



659 Memories by raycer27

as told to me by Charlie Santilli

Tom Skinner was born in 1930 and passed away in 2006. If any of you out there went to or followed racing in New Jersey and the surrounding tri state area, I doubt that you wouldn't know who Tom Skinner and Parker Bohn, his driver were. They were well known in the racing fraternity, but like I always say "There are always stories within stories".

The 1st car that was built by Tom was done at Bringleman's Garage, where Tom had about 10 cars all painted with silver paint to preserve them.

There were many people involved with this car, more than even this writer knew about and thanks to Charlie the full story can be told. He also put a lot of information about the many people involved with this car on our Blog, please check it out.

Around 1959 a friend of the family, Buck Sooy took Charlie to Vineland Speedway and Charlie heard that the 659 was based in Hammonton, only a few blocks from his house, so Charlie rode his bike over to the glass factory where Skinner had just built the race shop. So Charlie became a fixture at the shop washing parts, helping Tom with chores and over the years learned valuable information about race cars and mechanical procedures the "Tom Skinner" way as Tom was a meticulous person when building his cars.



In the early years Sal Moschella drove the 659 and in 1961 Tom put Parker Bohn in the car where he would remain until the end of their racing career. Now at this time Charlie was still a young boy and he couldn't make all the races that they ran. He missed all the Islip Speedway shows because his father had a blueberry farm and he wouldn't Charlie leave at 2 o'clock in the

afternoon to go to New York with the crew. Charlie recalled a funny incident that happened in 1967. Joey Panerella had a drivers license and so he drove the hauler with the 659 on it with Charlie riding shotgun. Tom and John Lyons had to get cleaned up and were a bit behind. Parker was already at the track and Joey and Charlie were on the G.S.P. and they were running late, so when they got to Lakehurst, Joey pulled over, Charlie got up in the 659 and fired it up so the engine temps would be up when they got to the track. (pretty smart thinking)



Now they're flying up the parkway at 70 mph fire belching out of the large exhaust pipe, and you can just imagine what the people on the GSP were wondering, as they're following behind the hauler looking at this spectacle. They got to the track just in time for the consolation race but missed qualifying by 1 spot.



The following two weeks they won features from the back against big block fuel injected modifieds like the XL1. In fact they won the Trenton qualifying race with a stock head and 3 2 barrel carbs.

Don House let Tommy Elliot go who was the driver of the XL1 and brought in Lee Roy Yarbrough to try to beat the 659.

Another top running car was the #14 that Richie Massing drove, that was owned by Dick Barney. One of the last shows that the 659 ran, Massing started up front and had a straight away lead, when Parker broke out of the pack and was in 2nd place and ran Massing down. Massing hit the wall going into turn 3 and Parker wound up the winner. According to sources, Dick Barney took Massing out of the car. The guys on the 659 crew still joke about the 659 being the cause of why 2 drivers lost their rides.



Another good story was the Delmar Delaware episode, it happened in 1973. They had run Wall Saturday night and Tom

wanted to run Delmar on Sunday, which I believe was dirt. The tires had to be changed and a different gas tank had to be installed that held more fuel for longer races.

So the next day the crew was supposed to show up early to get all the changes done to the car, but nobody showed except for Charlie, so he did the tires, changed the tank and now everyone starts to show up.

Now the dilemma was, who's gonna ride in the truck and who's gonna have to drive their own car to get there, so everybody's telling Tom that this one and that one are gonna ride in the hauler with Tom, and Charlie took exception to this and said to Tom that they needed to find their own way to the track and Tom said he couldn't do that and that Charlie was being a poor sport about the situation, so Charlie says he's not going.



Now Charlie had always mixed the fuel as Tom had taught him and Tom said "well at least mix the fuel for me if you're not going with us" and Charlie said ok, no problem. He

goes in the back to mix the fuel, well instead of putting 10% nitro in the fuel, he puts 15% in and they all went to Delaware minus Charlie.

So they went through warm ups and practice and Parker says "This thing is a rocket"!! They start the feature, from the back and Parker gets it up to 2nd, next thing he's backing off and back then they didn't have radios so no one knew what was going on and eventually it cracked a cylinder wall and Parker comes in the pits and raves about the power the car has and Tom said it's the same motor and nothing was changed.

When they got back to the shop, Tom gets the meter out to check the fuel and sees it has 15% nitro instead of 10% and needless to say he wasn't a happy camper! So when Tom asked him why he did that Charlie's reply was "I just wanted to make sure you had enough straight away speed so you could get to the front". Of course things calmed down over time and got back to normal.

Charlie credits Mr. Skinner, Tom's dad and Tom for keeping him off the streets and out of trouble as Charlie's dad passed away when he was a youngster, so the Skinners were now his family.



Charlie said if there was one fault about Tom was that he was stubborn, like Charlie and his son C.J. had tried to get Tom to restore and revive the 659 for 5 years until they took matters into their own hands and did what they had to do to get the car looking as it does today.

I remember when Tom was helping me with my car, the engine specifically, we had gotten the motor back from the machine shop and he told me to wash the block, which I did and told me to do it again, well the third time I think all the guys at the shop said , Tom make him do it again, but people, that's just how it was at Skinner's shop. I wish I could turn back the time and do it all over.

Later John Lyons bought one of the other 659 coupes that was built in 1963 and he put a V8 in it and he and Tony Siscione ran it at P'ville.

The last year that that Tom ran Wall Stadium which was in 1977, they were bringing back the sportsman class. Rules said they would start up front because of the lesser cid motors. They had stopped doing that after they won the championship in 1973 and they told Tom if they did that that Tom would only be able to run a single carburetor, no fuel injection or multiple carbs. That's when Tom and Charlie parked the 659, plus everyone else on the crew had gone their own separate ways, Joe Panerella had moved, John Lyons and Tony had their car they ran at P'ville and the Terruso Brothers with the T2 had left, so it was basically down to Tom and Charlie.



At this point I'd like to add that I learned so much from Tom when I ran my #27 car, he was always ready and willing to help and I wouldn't have had the success that I had if it weren't for Tom Skinner.
