

Not Slowing Down

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By Nicole Deck

Skip Bryan spent most of his life admiring sports cars from afar.

Now, he gets to sit behind the wheel if one, revving the engine, wearing a helmet and racing gloves. "I worked a lot and didn't have time for a hobby. Probably for 40 years I never had a hobby," Bryan said. "I saved it up for right now."



Bryan, 73, of the Village of Lynnhaven, has spent the last 14 years racing his 1972 BMW 2002. He has participated in about 75 vintage sports car racing weekend events, at two to three races each.

"It's really challenging, but it's really fun," Bryan said. "I'm into it with everything I've got."

As a child, Bryan and his buddies would play a game calling out the brand and year of cars that passed by. A few years later, he developed an interest in racing.

His friends would race up a hill in their cars, but because Bryan didn't have his own, he would have to borrow theirs.

After his last race as a teenager, in 1966, he didn't race again until 34 years later. But this time, he had his own ride.

Racing isn't all glamour. Bryan recalled sweating inside his race suit during a race on a 100-degree day in the middle of summer. He also survived a one-hour endurance race during winter, with temperatures below freezing; he won the race, by the way.

"You're totally focused because you can't look away for two seconds," Bryan said about the

races that can have up to 17 different turns. "By the end, you're exhausted and wet from sweating."

It was Bryan's wife, Carol, who gave him the extra push to take up racing again.

"I knew he really enjoyed it," said Carol Bryan, who loves going to the races. "I get some butterflies when I see the green flag fall, but it's exciting."

Besides the thrill, Skip Bryan has found more benefits to racing than he first realized.

"It forces you to take better care of yourself, mentally and physically," he said. "I feel blessed to be able to race at this stage of my life."

The Bryans agreed that one of the best parts about the racing events is the camaraderie.

“It’s extremely competitive, but we’re all kind of like one big family,” Skip Bryan said. “We’re ready to help each other if someone needs a spare part or helping hand. They’re really great, interesting people.”

Bryan’s most memorable racing moments so far was in 2007, when he won both the championship against 140 competitors, as well as the most improved driver of the year out of 830 drivers.

“I was speechless when they called me to the stage for the award,” Bryan said.

This year, Bryan plans to do eight more races, and for the first time ever, he will have a vintage sports car race on the Formula One track at Indianapolis Motor Speedway.

His wife of almost 47 years is happy with his car these days. However, that wasn’t always the case.

When they first met, Skip picked up Carol in his 1953 Chevrolet for a blind date.

But because the car had previously been in a wreck, the passenger door wouldn’t open. To get to her seat, Carol had to slide in from the driver’s side.

“She wasn’t too impressed,” Skip said.

Luckily, the two can laugh about it now.

And when Carol watches Skip on the track, it still makes her heart race.



Submitted photo
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