 1962-1963: The Supercharged Coupe That Set Records on Pump Gas

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In August 1962, Andy Granatelli drove a supercharged Studebaker Avanti to 29 USAC stock-car records at Bonneville, including a 168.15 mph two-way flying mile on Mobil premium pump gas. In October 1963 he came back: Paula Murphy averaged 161.29 mph, and Granatelli set a Class C mark of 170.8 mph in the gold No. 9 car. Two months later, Studebaker announced it was closing South Bend.

Car loans · sourced with Assembly Alert. <https://assemblyalert.com/blog/studebaker-avanti-bonneville-speed-records>

A white 1963 Avanti listed as an R3 shows off its supercharger plumbing at a Minnesota car show, the hood up on the most powerful engine Studebaker offered in the Avanti. — Photo: Greg Gjerdigen

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Studebaker, a South Bend, Indiana, company that started as a wagon shop in 1852, had a radical new car in 1962 and not much else. So it sent the Avanti to the Bonneville Salt Flats in Utah to prove it was fast.

In August 1962, Andy Granatelli, president of Studebaker's Paxton supercharger company, set 29 American stock-car records sanctioned by the United States Auto Club. The flying mile averaged 168.15 mph both ways. USAC certified the car as stock and running on Mobil premium pump gas. The old Class C mark, held by a Dodge, fell by more than 50 mph. Studebaker's ads soon called the Avanti "The World's Fastest Production Car."

The runs

August 1962, Granatelli: flying mile 168.15 mph, flying 5 miles 167.82 mph, flying 10 miles 163.90 mph (two-way averages); 178.5 mph one way on the return leg of the 20-mile run.

October 1963: Paula Murphy, 28, averaged 161.29 mph through the flying mile in a production-model Avanti, and Studebaker called her "the world's fastest woman on wheels." Granatelli took the gold Avanti lettered No. 9 to a Class C mark of 170.8 mph, with records from 1 kilometer to 10 miles. The experimental twin-supercharged Due Cento ran about 196 mph.

Hands off at 166

Granatelli wrote to Studebaker president Sherwood Egbert that he took four passengers, including the L.A. Times auto editor, for rides at 166.6 to 172.5 mph and let go of the steering wheel "for several thousand feet to prove how stable the Avanti really is." Notice Nearby's official position: keep both hands on the wheel at any speed, and especially at 172.5.

The motors

All three grew from Studebaker's 289-cubic-inch V8. The R1 was rated at 240 hp. The R2 added a Paxton SN-60 supercharger at 4.5 pounds of boost for 289 hp, one horsepower per cubic inch; Road & Track timed one from zero to 60 mph in 7.3 seconds. The R3 was bored out to 304.5 cubic inches, just under a 305-cubic-inch limit some sanctioning bodies used, with 6 pounds of boost. Studebaker never really announced its output; Hemmings puts factory trim at 335 hp. Only nine Avantis left South Bend with an R3.

357 records and a lot of oil treatment

By Granatelli's own count, his 12-car, 10-day campaign set 357 speed and endurance records. He credited STP oil treatment, made by a company Studebaker had bought. Egbert later put Granatelli in charge of it, and Granatelli said its sales went from \$1.8 million to \$105 million. The salt, it turns out, sold oil treatment even better than it sold coupes.

South Bend's last dance

The Avanti's fiberglass body was hard to build. Studebaker planned 1,000 cars a month and managed a fraction of that, and buyers canceled. It built 4,643 Avantis from June 1962 to December 1963. On December 9, 1963, Studebaker announced it was closing its South Bend plant. The U.S. Department of Labor says about 7,000 workers got no more than 15 percent of their pension's value, which helped drive federal pension reform. The No. 9 car survives and has been shown at the Studebaker National Museum in South Bend.

Check your own VIN

The No. 9 car carries a Studebaker serial, R1007, not a modern VIN. Your own car's VIN says which plant built it. Check it free at <https://assemblyalert.com>, and look up open recalls at <https://www.nhtsa.gov/recalls>.

Notes

- Car loans · sourced with Assembly Alert. <https://assemblyalert.com/blog/studebaker-avanti-bonneville-speed-records>
- Free VIN checker: <https://assemblyalert.com>. Open recalls: <https://www.nhtsa.gov/recalls>.
- Speeds are USAC two-way averages unless marked one way. Sources: Classic Motorsports, Hemmings, Hagerty, Motor Trend, Studebaker National Museum, Smithsonian NMAH, U.S. Department of Labor (full list in the Assembly Alert article).
- Photo: Greg Gjerdingen, CC BY 2.0, via Wikimedia Commons; cropped to 16:9.
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