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REVIEW

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◆ Wells Fargo will roll out a new retail-banking pay plan to fix what many believe was one cause of its sales-tactics scandal. **B1**

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**Dignified Again**

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## The Red Carpet? It's Hard to Say

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Fashion designers try to stop celebrities from mispronouncing their names

By RAY A. SMITH

Chances are, some star will wear a Prabal Gurung gown to the Golden Globes this Sunday. And chances are someone is bound to mispronounce the designer's name that night.

Mr. Gurung is used to it. The New York-based fashion designer often tells people his first name sounds "like trouble with a P" when introducing himself.

Mr. Gurung's personal Instagram handle is @troublewithprabal. His last name sounds like GOO-ROONG, by the way.

Many stars attending the Globes will receive last-minute

phone calls, texts or handwritten index cards reminding them not only whose dress or tuxedo they're wearing, but how to pronounce the designer label's name.

The exercise is an annual ritual but the stakes to get names right on awards-shows red carpets have risen in recent years with the explosion of social media, as many viewers watch and tweet. While in the past a star's mispronunciation might have been rebroadcast on a



Prabal Gurung

news program and then forgotten by most people, these days any flubs can be repeated. Please see NAMES page A9

SHOOTING: Police say Eastern Air Cargo opened fire Friday at LAX, killing 14 people. Hollywood International Airport. Bystanders ran for cover and the area was locked down for hours. **A3**

## THE WORLD'S FASTEST WOMAN ON TWO WHEELS

Denise Mueller always loved speed, but nothing prepared her for the risks—and thrills—of riding a bike at 140 mph; 125 feet per pedal stroke

By JASON GAY

TOOELE COUNTY, Utah—Denise Mueller, a 43-year-old mother of three, pedals hard atop the Bonneville Salt Flats in western Utah, making a run at an eccentric land-speed record—the fastest bicyclist on earth.

Barreling a bike at speeds past 100 miles an hour on this stark, white-floored landscape appears terrifying, but it makes Mueller happy. It quiets her mind. For most people, speed is a thrill. To Mueller, speed is peace.

"You can't focus on anything but what's right in front of you," she says. "You can't think about what you're doing tomorrow, who you're going to call, what you're going to be wearing—any-

thing. When I get into that zone, it's like a nirvana, that sense of focus when it all comes down to life or death."

*One hundred fifteen miles an hour.*

This feels good, Mueller thinks.

*One hundred twenty.*

The custom carbon-fiber bike, fitted with motorcycle tires, begins to drift a little bit, right to left, left to right. Mueller exhales under her matte-black helmet, steadies herself in her crimson-leather jumpsuit and keeps pedaling. Her red ponytail flickers from beneath her helmet.

Directly in front of Mueller on this September afternoon is a snow-white Range Rover Sport SVR, driven by race-car driver Shea Hol. Please see FAST page A10



## FROM PAGE ONE

## FAST

Continued from Page One  
 brook. Moments ago, Holbrook towed Mueller and her bike from a standstill to a spot past the first-mile marker, where, at a speed in excess of 90 miles an hour, Mueller released the tow cable and began pedaling. Now, she rides in the Rover's slipstream as Holbrook gently accelerates—a practice known as "drafting," or "motor-pacing," since the wind protection offered by the Rover means Mueller can go faster.

Make no mistake: She is riding completely unthethered. Through the Rover's salt-dusted rear window, Mueller can see into the SUV's cockpit. Next to Holbrook, in the passenger seat, is John Howard, the venerable American cyclist and Olympian, now 69. It was Howard who discovered Mueller when she was a teenage cyclist growing up in Southern California. Howard himself bicycled 152 mph on these salt flats three decades ago—and it was he who taught Mueller into trying this madness, to become the fastest female cyclist and take a crack at the all-time motor-paced bicycle land-speed record.

One hundred thirty miles an hour.

Around this speed, strange things begin to happen, Mueller knows. Air flowing off the Rover will rush and swirl to fill the space behind it, which in turn will push Mueller and the bike forward. The phenomenon has a name: the Von Karman Effect, after the Hungarian astrophysicist Theodore Von Karman.

The Vortex, Howard calls it. The Hand of God, Mueller prefers. Mueller's ride becomes trickier now. She and Holbrook compare it to a waltz. Holbrook has to be careful with the accelerator to make sure Mueller stays in the Rover's slipstream. Mueller can't let the force of the vortex shove her forward too hard into the bump bar at the back of the Rover. She can nudge the Rover a little, but too much could knock her down. Getting knocked down is bad, potentially fatal.

Then again, at this speed, pretty much everything is.

One hundred forty miles an hour.

It is a formality at this point: Mueller has ridden a bicycle faster than any woman ever has.

She keeps pedaling across the salt flats. The Rover keeps accelerating, into the horizon. Mueller wants to go faster. She always has.

Speed does something to Mueller, Shea Holbrook

**It sounds nutty, but Mueller is at the point of her life where nutty sounds right.**

and John Howard, a trio of Americans who joined in late summer to try to top a staggering human-powered mark: 167 miles an hour on a bicycle.

"We get called crazy, of course," Howard says. "But it's what we do. There's a big difference between taking a risk and calculating that risk. When risks are thoroughly calculated, we don't see it as dangerous. We see it as adventure."

## Fast friends

The story begins almost 60 years ago, in Springfield, Mo. Howard is a gangly 10-year-old when he walks into the local Schwinn dealership and sees a poster of French cyclist Alfred Letourneur with an intoxicating caption: 108.92 MPH ON A BIKE!

Young Howard is entranced. He decides he wants a Schwinn just like Letourneur's—and, maybe one day, that 108.92 mph record.

First, Howard will become the best cyclist in his region, training on roads and trails around the Ozark Mountains. Then he will become one of the best in the country, winning the U.S. road racing championship in 1968, 1972, 1973 and 1975. He will represent the U.S. at the 1968 Olympics in Mexico City, as well as Munich 1972 and Montreal 1976. In 1971, he will win the gold medal in road cycling at the Pan American Games.

Howard makes his attempt on the bicycle speed record in 1985. After he breaks it, resch-



Denise Mueller on the Bonneville Salt Flats in Utah set a course for an eccentric land-speed record: the fastest bicyclist in the world.



Driver Shea Holbrook and Denise Mueller celebrate their attempt to break the bicycle land-speed record at the Bonneville Salt Flats.

ing 152.2 mph riding behind a modified streamliner car, he joins Johnny Carson on "The Tonight Show."

A couple of years later, Howard is on a training ride not far from San Diego when he notices a red-haired teenager pedaling behind him. Howard isn't going his fastest, but it's not like he's casually pedaling, either. The rider stays with him for miles. Who is this kid? he wonders.

It is Denise Mueller, age 14, from Encinitas, Calif. She is out with her father, Myron, finishing a charity ride from San Francisco to San Diego.

"I didn't know who John was," Mueller recalls. "I was on his wheel for probably 10 miles before he turned around and introduced himself."

It is the beginning of a beautiful bicycling partnership. Howard, who lives not far from the Mueller family, encourages Denise to try out bike racing.

She does—and wins her first race. Bike racing appeals to Mueller. She battles with attention deficit disorder, and the focus and speed of racing settles her. She becomes one of the best female bike racers in the U.S., not just on the road, but also in downhill mountain bike, cross-country and track racing. Mueller will amass more than a dozen national titles, and take a silver medal in the downhill mountain bike race at the world junior championships.

Then, at age 19, Mueller stops. The speed doesn't get to her, but the pressure of winning does. Racing isn't fun anymore.

"I'm thinking everyone expects me to win," she says. "And that anxiety got to the point where I was like, 'Screw it, I'm getting out of this.'"

She hangs the bike up, cold turkey. She gets married and has children. She runs her family's home-security business. She is content. "I wouldn't trade in a million years my life after getting out of cycling," Mueller says.

Two decades pass. By her early 40s, Mueller is feeling the pangs of a midlife crisis. Her marriage is coming apart. She has become a gym rat and a runner.

When her 14-year-old son, Michael, starts distance running, Mueller reaches out to Howard to see if her old mentor would coach her son. A partnership is reborn. Mueller gets back on the bike and starts training for another edition of the San Francisco-to-San Diego charity ride.

At a luncheon in 2012, Howard proposes an attempt on the land-speed record. It sounds nutty, but Mueller is at the point of her life where nutty sounds right. She'll tell this story many times, about Howard proposing the speed record. She describes it as a "match to gasoline."

"He lit that sucker when he said, 'You realize there's no women's land-speed record?'" she says. "How many things are

left in history to be the first one ever to do something?"

She doesn't need much convincing. Mueller wants back. She wants to go fast again.

## Saddle up

There is no official competition to be the fastest bicycle rider in the world. It is a bit of a free-for-all, open to any dreamer or daredevil willing to try. That includes the Brooklyn, N.Y., man credited with launching the idea, Charles Murphy.

In 1896, he rode on planks behind a passenger car on the Long Island Rail Road at 60 mph. Mile-a-Minute Murphy, they called him after that.

Since then, the "paced" cycling speed record (there are also unpaced and downhill) has bounced among European and U.S. riders. In 1985, Dutch cyclist Fred Rompelberg hit 167 mph at Bonneville.

The bicycle Mueller will use is unlike anything you will see on a casual Sunday ride. To maintain such a high speed, it

must generate a spectacular amount of torque. A bike with traditional gearing would spin helplessly: Tour de France racers max out at speeds around 48 miles an hour in a sprint.

Mueller's bike is a beast. It features two 60-tooth chain rings that work to raise the gearing and allow the bike to travel 125 feet with a single pedal stroke. The drivetrain lets Mueller accelerate at speeds surpassing 100 mph.

Mueller also must find her form again as a cyclist—redevelop her explosive strength, as well as her bike-handling skills. Howard has Mueller dive back into training. On top of her day job, she puts in 15 hours a week on her bike.

Howard gets Mueller to enter races, where, sure enough, she starts winning. Mueller had spent years feeling bad about quitting as a teenager. "I felt like I was a chicken," she says. Now, she is back.

For a while, Mueller and Howard keep their mission a secret, worried they could inspire a copycat racer before they are ready. But they need sponsors, so they begin telling people about the coming Bonneville attempt. They give their plan a name: Project Speed. Its full budget will be close to \$150,000.

They also need a driver. Mueller likes the idea of putting a woman at the wheel—an all-female battery on the flats. She hears about Shea Holbrook, a 26-year-old driver by way of Orlando, Fla.

An entrepreneur with her own team, Shea Racing, Holbrook has won races on the Pirelli World Challenge circuit and driven jet-propelled dragsters to 278 mph.

Like Mueller, Holbrook is obsessed with speed. As an only child in a Navy family, Holbrook was raised by a daredevil father and mother and was competing in water skiing at 7 years old.

"I had Barbie dolls, but I didn't want to play with them," she says. "I wanted to drive the car. I was driving at 6, and I was driving the boat before I drove the car."

Mueller and Holbrook talk by phone. The connection is instantaneous. Mueller is supposed to finish the call and go to an appointment, but she skips it to stay in her car and talk. "It was like she was my sister," Holbrook says.

A few months later, the two women are on their way to Utah, to make a run at history.

**Flat out**

"The Mecca of Speed," Howard calls the Bonneville Salt Flats. People have raced on these flats for more than a century, drawn by the smooth surface that seems to disappear into the horizon.

The Project Speed team will make its attempt here at World of Speed, a four-day event in September that, besides Mueller and her bike, is full of hopefuls chasing records in vintage streamliners, muscle cars and motorcycles. The parking lot is loud, eclectic, a Star Wars bar for motorheads.

There is a hitch this year. Normally, land-speed records are attempted on a 5-mile track. But changes to the flats means there is less surface suitable for racing.

The World of Speed track will be only 4 miles, a worrisome disadvantage. Mueller and Holbrook will have to go faster sooner, which is precarious since Mueller needs to be brought up to speed carefully. Going too hard too quickly could threaten her stability behind the Rover.

This weighs on Holbrook. She could drive a car 175 mph with her eyes closed. But she has never been responsible for someone else before.

"I don't like to sugarcoat it, because the reality is that I'm helping keep her alive," Holbrook says. "I feel like we're on the operating table, and if I don't do my job perfectly, she might not come out of it."

Mueller's first attempt is on Day One, and it goes well. Holbrook tugs her safely up to 90 miles an hour and Mueller releases and powers forward in the draft. The vortex does its job. Mueller hits the bump bar on the back of the Rover a couple of times, but it's OK. Holbrook keeps accelerating and Mueller stays upright.

The World of Speed teamkeepers announce that Mueller averaged 147.2 mph over the final mile. Their waltz is working.

"We're just going to perfect it and get even more out of it," Mueller says.

## Photo Finish

Current land-speed benchmarks

Jet-propelled vehicle (sat in 1997)	763.0 mph
Wheel-driven vehicle (2001)	458.4 mph
Motorcycle (2010)	376.4 mph
Bicycle (1995)	166.9 mph
Fast (2009)	27.8 mph

\*Usain Bolt clocked while running the 100 meters at the Berlin World Championships. Sources: International Federation of Automobiles; International Motorcycling Federation; Guinness Book of World Records. THE WALL STREET JOURNAL.

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## Built for Speed

The bike Denise Mueller used on the Bonneville Salt Flats is a custom-designed hybrid, built with mountain-bike and motorcycle components to reach speeds beyond 100 mph



One revolution of the pedal propels the bike 125 feet. The system is designed for the rider to maintain a cycling cadence at speeds greater than 100 miles an hour.

Source: Chris Garcia and Len Lachmiller

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**RIDE ALONG IN V.R.**  
 See videos and a virtual reality view of the story.  
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