

Looking Back At Those Glory Days

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By Larry Croom

The need for speed.

Those four words have driven adventurous men and women to push the envelope since the first known race took place in England way back in 1867.

They also have motivated thousands of muscle car owners – this writer included – to “see what it’ll do” through the roar of straight headers and G-forces delivered by high-octane fuel pumping through an angry competition carburetor.

And the need for speed is what led Villagers Glen Carter and Mike Touchette to strap into powerful hot rods some 40 years ago as they searched for the magical thrill of victory.

They are among a very special group – grassroots racers who compete for the love of the sport. Some might call it a hobby, while others see it as a burning passion. Call it what you want, but these are the men and women who keep various forms of auto racing alive and well throughout towns big and small across the country.

For the 79-year-old Carter, the racing dream came alive in 1970 when he scraped together enough money to purchase a “hobby car” – a 1957 Chevrolet with a 283-cubic-inch engine. Painted red and sporting the number 3, Carter was ready for some good ol’ short track racing at Montgomery Motor Speedway, a facility made famous by the Alabama Gang – Bobby and Donnie Allison and the legendary Red Farmer.

“I was big racing fan for years, but I couldn’t do anything because I just didn’t have the money,” said Carter, who founded The Villages Motor Racing Fan Club in 2006 and served as its president/crew chief for three years. “I was raising a family and finally I thought to myself, ‘If I’m ever going to do anything, I’ve got to do it now.’”

After borrowing an old trailer from a friend who helped in the effort, it was time to go racing.

“I hauled that race car behind a ‘66 Chevrolet Impala with a bumper hitch. It’s a wonder it didn’t end up in a ditch,” he said with a chuckle. “But back in those days, you didn’t care. You just wanted to race.”

Carter said his wife, Linda, and young teen daughters, Allison and Lisa, thoroughly supported his racing effort. And another close friend who owned a gas station also helped out, going so far as to sponsor his ride.

“We had a successful year,” the Village of Summerhill resident said. “We did have to replace two crankshafts during that season, but we about broke even.”

After one season, Carter decided to hang up his helmet and go back to being a race fan – a decision that meant parting ways with his ‘57 Chevy.



Submitted photo
Glen Carter, of the Village of Summerhill, founded The Villages Motor Racing Fan Club in 2006. Carter, 79, is a former racer himself, and first took to the track in a red 1957 Chevrolet that boasted a 283-cubic-inch engine and a No. 3 painted on the side.

"It looked like an accordion, it had been wrecked so much by the end of the year," Carter recalled with a roar of laughter. "I bought it for \$500 and sold it for \$500, so that wasn't too bad."

All in all, Carter said, it's an experience he never will forget.

"I wouldn't take anything for it," he said. "It was really one of the highlights of my life."

Touchette, a former vice president and current tech guru for The Villages Motor Racing Fan Club, feels the same way. His "love of speed" led him to a couple years of bliss in the early 1970s while drag racing in Connecticut.

His ride of choice? A sweet, vintage 1968 Dodge Charger 440 – a car that he came across while running a gas station.

"This lady pulls in one day and tells me she's getting divorced and wants to sell the car out from under her husband," he said. "It wasn't running, so I got my wrecker and went to look at it."

Touchette said the Charger had a flat tire, a dead battery and bad points. So he bought it for \$400 and quickly fixed the problems.

"Then I took it out and buried the speedometer, which registered 140," he said with a laugh.

Racing also played a role in Touchette's relationship with his wife, Wendy, as their second date came at the drag strip.

"It's my fault that she's the way she is now," he said of Wendy, a huge Tony Stewart fan who serves as car chief/vice president of The Villages Motor Racing Fan Club. "She's kind of a girlie motorhead."

In fact, Touchette said, Wendy quickly took to drag racing, to the point that she once argued with him about a new shifter he had installed in the Charger.

"It was an automatic with a reverse pattern and she didn't like the way it was bolted in," Touchette said. "She said, 'I guarantee you're going to pull that off the floor.' I said, 'Baloney, that's not going to happen.'"

At the end of the quarter-mile run, Touchette stopped his car so Wendy could jump in and ride back with him.

"Here I am holding the shifter," he said. "I did pull it out of the floor and she's never let me forget it."

At age 63, Touchette said his racing days are behind him. But like every gearhead who's ever driven a hot rod, it's still a part of him today. In fact, a peek into his garage proves that point.

"I had always driven Cadillacs, but that wasn't doing it for me," he said. "So I came home with a red Charger R/T with a Hemi."

The need for speed? Count on it!