

NORTHEAST MOTORSPORTS JOURNAL

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Connecticut Yankee in the Court of Open Wheel Racing



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MOTORSPORTS TEAMS OF THE NORTHEAST

Last month we interviewed Bob Akin, longtime Porsche racer and winner of the Sebring 12 hour race at his racing complex in New York. We are continuing with our in depth and personal series on the Motorsport's Teams of the Northeast. In this issue we are talking with Charlie McCarthy, owner of the Chatim Racing Team based out of Warwick, RI. Chatim's race shop is a 10,000 sq ft building located in a light industrial area park right off Route 95, just 10 minutes from the state airport.

The team has a full time staff of 10 people divided between office and shop. In addition to maintaining the race cars, Chatim also offers for sale a street conversion of customers Camaros and Firebirds to ILE race specs. Basically, they take your street car and make it a race car; tires, brakes, engine mods and suspension while keeping it street legal.

The team has competed in the IMSA Firehawk series since its beginning in 1985 and is always among the frontrunners with its fleet of immaculately prepared Chevrolet Camaro race cars. Chatim Racing is a GM factory supplied team for drive train components, engines, transmissions and rear ends.

Driver pairings for the four car team are usually as follows:

Charlie McCarthy and Bruce Mac Innes (Chief Instructor of Skip Barber Racing schools) in car #60.
Charley McCarthy, Jr. and Bill Warner in car #62
Ed Lane and Tom Gaffney in car #61
Tom McCabe and Mike Zimicki in car #63

Chatim Racing also supports a GTO effort with Charlie McCarthy and Tom Ciccone in the IMSA EXXON endurance series in a Chevy Camaro. They recently captured a third place finish at Lime Rock, right behind the two factory backed Corvettes.

As Charlie was away on business trip when we visited the shop, he agreed to meet us the next day, Saturday morning, at his home. This was worth the trip itself. Charlie lives in a secluded section of the city, on 7 acres of beautiful waterfront property overlooking Narragansett Bay. The landlocked side of the property is bordered by a private country club that has an 18 hole championship golf course.

Home is a turn of the century, 22 room New England Victorian, with wrap around porches and decks and such amenities as an elevator, private gym and handball court. But for the motorheads, there is also a private race track on the property and a 7 car garage full of interesting rides and a helicopter landing area.

We met with Charlie in his study. It is tastefully decorated with oriental rugs, leather chairs, comfortable couches, marble fireplace and a full wall bookcase; but the best part is the million dollar view across the bay of the Newport Bridge.

NMJ...Charlie, thanks for allowing us this time with you, even being able to come to your home for this interview. We have been hearing rumors that there may be some changes coming for Chatim Racing in the future. Anything you can share with our readers?

CM...Thank you for squeezing me in. Yes, as you know we have competed in the various IMSA series for the past several seasons and have enjoyed it tremendously; but we always try to do something interesting next. The biggest change in the team is that my oldest son, Charley, has just graduated from college in California and is moving back here to become

involved in the businesses. He was one of our main drivers and would fly in for the races or testing and then back to school. Now he wants to concentrate all his efforts on the business, so he won't be driving at all this season.

NMJ...Will the team disband or will you move to another type of series?

CM....We have been exploring some options and have decided on moving to another series for next season.

NMJ.... We understand there was some "secret" test done by Porsche recently in California. Do you know anything about that and does that have anything to do with your future plans?

CM...Yes, it wasn't that big a secret (laughing). Porsche is going to introduce the Carrera Cup racing series into the USA next year and it will be the same format that they are using in Europe right now. Each car is identical and is purchased directly from the Porsche factory. The drivers are the determining factor in the racing. I feel it is going to be a great series and they promise TV coverage for all the races.

Now as far as the "secret" test, the Porsche factory had Alwin Springer and the people at Andial build a Carrera Cup car to the specs that would be used here in the series. Porsche invited four drivers to come and test the Andial Cup car in a closed session and offer feedback. The four drivers were Allan Freed, an IMSA lights driver, Tom McCabe who is my teammate on occasion at Chatim Racing, George Follmer, the former Can Am Porsche Champion and me. We tested all day at Willow Springs raceway in California and gave feedback to the engineers that were there.

NMJ....What was your impression of the car from the test?

CM...Unbelievable, fantastic. The brakes were so good that it almost felt like you could go to the turn in point before you needed to think about them. That test sealed the deal for me and Tom McCabe, too.



On our flight home, McCabe and I put together a plan for competing in the Porsche Carrera Cup series, we decided to sell all our GM race equipment and start preparing for the new season. Chatim Racing would be the named team for both cars and would use two transporters as support vehicles, down from our four car team with four transporters. As these will be sprint races, we won't have the need for as many mechanical spares or people.

NMJ....You have been a longtime racer in IMSA but never in Porsches before; but you have a Porsche factory connection, don't you?

CM....Yes, my team and the teams I have driven for were always GM teams. However, as you pointed out, my connection with the Porsche factory goes back to a time when Jochen Mass and I became friends in the mid 70's.

At that time he was actually a Formula 1 driver for McLaren as a teammate to James Hunt; but he also a Porsche factory driver and was doing a lot of driving for the Porsche team in the endurance races. We would often spend a weekend in Europe at a Formula 1 race and then fly back to the US for an IMSA race, like the 6 hour race at Watkins Glen for instance, with Jochen and Jacky Ickx driving the Moby Dick Turbo car. We used to go boating here in Rhode Island before we had to leave for Watkins Glen.



Charlie McCarthy and Jochen Mass before the start of the Daytona 24 hour race.

Just by being there on the scene, I got to know the factory people and the engineers; plus I have been a Porsche owner myself from the early 70's and love them. I've also owned a number of Ferraris, but just seem better suited to Porsches.

NMJ....Those must have been exciting days in the 70's. How did you first meet Jochen Mass?

CM.....I owned a boat company that made high performance offshore powerboats. It was called Banana Boat Co. One of my first customers was a top executive with Phillip Morris Tobacco Co. in New York. He was on a team that had the responsibility to find somewhere to put the millions of dollars of advertising funds that the company had; but could no longer use to buy TV ads. Remember that the government in the 70's stepped in and stopped all TV advertising for cigarettes. He asked me to come with him to Europe and see what they were doing over there with sponsorship of sports. He wanted to know if I would help them set up an offshore racing circuit or sponsorship of some type.

We went first to Wimbledon in England, where the company-owned brand Virginia Slims had a great deal to do with sponsorship for tennis stars like Chris Evert and Billie Jean King. Next we went to Paris to meet more people working on various sports sponsorships and then on to the French Grand Prix at Dijon. One of their products, Marlboro cigarettes, was the main sponsor for the McLaren Formula 1 team. At that time, McLaren was headed up by Teddy Mayer who had taken over after Bruce McLaren's death. Ron Dennis at that time was running a Formula 2 team called Project Four. A few years later on, Marlboro would be the power broker and engineer the merger of the McLaren team and the Project Four team, and Dennis and Critchon Brown ended up with a 50% share of the new company. Designer John Barnard came on for a share, too; he stayed for a while but eventually, even with all the success, he moved on to Ferrari a few years ago.

The drivers for McLaren at that time were James Hunt and Jochen Mass. As a guest of Phillip Morris, I had all the right credentials and was allowed access to all the parties and events going on at the time. There was a dinner the night before the Dijon race at the estate of Prince Napoleon and Jochen and I sat next to each other. Before the night was over we realized that we had this great mutual love of motor racing and boats. He owned a large schooner on the coast of Germany. We hit it right off and have been good friends ever since.

MNJ...Some of those names from the past, like James Hunt, really bring back strong memories. It must have been really exciting being around those people.

CM.....Formula 1 back then was a much more relaxed venue and a place where a great number of personalities hung out together. George Harrison of the Beatles was a regular on the circuit. It was a time when Mario Andretti was trying to put together a winning Formula 1 season with Colin Chapman and his Lotus team. Colin would throw his hat in the air from the pit wall each time they had a victory.

All the great names of that era were at the races and were very accessible to you at any time. Jackie Stewart, although retired, was very present. Bruce McLaren's widow and Jochen Rindt's widow were there all the time. Niki Lauda had undergone his horrific fiery crash; but he had returned and was racing with those terrible scars. A new boy had just been "discovered" and it was the talk of the McLaren group to try and get him signed up... Gilles Villeneuve. He did do one race

in a McLaren, but went over to Ferrari after that. Bernie Ecclestone was just another team owner with Braham.

From this initial connection, I became good friends with Paddy McNally who was working for Marlboro in Lausanne, Switzerland. I stayed at the Beau Rivage Hotel, just up the street from Phillip Morris headquarters where Paddy had his office. Paddy was given the opportunity by Bernie to leave Phillip Morris and take over all of the advertising and hospitality at all Formula 1 race sites back in the mid 80's. He controls all signage and hospitality in his exclusive Paddock Club. He is a very smart entrepreneur and taught me a lot. Sarah Ferguson, Fergie, was his girlfriend before she married Prince Andrew.

It was a great learning curve for me. European travel, customs and languages ... this was all a bit new for a boy from New England. My new friends took me under their wing and introduced me to everything from how major sponsorship deals really worked, to understanding fine wines, to wearing the latest "brands." Back before anyone in the US had ever heard of Hugo Boss clothing, I had a deep immersion into the style. Boss was a personal sponsor of Jochen; he carried the company name on his helmet and had great access to the supplies.

I was very fortunate to be able to be on the front line as these major corporations were just expanding into multi-nationals and exercising their power in new ways. They were thinking out of the box and I was sitting there learning everything I could.

I also remember how easy it was for those drivers to be killed in that era. Thinking back on it now, I remember it being very dangerous to be just standing in the pits as a spectator. During testing the drivers would come in for changes to the set up and then blast right out again. If you happened to be standing there, they would miss you by just enough...maybe an inch or so. I saw some very close calls.

The technology was just beginning to really stretch the imagination, from the 6 wheel Tyrrell's to the ground effects design of the Lotus, they were trying everything for that edge. Most of the teams were using the Cosworth Ford engine, so the differences had to come from chassis designs and driver talent. It really was a time when a great driver with a fair car could really shine.



Charlie McCarthy and Tom McCabe share the driving duties at Road America in Elkhart Lake, Wisconsin.



Jochen Mass co driving with Bobby Rahal, prepares to start the 12 hour Sebring race in Bruce Levin's 962 Porsche. The driver pair won the race that day. Charlie McCarthy stands by at the front of the car to lend friendly support.

MNJ....What do you remember of the Porsche cars of that time?

CM...Porsche was just discovering the awesome power and potential of the turbo. You had the basic 911 that they started with producing around 150 to 180 HP in basic form, and then in a few short years, you had the same basic engine producing 1,000HP on demand. It was a kick listening to the drivers trying to describe how to set the car up, so that with the turbo lag you had to have it pointing in just the right direction when everything came on ... because at that point you just held on and aimed it.

The cars were coming from the production ranks and the engineers were coming down from the highs of working on the 917's. This was a whole new ball game in a sense.

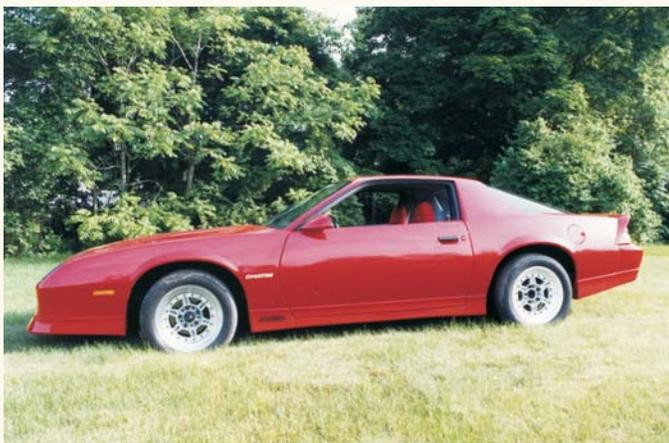
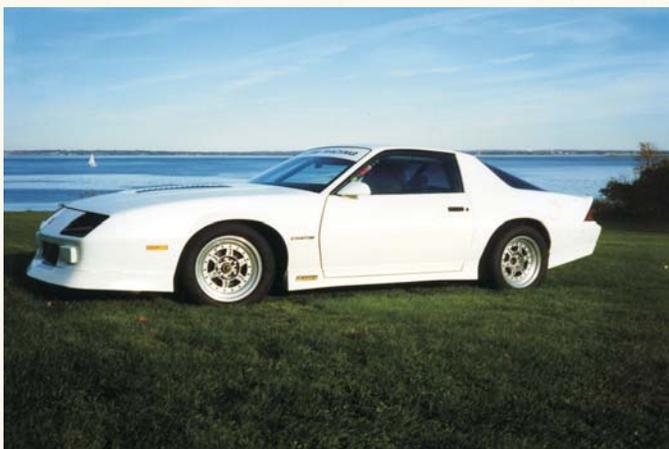
When they first started, the question became, how could they get reliability from that much horsepower? Well, the 911 turbo finished 2nd overall in the '74 Le Mans race and the stage was set for the rest of the 70's to just keep getting bigger and better.

By the '76 and '77 seasons, the factory was turning out fleets of customer 935's that were very reliable. The European drivers pretty much stayed with the factory specs and ran them; but not the Americans.

The factory cars always had the edge on the longer runs like the 24 hour and 12 hour races, but the Americans on the west coast just kept tinkering and changing until they came up with little short race rocket ships. What happened was the European drivers, even with the factory tech behind them, would be evenly matched with the Americans; but put a professional European driver in an American rocket ship for a short race and they were gone.

The wildest were, of course, "Moby Dick" and the little car they called the "Baby." It had a very small engine, under 2 liters, and produced almost 400HP -- crazy. There was nothing like the glow of the exhaust and the big tongue of flame in the middle of the night in a 24 hour race as you followed one of those turbo racers around. Out of this world.

I learned how to drive those beasts and to describe it now almost seems like a joke. As you were braking with your left



Here are a couple of the Chatim Camaros that have been converted for street use while being a full race car underneath.

foot, you would push the throttle down to the floor with your right foot, so when the lag finished, you would be ready to go. It was a delicate dance to say the least. And to get your competitive spirit going, all you needed to do is twist the turbo knob and grab an 200 extra horses. Everything was overdone. The mechanical fuel pumps were so powerful, they pushed more fuel into the engine on the downturn as they did on the upturn; hence those big beautiful flames shooting out the back of the cars in the middle of the night after coming off the banking at Daytona or slowing at the end of the Mulsanne straight.

That era eventually ended and the new race cars -- the 956/962 -- were developed. These are my favorite cars of all the Porsches. I have been talking to Walter Gebhard, the crew chief for Bruce Levin's team, about buying one of Bruce's old Texaco 962's. I would like to buy the one that Jochen won the LaJolla, California race in. I intend to use it in vintage events. We shall see what happens in the next few months.

I learned a lot being around those Porsche factory race people as they worked so very hard to really sweat the details. It is the lesson that I brought back and use directly with my own race teams, both boat and cars. There is nothing like preparation, check it over and over and over again and make sure it is right. Once the race starts, it is too late for any last minute thoughts.

MNJ.....Did you have a Porsche turbo back then?

CM.....Yes, I had one of the first 930's in the states for the street. It was a little rocket ship and I loved it. I was able, with my friends help and their factory connections, to get some

really neat cars. I had various 911's, 930's and 928's from Porsche and then from Mercedes. I was able to obtain a Formula 1 driver spec 6.9 sedan.

MNJ.....We noticed that you have a 7 car garage here. Is there anything interesting in there?

CM.....Well, I still have an '87 930 Porsche Turbo. That was the last year they made the car without any electronic chip at all; it is still a pure driver's car. Dave White Porsche Racing did the set up on that for me; it is lowered to European ride height and is a great car. I love to drive it on the limit with the tail sliding out and then catching it. If the tail comes around on you in that one, it means you lost it; you can't blame the computer.

My daily driver is a BMW M5 that has been tweaked a bit. The garage also has one of the original 5 prototypes that GM built when they working on the 1LE Camaros. We raced that car in FIREHAWK our first year, working under Bill Mitchell. And for any weather working vehicles, there is a GMC 1 ton pickup with a 454 and 4 wheel drive that I pull my boat and car trailers around with, and a Range Rover. For sentimental reasons, I have a Mercedes Benz Turbo Diesel, similar to the car that I raced in the Cannonball.

MNJ.....That's right. You were in the actual Cannonball race that they made the movie with Burt Reynolds out of. How did that come about?

CM.....The Cannonball is put on by Brock Yates. I first met Brock at the Formula 1 races in Europe and we became friends. As the date neared for the Cannonball he called and asked if I would like an invitation and I accepted, gratefully.

I originally planned on using my new 928 Porsche with a fuel cell; but a friend of mine heard about my invitation and offered to pay for all expenses and the use of his car if I would take him along. He had a brand new Mercedes Turbo Diesel. I accepted and we turned the car over to Bill Mitchell of Special Vehicles for prepping. With the addition of new Michelin XWX tires, a trunk converted into a fuel cell and radar detectors front and rear, we were ready to go. We had a range of over 600 miles between the regular tank and the fuel cell. I took another driver, too, as the car was larger than my Porsche. Our strategy was to take regular three hour shifts at the wheel. We would set the trip odometer to track each driver's progress. Over the next three hours, the driver would sleep and then three hours of navigating before driving again. We came in 6th out of 46 cars and did the trip in a little over 36 hours averaging 80MPH for the crossing from Connecticut to California. On one of my 3 hour driving shifts in the middle of the night in pouring rain, I clicked off 327 miles ... great memories of a once in a lifetime deal. I don't know if you could get away with that type of race today.

MNJ....We heard that you have a race track on the property. What is that all about?

CM.....I bought a bunch of Honda Odysseys with the full roll cage and have some of my friends over for hot laps. I set up a track that goes around my orchards on the back of the property and it takes just over a minute for a good hot lap, kind of like a mini Lime Rock. It has been pretty safe for all concerned with one exception. While attempting to show my wife how safe they are, I took her out on the beach in front of the house in one and got carried away, and rolled it with her in there with me.

MNJ.....What are your favorite memories from racing?



The Chatim Camaro leads the pack through the first turn at Sebring.

CM.....For me personally, it has to be driving during the transition times during the 24 hour races. I loved being in the car as the light would grow brighter in the East and you knew the night was finally over. Another would be The Mulsanne straight at 245 MPH in a 956. I am also very pleased watching my son develop into a very good race car driver in his own right. I marvel how he is able to hold his own out there. For others, I guess when Jochen finally won Le Mans with Mercedes in '89. He drove for so many years with Porsche in the 956's and just had the worst luck. He truly deserved it.

MNJ....Any regrets about anything you haven't done?

CM.....Oh yes, (laughing) I am the biggest ParisDakar fan in the whole world. If I didn't have the day-to-day responsibility to my employees and customers, I would love to do that month long race across Africa ... that would be my dream.

MNJ.....As you know from reading our past interviews with team owners, we all know that it costs a lot of money to race and we ask the owners how they made their money and how it works as far as paying for their racing. Last month we heard from Bob Akin about his company Hudson Wire, and their involvement in his racing program. Would you mind sharing with our readers your story?

CM.....My basic business is transportation. From that base I have businesses that cover all areas of that broad base. I own under various holding companies other companies that do trucking, contract carriers, truck leasing, equipment leasing, labor leasing, mobile maintenance and finance leasing.

My physical operations are based at the customer's plants, so I have no overhead expenses and we operate primarily east of the Mississippi River from New England to the Gulf Coast. Our finance operations are worldwide.

What I do in a nutshell is offer manufacturers the ability to have their own private truck fleet totally under their control; but I handle all the headaches. I own the equipment and employ the workers and cover the insurance and do the maintenance. They have these fleets at their beck and call and it is up to them to dispatch them in the most efficient manner. For this they sign long term contracts with me, and my company is their exclusive trucker.

Usually a new customer will give us a single plant to go in and show them what we can do; but soon after we are asked to take over the entire operations at all the plant sites. Some

customers have more than 25 plants that we service for them.

I first started doing this with only Fortune 100 companies or bigger; but recently have opened up parts of the program to smaller manufacturers. For instance if you have trucks and you like that, we can give you everything else -- drivers, maintenance, insurance, etc. You can pick whatever part of the program you like and we do everything else. We service such varied accounts as the US Navy under our mobile maintenance trailer program to a regional jewelry shipping association that combine all their members together to get the best shipping rates.

We also arrange transportation balances. This means a manufacturer that previously only shipped one way before, we schedule so that his inbound raw materials can be picked up and he gets a freight credit.

Our financial arm does leasing for equipment from rail cars, planes and helicopters. Our labor leasing companies work in many various industries, not just transportation. We try to give the customer a blank sheet of paper to design just what it is that they want us to do.

I use many of the business contacts that I have to help sponsor a small part of the racing program. I learned from the Marlboro people how to put the right kind of package together for a sponsor and then show them how they are getting their money's worth. Sometimes the sponsors name doesn't even show on the car; but they want to be there at the race site and meet other people who could possibly become their customers. It is bringing the right people together for the right reasons ... everyone benefits.

MNJ.....That is very interesting. Thank you for your time and I think we should be closing this up. Is there anything you would like to add.

CM.....Tell your readers to make sure they keep the racing fun. Sometimes it gets very tense; but in the end it has to be something you love and that is why you became involved in the first place. Stop and enjoy what a great sport it is and enjoy the wonderful people you meet here. Thank you for including me in this interview series on the teams. I enjoyed this and meeting you guys. Good luck with your publication.



McCarthy and McCabe in the Chatim Camaro lead the Firehawk Camaros down the hill at Road America