

“CARL HAS A TREMENDOUS PASSION FOR RACING, AND HE’S AN EXCELLENT DRIVER.” — Vickie Eckert

THE THRILL OF RACING

BY RICA KEENUM

Carl Eckert can't stop. His passion for speed, for souped up cars and auto racing runs deep. It started with his father Harry, a National Auto Racing Hall-of-Famer who won countless awards for his racing endeavors. Harry took the wheel after serving in the Navy during World War II, but stepped back from racing when Carl was born.

Back then, racing was far more dangerous, he notes. But with modern roll cages, arm restraints, fire retardant suits and special helmets, today's race car drivers are far safer than when Carl's father Harry was behind the wheel. That fact brings comfort to Carl's wife Vickie, who grew up watching her father's drag races on television and nursing a crush on





Dale Earnhardt senior. “I loved racing,” she said, “still do.” Vickie now serves as Carl’s “pit crew.”

“If you look at the difference in the cars,” she said, pointing to photos of the previous models, “the roll bar sits right at the neck. So, the driver’s whole head was exposed.”

Carl shakes his head in agreement. “Honestly, when we raced these cars, we had a couple of people die on the track or be seriously injured,” he said. Drivers in those days risked their lives for the



sign carved with the header: Eckert & Eckert Racing.

“I got into racing legends cars, and then into what’s called a Thunder Roadster,” he said. Proud of her husband’s achievements, Vickie says Carl won several championships throughout his racing career. Around 2010, he joined the National Auto Sports Association (NASA), earned his competition license and began racing on road courses within the Southeast, with Vickie by his side — perhaps his biggest fan.

Post-retirement in 2008, Carl and Vickie lived in Atlanta for a time before moving to The Villages. Carl sold his four race cars due to lack of space, and left racing in his rear view — or so he thought.

But when COVID-19 hit, everything changed. With little to do but dream about the thrill of his racing days, Carl revisited the sport.

“When I was thinking about getting back into it, I was looking at several different types of cars, but I called the guy that had upgraded my last Thunder Roadster,” Carl said. “He happened to know about a car that had been wrecked.”

Carl bought the car as is and replaced the chassis and working parts. He bought all new safety gear and hauling equipment — even a truck and trailer.

“Carl has a tremendous passion for racing, and he’s an excellent driver,” Vickie said. “So, you know, it’s just a lot of fun to go with him.”

Standing beside their gleaming GT Roadster that bears Carl’s original number 24, Carl and Vickie relish the sport that has always quickened their pulses — and quickens it still.



sheer pleasure of racing, receiving mere trinkets for their winnings — a cap or a plaque, for example.

“It was just exhibition racing,” Carl said. “You were racing for the fun of it — no money.”

In 1987, Carl came across a sprint car his dad had built and sold decades prior, in the early 60s. The two joined forces to restore the car, a perfect project for the father-and-son race enthusiasts. Soon they were full speed ahead — taking on other restorations, and racing and showing their cars.

“(My dad) was quite the racer,” Carl said. “That was from New England — won three championships in the 70s up there, so these were vintage cars.” Carl shows off the old photos he’s affixed to a memory board, glossy beneath a wooden

