
Old Racers Never Die by Terry Brim

For any of us who Mike Ammer, we know how much he loves his race cars. It wasn't always that way however. When Mike was still in high school, he fell in love with the looks of the 57' Corvette fuelie.

Now if you stop and think about that statement, from the outside, a fuelie doesn't look any different for a non fuelie 57'. So what does that tell you? Well, it tells me that even way back then, Mike subconsciously was thinking about racing...why else would he like the "looks" of a fuelie?

Mike says the other thing that caught his fantasy about the Corvette was the fiber glass body. To his way of thinking, "that sucker will never rust out". Well not the body anyway Mike!

His first car was a 54' Chevy Bel Air. After graduating from high school Mike, like his father, got a job at "mother cash" here in town. Mike recalls that he and his buddies would spend their lunch hour walking down to what was then Ray Bryant Chevrolet and watch

the guys in the body shop learn to repair fiberglass. At the time, Mike says that Ray Bryant was trying to establish themselves a reputation around town as experts in the repair the Corvette body.

At about the same time (1960) a friend of Mike's bought a new tri-power Chevy Impala. Well, you guessed it, soon Mike was in the market for a new set of wheels as well. Mike says he was so impressed with the tri-power that he was thinking about buying one himself.....BUT! As luck would have it, there was a new 61' Corvette sitting on the showroom floor! Mike being the accountant that he is started to add up the numbers and discovered that a stripped down 61 vette was only about \$300 more than the tri-power Impala!

On the spot Mike plunked down a down payment and ordered a basic vette with the base small block motor, 3- speed transmission, and a convertible top. The color was Hon-

duras Maroon with Beige interior (Sounds familiar, I like Mike's style!) Fast forward a year. Mike had a friend that was looking to buy a 58' Corvette that had been stolen and had the motor and transmission stripped in the process.

Upon recovery of the car, the insurance company had had the car repainted and instead of putting a basic 283 engine back in the car, they put a new 327/340, 4-speed in the car. Only problem was the guy that now owned the car was asking more than Mike's friend could afford to pay. So once again, Mike the accountant, told the guy that if he would swap engines and transmissions with his 61' (we're talking 283 base motor with a 3- speed remember), he would pay his friend enough money so that he could buy the 58'.

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So, the deal was struck, Mike was about to go into the fast lane! The

Continued on Page 2

Old Racers Never Die by Terry Brim (con't)

Continued from page 1

best laid plans of mice and men!...you know how that story goes.... December 31, 1962 New Years eve, outside temperature was zero! Mike and his friend had completed the engine and transmission swap. The stable in Mike's 61' now held a 327/340 with a 4-speed tranny. All that was left was to hook up the fuel line!

As the gas ran over their hands at zero degrees, they couldn't function enough to connect the line

the gasoline on the floor (underneath Mike's beloved 61') caught fire.

To make matters worse, the car was still up on blocks and could not be moved, the water line had frozen, and the fire had run up the telephone pole and had burned the phone lines! By the time Mike went to a neighbors house to call the fire department, the 61' was melted....I

As Mike recalls, they unplugged the fuel line going to the engine and proceeded to connect it to the fuel pump. Have any of you tried to connect a fuel line with gasoline leaking out of the line in zero degrees temperature? Not an easy job! As the gas ran over their hands at zero degrees, they couldn't function enough to connect the line, so they plugged the line back up and went into the house to wash their hands and get warm. In the meantime, during the process gasoline had run onto the floor.

To this day Mike doesn't know what happened, but



mean totally melted, every sq in melted! WOW

Not all was lost however as the insurance company gave Mike \$3500 for the loss of the 61'. The bug had bitten by then of course, so he set

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out to find another vette. As luck would have it, a commercial artist friend of Mike's knew Jack Knab. Jack had been racing Corvette's for years and at the time had a 62' fuelie that he was looking to sell for \$3800. Well now, Mike had \$3500 burning a hole



in his pocket at the time, so go figure...the deal was struck!

Jack has just raced the car at Daytona against the best in the business

with the next stop on the circuit being Sebring. According to Mike however,

Continued on Page 3

Old Racers never Die by Terry Brim (con't)

Continues from page 2

the cost of the tires to run at Sebring was more than the car was worth. Reluctantly, but fortunately for Mike, Jack decided to get out of the racing business as he could not compete



with the professional sponsors like Gulf Oil.

When I asked Mike if it

bothered him that the car had been raced? His answer was "geez, at the time he was kid, heck, he didn't care!"

Mike says when he

went to look at the car, it looked like a new car, having only 10,000 mi. (Jack would drive the 62' vette to the race location, run the car at the race and then drive it back home!)



Having had the car now for almost 45 years, was Mike ever tempted to sell the car? Only one time, when the 63's came out. Mike and his buddies all had 61's and 62's at the time. They would all go down to Ray Bryant's and "float around" the 63's. Mike says he thought about it, but he could never afford a 63' equipped like his 62' with the fuelie, etc. At the time, Mike said his 62' was paid for and beside, "he kinda like the car to tell the truth" So, that was the end of his wanderlust, he has never again thought

If you run the numbers, that means in the last 40 years, Mike has probably averaged at best a couple hundred miles a year!

about selling the car.

Mike only has 56K miles on the car with most of those being put on the first 5 years. If

you run the numbers, that means in the last 40 years, Mike has probably averaged at best, a couple hundred miles a year! Mike says the car was used as a daily driver by he and his wife when he got out of the army. Jan worked at at WPAFB and

Mike returned to his job at NCR.

Mike did drag race the car a few times however, to quote him "back in those

days, speed equipment was a pair of slicks" but they were expensive and hard to come by. Probably a good thing for Mike that he couldn't afford to get serious about racing the car, it might not have survived in such original condition.



Even though, Mike quit drag racing the 62', racing remained in his blood. Mike says for years he would drag Jan over to the finals at Indianapolis. That is how they would spend their vacation!

In the early 90's Mike joined the NCRS. Although they was not a

Continued on Page 4

Old Racers Never Die by Terry Brim (con't)

Continues from page 3

local chapter, the Lake Erie Chapter being the closest, he would still read all the newsletters and manuals. Around 1994, Mike saw an advertisement for the newly formed

Cincinnati chapter. At the time, he remembers, the Chapter was sponsored by a Chevrolet dealer in Milford, Ohio. Mike

would go down to the chapter meets and at the time, there would be only 5 or 6 members at the monthly meetings.

Mike met some great people in the Cincinnati chapter during those early years and it was at this time that he got into having the 62' judged. It didn't take him long to achieve Top Flight as the car was still pretty original. Since then, he has accumulated numerous NCRS awards and has attended many



judging meets. Later, Mike says he would see some guy milling around trying to get Top Flight (and eventually Dontuv) on his red 65/396 coupe. Mike says he was never friends with the guy (really now), but he would

see him and talk with him at the meets.

The year (2000) Mike was at Bowling Green for his BOWTIE judging, Greg Gorniak was

there for his Dontuv judging. One of the lessons learned out of his BOWTIE experience was that he had kept the car in such good condition, that the judges didn't believe that some of the things on Mike's car was original. i.e., when he first got the car from Jack Knab, Mike took the trico wiper blades and visors off the car and just put them away.

When he put them back on the car in 2000 for the BOWTIE judging, they looked to new to be original!

Enter the



NCRS Miami Valley Chapter. One year when Mike was at the Lima swap meet, he ran into Al Kationa and Nick Kammer. Nick gave Mike an application for the Miami Valley Chapter and the rest is history....way to go Nick!

Nick remembers Mike's car as he lived on the same block as Mike grow-



ing up and remembers the

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car sitting in Mike's garage when he would deliver the paper on his paper route.

A couple of years ago, the Cincinnati Chapter held their regional meet and they wanted to have an exhibit of race cars. That's

Continued on Page 5

Old Racers Never Die Terry Brim (con't)

Continues from page 4

when Mike decided to put the numbers back on the car. As luck would have it, Mike had a friend that has a horse and carriage school down in Lexington, As the story goes, there was a man and his wife on vacation visiting the school and come to find out, this guy makes the numbers for all the NASCAR racing cars. How



lucky can you get!

To put things in perspective back then, Mike has paperwork from the Daytona race that Jack Knab averaged well over 90 miles per hour for 3 hours....wow! Mike has the same motor in the car today having



done nothing to it except a valve job which by the way, he concedes didn't really need to be done.

The 62' was built for racing with a 327/360, big brakes, stiff suspension, quick steering, radio delete, and roll bar.

Along the way, Mike has also

owned a 79' which Craig Egbert repainted. That car also received a Top Flight

before Mike traded it on his 2004 which he bought new. The 04' comes with chrome wheels, HUD, and a six speed which was the only requirement Mike had other than being red.

That was in the spring of 2004. Mike and I took the car to Carlisle that August and he made the mistake of letting yours truly drive the car. Needless

to say I was impressed. One month later, I bought



my 2004. Thanks Mike!

Mike's other hobby is collecting model Corvette's. If you have ever been in his garage, you'll see one en-



tire wall lined with his collection.



Continued on Page 6

Continues from page 5

Yes, at times, even Mike
lusts after the unobtainable.



Like any good Corvette fa-
natic, Mike is doing his part
to keep the tradition going.
Someday, his youngest
grandson will have stories to
tell his kids about his
grandpa and the racer who
just faded away....

