

THE SPUR HAS A HISTORY

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Sent: Fri 7/26/13 5:20 PM

To: Rosi DeVillier (rosidev@gmail.com)

ALSO MAIN ST. IN FRONT OF OUR OLD SCHOOLS
WAS POURED AT THE SAME TIME.

Spur 136, the link between Twin City Highway 347 and Port Neches' Grigsby Avenue, is back in the news: the Texas Department of Transportation announced the speed limit has been reduced from 65 mph to 55 mph. That's in sharp contrast to bygone days when hot rodders marked off a quarter-mile strip to test their souped-up jalopies.

The spur is only about two miles long and never will be confused with the mythical Route 66. But it does have a history -- and notable durability. For more than one reason, it's been suggested a Texas historical marker is overdue.

"Rubber Plant Road" was planned and executed to connect the string of chemical plants that processed refinery waste into synthetic rubber. The vital program involving government and industry was put on fast-track during the early years of the United States' involvement in World War II. Without access to the world's natural rubber plantations, our war machines (and the pre-war family autos) were, as old-timers fretted, "running on the rims."

At one time, a plywood city abutted the north side of the road, providing housing for hundreds of construction workers and their families. Starting from scratch, the technology and labor that produced synthetic rubber was one of Southeast Texas' major contributions to the war effort, alongside refinery products, shipping and shipbuilding, and the manufacturing of munitions.

While every highway in the area is constantly being patched or rebuilt, "RPR" is almost as pristine as it was 70 years ago. Certainly it is not pounded today as it was during the war years but the thickness of the slab and an apparently forgotten blend of reinforced cement, rock and sand was a formula for endurance.

Post-war, another definition of fast track emerged: narrow but straight, 136's surface provided ideal traction for racing.

Assured the statute of limitations on their youthful indiscretions has expired, former speed merchants confided on social media that the roar of engines and the smell of burning rubber continued through the 1960s.

"John" wrote: "Jimmy and George raced bad-az cars... one was a '50 Chevy with an Offenhauser engine that could hit 140. Another about as fast was a '50 or '51 Ford with a full house Caddy."

He later commented on his own time behind the wheel of a muscle car: "Closest I ever came to losing was to a kid whose dad bought him a '55 Buick Special."

"Terry" chimed in with a high tech review of his pickup "I dropped a 350 with a 327 turbo-pack head on an Eldabrock with twin-quad Hollies, a Muncie 4-speed transmission with a 411 posi-track rear end piped out with headers."

Less technical was the post by an observer who described her dad's revealing encounter with a young man. "He told dad, 'you have the fastest car on the school parking lot.'"

"That explained," she wrote, "why dad always was replacing the car's rear end." Under questioning, her brothers confessed to auto abuse.

And this succinct message underscores why Spur 136 no longer has its drag strip reputation:

"The police came one night and gave everyone tickets -- even the spectators."