

a valued service, C-Transpokes-
Scott Patterson said. "But addi-
l revenue is going to be needed

routes. One item — in a separate par-
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toward introducing light rail and bus

the C-Trans boundaries — the incorpo-
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couver's urban growth area — at any

more drivers and vehicles to
fewer people, the service costs
Please see **C-VAN**, Page E4

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QUAD SQUAD'S HOT ROD

Group of
Clark County men
spearhead a mission
to let a quadriplegic
reach 100 mph
in a car



Mike Peters (from left), Robert Withee, Ed Tolon, Ron Phillips, Mike Tabor and Jay Delaney, members of the Quad Squad, take a break on the morning of Sept. 11 before installing sand tires on the Pontiac Firebird that Ron Heagy would drive in southeastern Oregon's Alvord Desert.

By **JONATHAN NELSON**
SPECIAL TO THE OREGONIAN

Ron Heagy found himself strapped into the 1968 Pontiac Firebird under a bright September sun ready to rocket down a dry lake bed in the Alvord Desert at more than 100 mph.

The effort wouldn't break any land-speed records or present a big challenge for an experienced driver. The last time Heagy drove, however, was 30 years ago before a surfing accident left him a quadriplegic. The 48-year-old Albany resident was going to drive the muscle car using a joystick he controls with his teeth.

Almost four years earlier, the thought of racing 100 mph on a dry lake bed thrilled Heagy. But watching the car fly by during a test run in September put Heagy in a different mindset.

"I saw how fast that was and at that point I wanted to abort the mission," Heagy said.

Heagy's fear was another hurdle to clear in his quest to drive one more time, a challenge chronicled by a documentary film crew. Production of the film — dubbed "Hope Rod" — continues with no timetable set for its completion.

Ron Phillips is the de facto project manager for what became known as the Quad Squad, guys from Clark County who formed the core group of volunteers that transformed Phillips' Firebird into a car that Heagy could drive. Phillips, Mike Tabor,

Photos courtesy of ED TOLON

Please see **QUAD SQUAD**, Page E4

attle Ground project to pave way for jobs

Quad Squad: After success on first day, a solo sprint

Continued from Page E1

Jay Delaney, Ed Tolon and Mike Peters work together at SEH America Inc., a silicon wafer manufacturing plant in Vancouver, and overcame repeated mechanical and logistical problems in getting Heagy to Alvord. Heagy's apprehension was just one more thing to overcome.

"You don't appreciate the big wins if you don't take risks," Tabor said.

It was Heagy's dream of one day driving a car again that started the odyssey to drive faster than 100 mph. Heagy, who at 17 broke his neck during a surfing accident and is now a married father of four daughters, makes a living as a motivational speaker with a simple message — if he can overcome life's daily challenges from his wheelchair, what's your problem?

Phillips was in the audience a few years ago and pondered the thought of getting Heagy behind the wheel. A day later, Phil-

lips was at work when he leaned over a manufacturing machine and told Peters about Heagy and the dream.

The two threw ideas back and forth before deciding it could work using Phillips' 1968 Firebird. Phillips e-mailed Heagy three weeks after the meeting with a simple offer. Heagy wasn't interested until he learned the Pontiac he was going to drive wasn't a Bonneville like he thought, but a Firebird.

Once Heagy agreed, Phillips organized the Quad Squad by their specific talents and began the monumental task of rebuilding the Firebird to fit Heagy. It was a slow process of trial and error. The project was funded through donations, including the time that Phillips and others gave, and the equipment.

Tolon would repeatedly manufacture certain parts of the car only to tear them out and start over. The most difficult component was locating a system for Heagy to control the car.

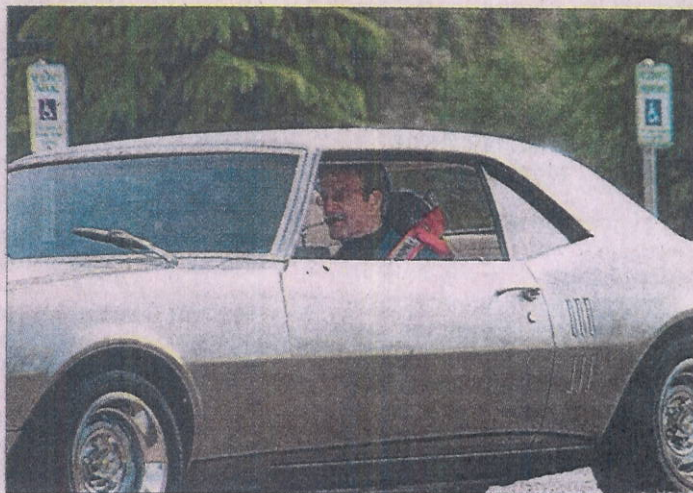
The team eventually found Dignified Motors, an Arizona company that makes vehicles operational and accessible for wheelchair users. Tolon, however, needed to overhaul the system to fit Heagy's needs.

"I always dreamed of driving something fast and powerful," said Heagy, who drove a Volkswagen as a teenager.

The first trial run was a spin around a church parking lot. Heagy was at the controls and Tabor sat in back, his hand on a mechanism to hit the brakes if needed. Top speed was 10 mph, double what Heagy is used to in his electric-powered wheelchair. He graduated to driving a short stretch along a deserted road, hitting 30 mph.

The big test came in June during the Rose Cup Races at Portland International Raceway. Between races, Heagy was lifted into the Firebird and Tabor squeezed into the back seat. Heagy coasted to what they call the Christmas tree of starting lights and waited for the sequence to begin.

"I had to fire it off when things turned green," Heagy said. "It was a pretty intense feeling.



Courtesy of ED TOLON

In May 2009, Ron Heagy got behind the wheel of the Pontiac Firebird for the second time as he drove around an obstacle course in a church parking lot. Heagy was practicing for later that year when he would drive a lap at Portland International Raceway as part of the Rose Cup races.

It felt like I was able bodied again."

The car hit a top speed of 52 mph, but Heagy said he struggled to keep the car under control as it maneuvered the tight corners around the 1.9-mile course. Even though the 100 mph attempt was going to be on a straight stretch, Heagy was starting to have doubts.

Phillips was having his own doubts, but for a different reason. He couldn't find a track that would let Heagy attempt the 100 mph benchmark. Nobody wanted the liability in case of an accident. It was the same obstacle the Quad Squad faced when trying to find a steering system for the car. Several companies refused to sell them equipment due to liability concerns.

Phillips said he started to understand better the daily tribulations Heagy endures.

In late August, the group discovered the Alvord Desert in southeastern Oregon and set Sept. 11 as the date Heagy was going to make his attempt.

The weather that morning was perfect as Tabor took his seat in the back with Heagy at the wheel. Heagy said the car handling felt tight as he maneuvered to the starting line. He hit

the throttle, the gas flowed into the engine and Heagy had the car up to 70 mph.

"I thought that was fast enough," Heagy said.

Tabor thought otherwise.

"Faster, faster," he urged.

But Heagy ran out of real estate, so he wheeled back around for a second attempt.

He quickly hit 80, then 94 and the car started shaking a little. Heagy kept pushing. The speedometer read 96, then 98 and finally 100.

"It was an experience that you can't describe," Heagy said. "I wanted to shake up that champagne and spray it everywhere. I let the guys do it."

The day ended with the emotional high of Heagy hitting the 100 mph mark and that could have been the end of the story. But that night Heagy called Phillips and asked if he could do it again the next day. This time, Heagy wanted to drive solo.

So the next day, Heagy was put back into the car. Once again, the speedometer's needle inched beyond the 100 mph threshold.

"I hope it recharges his battery," Tabor said. "I hope it does something for him other than just driving a car."

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