

BUDDY CATERINO

Owner of the # 947 "The Critter"

By raycer27

The year was 1948, the place, south Philadelphia or south "Philly" as it was called by many who lived there. The culture of that area was mainly of Italian heritage. South Philly is also the place where the famous restaurant, Pat's Steaks is located, home of the Philly Cheese Steak sandwich, it's still there today.

Back then rock and roll music was just starting to emerge and along with that came doo-wop music that you could hear on any given street corner in south Philly. At the location of 10th and Washington avenues there was something else going on but it wasn't doo-wop music and it was happening at Buddy's Garage located at 947 Washington Avenue. They were building a stock car to run at the various oval tracks in Pennsylvania and New Jersey.

There were quite a few back in the 50's, Atco, Alcyon, Oldbridge, Vineland, Hatfield, Langhorne and P'ville. So Buddy, being in the automotive trade, knew people that had special talents in the mechanical trade and Buddy wound up with 5 friends of his, Jerry DeGaldo, John Bush was the technical guy who handled the carburetor and ignition problems, Mario Antonelli, Tony De Sabeto was their machinist, Mario De Carlo was the main mechanic and trouble shooter and Buddy's two brothers, Louis and Walter; so Buddy had a very knowledgeable and experienced crew.

Early on, Nascar tried to bring their sanction to P'ville, but there were a lot of rules and conditions that just couldn't be resolved, so it remained under the South Jersey Stock Car Association sanction.



As Art Powell was building the track, a lot of the drivers and crews helped with various phases of construction; Sal Moschella, Tony Dell and a lot of guys from Buddy's crew helping to complete the track. They would bring dirt in and the guys would run their cars around to pack the dirt down. The 1st flagger's stand was actually located on the infield until it was demolished by a competitor in an accident. The track surface was dirt, then later on

they started to put oil in with the dirt to keep the dust down and further on they tried mixing asphalt into the dirt and eventually when George Stockinger took the track over, he had it paved. Buddy says that they actually did run races at the track at the end of the season in 1949 and started a full season in 1950

Buddy's 1st driver was Hawk Coppola and according to Buddy, was a good pilot for the 947, he drove it for 4 years from 1949 to 1952 and won the championship in 1950. Tony Dell then came aboard and drove from 1953 to 1956, taking track champ honors in 1953. Sal Moschella drove the car for a while and Carl Grinar also hopped in the seat for a few races.



Although it was never made public through the media or otherwise, there was a little tension or discontent between the south Jersey guys and the drivers from south Philly, I guess you could say it was a territorial issue, but they all managed to work it out eventually and to this day are still friends and can talk and joke about the bygone days at the reunions that are held every year.



The early 50's were extremely good for Buddy and his crew, very few breakdowns, no major wrecks and they were winning races. Of course when things are that good for a team everyone thinks that you're cheating, so they had the protest rule, someone puts up the money to tear you down, if you were found illegal, the protesters got their money back and you got penalized. If you were legal, you got \$45.00 for

your trouble of tearing down your car. There were 4 such instances that happened to Buddy and he was never found to be illegal, but the fifth time it happened, Buddy had run P'ville in the afternoon and had won the race and once again they protested his car, problem was they had another track to run later that night, so they refused to tear the car down so they could race at another track the same day.



Buddy says the purse money wasn't all that great considering the expenses that it took to compete every week, it was about \$150.00 to win. They just liked the sport and in his words, we raced for the poor people that came out and enjoyed racing.

In Cecil New Jersey on the Black Horse Pike there was a family type bar called Pat & Helen's. Buddy and his crew would stop on their way home after the races and eat dinner, it became a weekly ritual. Buddy and his wife became very good friends with Pat & Helen and would leave his trophies at the bar so people could see them. There were 14 first place trophies sitting on display on the piano in the bar for 3 years, and then Pat took ill and passed away and not too long after Helen passed on also.



Buddy asked Pat & Helen's son if he could pick up the trophies and he said yes, but after the mourning and legalities were over with. Well, the bar got sold and the new owners told Buddy they didn't know anything about the trophies and the son didn't know either, so no one knows what happened to them, that's a shame.

Buddy also recalls that there was a hotdog stand in the infield until one of his brothers at the age of 16, got in the 947 and took it out on the track

and somehow ran into the hotdog stand and demolished it.

For the longest time Buddy's car held the record for the fastest lap in the strictly stock flathead division at 21.5 seconds and he still has the stopwatch that he used to time the car stopped at 21.5.

In 1961 the track wanted to go modified, which meant you could run anything you could hide, multiple carburetion and change the gear ratios in the transmission and differential. Buddy didn't want to go that route, so that year Buddy put the car in storage where it's been for over 40 some years. In 1964 they had a block party and he got the car out and let the neighborhood kids ride in the car with him. In 1997, (not sure of the date) there was a vintage car show in Valley Forge Pa., Bill Force came over to help him get the car to the show. At the present time they're looking into the possibility of bringing the car to the Pumpkin Run at Flemings for the 2011 season, nothing definite but it would be nice to see the car displayed. The car is in pristine shape, as it was in the year it was taken off the track in '61.



Buddy and his wife, Trudy have been married for 63 years and yes, Trudy made all the races when the car was running at the various tracks that they ran. Also congratulations to Buddy, he just became a great, great, grandfather!! Saluda Buddy!!
