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Remember When: Joe Borandi

Joe Borandi was born in 1927 and for seventy years he had racing in his blood until his death in 1997. His widow Emma currently lives in Plum Boro, Pa. Emma gave all of her husband's racing memorabilia to nephew, James Gazdacko from Fort Pierce Florida, which he shared with me for this story.

At age twelve Joe started building engines in his father's garage in Penn Hills. Borandi was a race car owner and engine builder from 1949-1956. His cars won over a hundred races in those years. In 1953 the drivers and owners that competed against the number 270 gave the car the nickname "The Outlaw".

Buck Borandi, Joe's father, was a retired pilot and wanted his youngest son to be an engineer. Joe was about to enter Carnegie Tech when Uncle Sam called. He served on the aircraft carrier Enterprise as the chief engine mechanic. After the war Joe was made a partner in Borandi's Engine Works. He developed an interest in auto racing while in the service after watching the competition in California. His passion intensified once he started to go to the local tracks of Pennsylvania.

In 1949 he built his first car, a 1935 Chevy sedan. It was also the year he met and married his wife Emma. After running in several races, in late 1949, his dad Buck found out Joe was driving and made him stop. In 1950 he built a new car. Bobby Dietrich stopped in Borandi's for gas and saw two men working on a race car. Dietrich, a race fan, went over to look at the car.

After that chance meeting, and his father's pressure not to drive, Joe decided to put the young rookie, Bobby Dietrich in the 270. Bobby drove the car for a year and a half, breaking the hold Buddy O'Conner and Joe Mihalic had on winning. In late summer of 1952 Dietrich left for the

National Midget Circuit. Jerry Maier, a pilot friend of Buck Borandi, drove the 270 for the remainder of the year and added a couple of wins. While Maier was driving, Ed Fiola started hanging a round the garage talking to Joe. Jerry left to drive for someone else and Joe hired Fiola.

Joe built a new car for 1953 and the team broke all the records. Ed Fiola was 6 ft 6 inches tall; they had to modify a lot of things around to fit him in the car. Borandi was very safety conscious for his time. Joe lowered the seat shortened the steering shaft and added some access panels and a firewall front and rear.

The team tried out a new fuel mixture because in those days you could run most any kind of fuel. Joe was Italian, and as most Italians his grandfather produced his own wine, and for those who don't understand the procedure there is first wine second wine and moonshine. Joe acquired some of the moonshine; crew member, Stoner Fair added some airplane fuel and acetone to the mixture. When Fiola would come in after a race his face would be cherry red from the fumes.

In 1953 Joe's car with Ed Fiola behind the wheel, won twenty six feature events. The team was the NASCAR Pa. Point Champion and finished sixth in the National Point Standings. That year Joe's car won track championships at Latrobe, Claridge, Arden Downs, and Turnpike Speedways.

During the 1953 season there was a heated rivalry with the Linders and the Pallone Brothers both V2 car owners. Fiola was beating them badly. They claimed that Joe Borandi had to be cheating and they put up \$ 200 to tear down the engine in the 270. The project lasted until 4:30 in the morning and found the engine was found to be legal. The team received an invitation from Bill France Sr. to race at the Daytona Beach course in 1954. Mechanical problems spoiled the trip.

In 1954 Fiola's brother Jim talked him out of driving Borandi's car and convinced him to drive one of his. In 1954 Joe had three different drivers, Jim Coleman, Irv Leach, and Dick Bailey.

That scenario did not last long and Gus Linder started driving solely for Joe in 1955. With the heated rivalries in years past the Linder fans wondered why Gus signed on to run for Joe. Linder knew why Joe had great cars and he wanted to drive for him. Linder and Borandi had a great relationship that lasted until Joe decided to quit racing. During the 1955 season the team was leading in the points for most of the season. Linder had two serious roll overs, and destroyed both cars which cost them the championship. In 1956 Borandi was having a fair season when Linder flipped again and was injured. Looking back at the previous year's accidents and the latest accident, Borandi decided to retire as a car owner. He did not give up his passion for racing, he loved the sport. I spent many nights with Joe on the hillside of Motordrome 70 Speedway drinking coffee and discussing the "good old days" of the Pittsburgh Racing Association.

Occasionally Joe helped his father with car number 960 and a few of his friends with their cars, John Boltey with car number 59 that Gus Linder drove, Dave Lundy, and Billy Seifert with his Daytona car. One night at Heidelberg, Tom Colella was having problems with the #40. The car had a miss in the motor in the heat race. During intermission Joe took the car out on the track with out a helmet (no one had one to fit his head) and on the third lap the flag man noticed and black flagged him. It was enough time for Joe to diagnose the problem. He adjusted the timing and carburetor and Colella won the feature. Later in the 1980's Joe persuaded a local car dealer to sponsor a pace car which he drove at a few local tracks.

Joe always felt that the best part of racing was all the winning they did with "The Outlaw" and the toughest part: traveling all the bad roads back in the early fifties. His most memorable moment in racing was the NASCAR Championship and beating Bob James at his home track, Canfield Speedway. Several of the tracks set up match races and Fiola win every race set. He started last in every event and beat the best in racing.

Joe's reason for getting involved in racing was his love of cars and speed. His favorite competitors were Buddy O'Connor, Dick Linder, and Bob James. His drivers included Bobby Dietrich, Irv Leach, Jerry Maier, Wiley Lowe, Ed Fiola, Jim Coleman and Gus Linder. The pit crew

was Lloyd Richardson, Billy Lynch, Herb Tillman and Stoney Fair. Tracks where the team competed included Arden Downs, Blanket Hill, Butler, Canfield, Claridge, Debo Park, Ford City, Heidelberg, Langhorne, Latrobe, Mon-Duke, New Kensington, South Park, Spring Church, and Turnpike Speedway.

Several of Borandi's drivers are in the Pittsburgh Circle Track Club Hall of Fame. The list includes Ed Fiola, Dick Bailey, and Gus Linder. Perhaps it is time for Joe to join his drivers. The hard work and efforts of Joe Borandi and others like him will long be remembered by all of us in racing today. Many of the things that we take for granted now were not possible in the early years. The growing popularity of auto racing in the United States is a tribute to these men. They are the reason that auto racing is the number one spectator sport in this country today.