

Longtime Racer Enjoying Life in the Fast Lane

Bob Lupini got into racing as a child and turned his passion into a 40-year career.

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By Sherri Coner

Some people wouldn't be thrilled about their partner talking to them while they are trying to concentrate on something serious, like driving a race car.

But Bob Lupini is grateful for the verbal presence of his life partner, Sally Lippman.

"I can hear her in the speaker in my race helmet," he said. "She's the voice in my ear. She's the one that will calm me down."

Racing has been a part of Lupini's life since he was a child. He first fell in love with racing go-karts, and that passion just never left him, he said.

As an educator, summer months provided time for Lupini to build a racing career that has stretched into 40 years of adrenaline rushes.

Through the years, he collected many victories, including more than 30 wins in top dragster races.

In 2017, he took Vintage Grand Prix champion status when he raced a 1957 Corvette at Watkins Glen International in New York. That's the same year Lupini blew the doors off competitors for another championship at the Summit Point West Virginia Grand Prix, where he raced a Craftsman series truck.

Eventually, racing brought him to Lippman. The pair had dated in high school but parted ways and eventually married other people.

About a decade ago, they reconnected via Facebook during a conversation about racing and have been together ever since.

Three years ago, Lupini retired from teaching and the couple moved to the Village of Osceola Hills. Now, Lupini's need for speed, which is still fairly unquenchable, speaks for itself in a Wildwood garage.

During a recent visit, he pointed at a blue AC Shelby Cobra. Expecting the car to clock at least 165 mph, he planned to race it for the first time ever a few days later on a Florida track.

Because Lupini was making adjustments to his second drag racer, which stops with a parachute, several parts of the car were dismantled in the garage.



Bob Lupini, and Sally Lippman, of the Village of Osceola Hills, pose by their Shelby Cobra on Wednesday at his shop.

“Top speed for that one is around 195 miles per hour on a quarter-mile track,” he said.

While he tinkers with tools and engines, Lippman, his crew chief, already has been busy for a while on the details of before, during and after the race.

“My job starts long before we leave home for a race,” she said. “Bob pulls the trailer behind the motorcoach. That’s 70 feet, and you can’t get just anywhere.”

To avoid steep hills, hairpin curves and other headaches, Lippman carefully maps their route.

“I’m the navigator,” she said. “But my role also shifts to scheduler.”

But she is never too busy to carefully inspect Lupini’s red, fire-retardant racing suit. And when he refuses to wear the flame retardant shoe covers, she nicely but firmly insists he does.

Once the race is underway and no caution flags have dropped, Lippman dons her headset and finds a safe place on the sidelines.

“She does the spotting on the straightaways,” Lupini said.

The job of a spotter is to warn their driver that others are closing in on them, from which side and how far back the other cars might be.

At every moment, they must both be alert, Lippman said.

In a jolting way, they were reminded not long ago about how quickly things can go wrong.

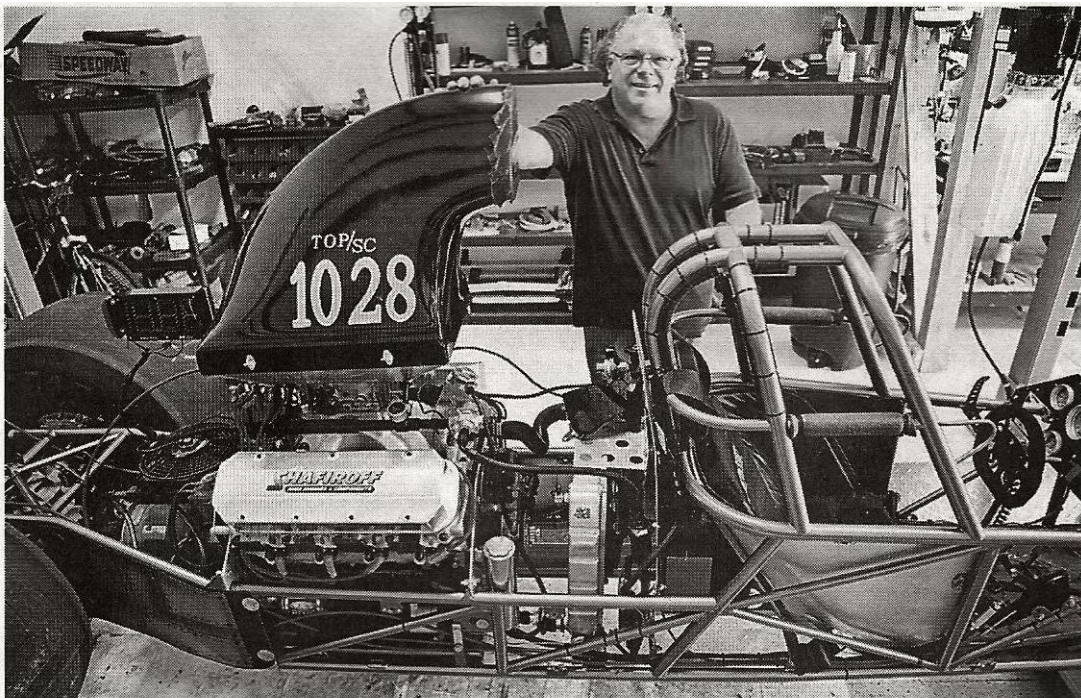
While Lupini competed at a drag strip in Pennsylvania, he unknowingly drove over a patch of fluid on the track.

“The car started fishtailing, spun around and hit a wall,” Lippman said.

Thankfully, Lupini wasn’t seriously injured.

Both were shaken and the lesson was clear. In racing, every second counts, for or against safety.

“There is more to racing outside the track than on it,” Lupini said. “It’s definitely a team effort.”



Photos by John DeClerk | Daily Sun

Bob Lupini, of the Village of Osceola Hills, poses by his Top Alcohol Dragster on Wednesday in his shop.