

## In His Own Words

As told to **Lew Boyd**

PRESENTED BY:



# Joe Constance

- Born April 20, 1964 in Nyack, New York
- Founder of Joes Racing Products and an accomplished racer out of the Pacific Northwest
- An ordinary Joe Racer doing extraordinary things through homework and passion for what he does.

They say a life can be directed by purpose or chance. Early on, there was a lot of chance in my career.

You see, I had finished technical school in Washington state to become a machinist. I ended up making cannery equipment and was spending a lot of time in Alaska. That just wasn't me, and I quit.

I really didn't know what to do, so I hung around with a friend in Renton [Washington] and started building a race car. I'd had racing on the brain since I lived back



East. My friend had a Bridgeport [milling machine] and an old lathe, and I had a welder and a tubing bender. We made just about everything.

Soon word got around about what we were doing. I made some parts for Dave Fuge, the chassis builder and crew chief. And the phone started ringing more.

In about a year, I became more focused. I rented a space in West Seattle and was soon working a million hours a day, seven days a week. It was okay because I wasn't married yet. As Constance Machine, I still did some cannery stuff and commercial products, but I was so into racing that I got a business license in 1989 and started Joes Racing Products. That had my heart. We made all kinds of brackets, motor mounts, and that kind of thing, mostly for late models.

I was a machinist. I knew nothing about being a businessman. I had no mentors and had no time to take any classes, so I read whenever I could. Lots of business books on employee management, finance, marketing. It took me a long time to stabilize financially and to do things like investing in the building we occupy. Now 25 years later, our shop here is 25,000 square feet, with a staff of 45. I never dreamed it could be like this, but I never stopped reading. Whenever I travel anywhere, I still pick up a business book to read along the way.

No question, the hardest part of business is taking care of the employees—motivating them. Even though I run almost every aspect of the company, I am on the floor all the time. Partly it's because I still love making things, programming our robotic welders, running the CNC machines. But also, I have learned to engage with everyone and make sure they see that I'd never ask them to do anything I wouldn't.

In a way, it's the same way with customers. I think we are successful because I have always been a racer. Being so into manufacturing *and* racing, I'd be really embarrassed to put out any product that is not total quality.

We rely on customers to know what we should be developing. For example, when

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## VOICE OF EXPERIENCE

I was getting into late models years ago, I needed a rear-end breather that was filtered, not just a rubber hose taped onto a bar somewhere. So I made a little tube with a filter. People saw it and began asking for one.

I believe that passion is the key ingredient to business success. If you are passionate, you get things done. I've been that way about race cars, anyway, since I was 13. That seems unlikely for a kid living near New York City whose family was into political science and knew nothing about motorsports.

The neighborhood kids and I found an old mini bike that had no brakes. I wore out so many pairs of sneakers riding it that my dad took me around to all the shops to find some brakes. We never did, but we did see a go-kart for sale. I was *really* hooked then. I mowed a thousand lawns, and Dad finally helped me buy that kart.

We took it up to [New York's] Accord Speedway in our station wagon. With tools that would easily fit in a lunch box and no knowledge whatsoever, I raced it for a year-and-a-half, always at the back of the pack. The whole time I had been running on the dirt with rock-hard asphalt rubber, not knowing the difference. Then, Dad was offered a job at Seattle Pacific University. In the very last race before we moved, someone suggested I put on new tires and groove them. I did. We won!

I knew no one out here, but, going to some tracks on my own, I found that Evergreen [Speedway in Monroe, Washington] had a go-kart indoor series in the winter. I took my kart up there with that same minimal toolbox and, somehow won the A-main in a stacked field of karts that went all the way back to E-mains.

After that, I joined a super stock team at Evergreen, but soon realized they knew nothing. So, I did what I later did in business. I started reading every book and magazine I could find on racing technology. I even went to Duke Southard's school in Florida.

The first car I built was a '77 Monte Carlo for an enduro, and it was fast. The first outing

was a 250-lapper at Evergreen, with almost 100 entries, so many that there was no beginning, no end to the field. Just middle. I finished fourth, and placed second in another one at Spanaway Speedway [now-defunct, in Washington] the next day.

Then I built a mini-stock Ford Escort for Wayne Hart. I drove it for him, and it was fast, but we blew a motor every week. Over the winter, he bought a dyno, and we really studied which piston-and-head combination we should use. Studying really does work in racing. We won the '91 Evergreen championship.

After that, Wayne bought a super late model on the NASCAR Northwest Tour. The first event was a 100-lapper on Evergreen's  $\frac{1}{8}$ -mile, and it went all the way under green. What a huge difference that experience was. I about fell out of the seat, but we pulled in an 11th.

My own cars came next. Back then we still had little equipment or money. With just a manual lathe and mill, I made the spindles, the five-on-five hubs, everything. I've been in late models ever since, and plan to race this year.

My wife, Tiffany, (a former kart racer) and I have three kids—Spencer, 18; Haley, 11; and Brooklyn, 8. They all race—in junior sprints and 600cc micros. To be honest, they are all good. But, my daughter, Haley, is the one who will excel. That's because Spencer and Brooklyn really do it for fun. Haley has that burning desire. It keeps coming down to that in this sport—and in business. There are folks out there who like to bash kids who are born into a racing family. I don't see it that way. Where they were born is not their fault. If they have that special passion and can take advantage of the opportunity, why in the world not?

I'm going to continue racing with my kids. You could say that's a key part of my business model. We have mostly been in late model parts in the past, but, since they have been racing, we are doing more and more micro sprint equipment. Quite likely, if they go more toward other forms of racing over time, our business will follow right along. 🏁

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