

MATTY RICCO

By raycer 27



Matty's brother used to take him to Alcyon Speedway in Pitman N.J. when he was eleven or twelve years old to watch Henry Doerr, Al Tasnady, Tommy Elliot and Elton Hildreth race. When he graduated high school, he decided that he wanted to get involved in stock car racing.

He bought his first car in 1971 from Johnny Bennett and was racing in 1972. Some of Matty's friends also had an interest in racing and they banded together and formed their first race team. Like many of us that began our journey into the sport, they knew absolutely nothing about the obstacles and hurdles they would face along the way, but they learned fast.

Example; someone came up to Matty and his crew and asked them how much wedge did they have in the car; they just looked at each other and the guy who asked them and said "What are you talking about"? I believe that was their first introduction to the legendary Tom Skinner, who then showed them how to check and adjust wedge, Tom mentored many of us in the racing fraternity.



The guys that came on board and stayed with Matty as a regular crew were, Greg Ingram, Scott Page and Bobby Weil. Another friend of his, Ed Fibido built the motor for the car. At that point they decided to paint the car, so Matty got some silver paint and 4 brushes and painted the car. Next, they were trying to decide what number to use and how to draw it on the car (At that time they didn't know about Bill Force A.K.A. Mr. Woo) so they cut a #1 template out of cardboard, 'cause it was the easiest number to make, but when they put the number on the car it just didn't take up enough room, so they added the extra digit, stood back and said "Guys, we got us a race car"!

Another friend came along to help out by the name of Pete Bellace, who owned a janitorial service company and that eased the expenses of owning a race car, granted it wasn't thousands of dollars, but back in that era, if you were able to get any kind of sponsorship, you took it, whether it was money for tires, engines or whatever, anything that lightened the expense load.

Matty ran the #11 for a short while, gaining experience, getting as much seat time in as possible. It was then that a longtime friend, Joe Perona, who owned a junkyard and was also a race fan, came on board and bought a car from someone in Berlin Township and put Matty in the car.



Joe numbered the car #J 32, J, for Joe and 32 for the year he was born. I put in the info on numbering because many people want to know the reason why a driver or owner made the choice for the number on their car.

Now, when Matty drove the #J32, he took one nasty flip over the 1st turn fence after locking wheels with someone coming into turn 1, which almost launched him into the pit area. (see photo insets) Fortunately Matty wasn't injured, but they had a lot of work to do to repair the car.



They repaired it and ran quite a few races after that with the same car and that same car can be seen today if you were to go to the stock car reunion at Pole Tavern or Fleming's Pumpkin Run, but it bears the number 24 and has Will Cagle's name over the door, but it is the #J 32 in disguise.



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About 2 years later, Matty had a car built by Paul Blair, it was a Vega bodied car, silver paint scheme with a red #11 like the coupe that he had when he started with back in 1972. It had a set of 180 degree headers that made the car sound almost like an Indy car; supposedly they were designed to get more



H.P. by improving the exhaust flow and better low end torque than conventional headers.

Matty put a big block motor in that car and ran Pocono, finished 20th out of 40 cars. He acquired a few more cars along the way and also picked up a few rides; he ran New Egypt, Flemington, both the 2 1/2 mile and 3/4 mile tracks at Pocono. He also ran trucks and Legends cars at Wall Stadium and capped it off by winning the 1988 Sportsman Championship at Wall.



Matty went into law enforcement in 1975 and was with Mullica Township Police Dept. for 30 years. When he retired from the force, he moved to sunny Florida where he now resides and is now part of Mrs. France's security team in Daytona Beach, Florida. Yes he's still racing, he's already won 2 Go-Kart championships down here and will probably win some more. He's kinda like the Energizer Bunny, he just won't stop!
