



The Annual Visit To The Villages Motor Racing Fan Club

Posted by Ron Hedger on April 20, 2010

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THE VILLAGES, Fla.

Our annual trek to this Florida retirement community near Don Garlits's famed drag racing museum was timed perfectly to catch another meeting of The Villages Motor Racing Fan Club, a group of enthusiasts tuned to all types of auto racing.

Hot off bus trips to the Daytona 500 and the NHRA Gatornationals, arriving members found club member Eric Jones's Super Comp rear engine dragster in front of the clubhouse. A number of the attendees elected to climb into the car after Eric gave a quick lesson in where to put your feet and how to get out again, giving many their first experience in a race car.

And when Jones hit the switch and started it up a few times after drivers changed, the smiles lit up the parking lot like a bank of Musco lights.

Later, during the regular program, Jones told the group how he became a drag racer after decades as a UAW worker at Buick City in Michigan. He described the joys and disappointments of bracket racing. Jones, who laughingly describes himself as "just an old guy playing with toys," has run the car at Bradenton, Gainesville (Fla.) Orlando, Indianapolis and Central Michigan.

Drawing nearly as much attention as the dragster was a photo of Jones's immaculate '31 Ford sedan street rod, originally a race car, that still sports its roll cage. He told of putting kids into both cars at various shows, amid dozens of other cars surrounded by 'do not touch' signs, and noted that their excitement might be the catalyst that draws another generation into the racing world.

Every year we hear the complaints of racers asked to give kiddie rides or display their cars for the fans and we couldn't help but think that those racers are shooting themselves in the foot by not supporting such activities.

The racing club is unique in that it picks out a variety of drivers to sponsor, among them Florida racing legends Buzzie Reutimann and Wayne Anderson, both of whom have visited victory lane already this season.

"Buzzie appreciates our help so much that he came up to our meeting the week after David won last year," related club President Gerry Hafer. "He called me and said that he was so excited he just had to talk to somebody about it."

Hearing that, we suggested to Hafer that another of Reutimann's contemporaries, Will Cagle, the "Tampa Terror," would make a terrific speaker for a future meeting.

"You're a mind reader," was the reply. "Our goal is to schedule a night where we have a panel of Buzzie Reutimann, Will Cagle, Dick Anderson, Bobby Brack and Buddy Pierce on the stage for a two-hour question-and-answer session. For Florida race fans, that would be about as good as it gets."

Glen Carter, who established the club and oversaw its growth period, tipped that a long-term goal is the establishment of a Florida Short Track Hall of Fame.

With that, a night of go-kart racing at a local track, bus trips to Florida tracks in Daytona, Ocala, Auburndale and New Smyrna and a number of social events on their schedule, the club members will be busy.

They've obviously learned a lesson from their involvement with Reutimann. Just because you're along in years doesn't mean that you have to quit doing what you love.