

My Memories of Bob Wilcox
By Michael Craddock

I met Bob the first time probably in late 1972 or early 1973 when we both lived in apartments in Langley Park, MD within eyesight of each other. I was trying to put together a 1969 Road Runner (in the parking lot because I didn't have a garage to work in), and Bob stopped by one day to see what I was doing, introduced himself, and gave me some advice. I was only 17 or 18 at the time and really didn't know that much about cars. To make a long story short, Bob ended up doing as much, if not more, of the work putting the car together than I did, including using his engine hoist to help me get the engine in and bolted up to the transmission, and test driving the car the first time. I'll never forget going south on I-95 past Calverton, approaching the Beltway, in excess of 120 mph at 2 or 3 AM, wondering if we were going to stop because the brakes weren't that good on the car. His philosophy was if you're going to drive the car hard, break it in hard. It was definitely a white-knuckle ride.

I originally didn't have any plans to race the car at a track, mainly because my only way to get it there was to drive it. I couldn't afford a tow vehicle and trailer, and didn't want to drive to a track and break something while racing and be stranded there. But, Bob got me interested in going to the track and even flat towed my car to MIR several times with his car. This is the same way he got his car, a 1970 Chevelle SS 454, there because he didn't have a trailer at the time either. Even before my car was finished, many weekends were spent with him and his car at MIR in Budds Creek, MD on Saturday night, and then all day Sunday at the track in Colonial Beach, VA. I guess you could say I became his pit crew. I remember after every run, I had to spray the radiator and trans cooler with water from a garden sprayer to cool it down. I still have many fond memories of those weekends spent at the two tracks with him, and at a crab house in Pope's Creek we'd go to a lot on Saturday nights.

Unfortunately, I never had the success that Bob had at the track. He was always quick to point out that you get more "bang for your buck" with a Chevy vs. a Mopar, which Bob was not very fond of. Despite that, he was willing to help me get my car ready for the track, tow me there, and give me a lot of great advice about the car in general and racing. It was obvious he loved cars, drag racing, and helping fellow racers who he considered friends (as long as they were not competing in his class!!!).

A few things stick out in my mind about our trips to the track. I remember one time Bob was hungry and wanted to eat before we got to the track, so he drove through the drive-through at a Jack-in-the-Box restaurant in Langley Park, flat towing his race car. They had one of the tightest drive-throughs of any of the restaurants around, but somehow he managed to get both cars through without hitting anything. But, it definitely drew a lot of attention. Speaking of food, I had never seen anyone as picky about his food as he was. Sometimes we'd eat inside a fast food restaurant, and he'd sit and pick anything off of the sandwich that he didn't like, especially any piece of lettuce that wasn't fresh or a piece of tomato that was too mushy. On several occasions by the time he was done picking, about all that was left was the meat and the bun!

From the photos I saw of Bob in the tribute to him on the web site, I don't know if I would have recognized him if I would have encountered him on the street. When I last saw Bob, he was still skinny as a beanpole, didn't have a beard and I don't think I ever saw him wear a baseball cap. He was balding on top, which I used to rib him about because he was only in his 20s at the time. I guess I should say that Bob was very lean (had very little body fat) instead of skinny, because he definitely was strong and was not a skinny weakling.

Just trying to remember some things that happened to Bob when I wasn't with him. I know one weekend I didn't go racing with him, his car caught on fire and pretty much burned to the ground. I'm pretty sure it was the 70 LS6 Chevelle SS I mentioned above, and it was a holiday weekend (I think Memorial Day 1974 or 1975). I'm pretty sure he was at the track in Colonial Beach and I recall him telling me that it took the volunteer fire dept. a long time to get there.

Another time he was going to the track by himself, he had to slam on his brakes and the tow bar popped off of the trailer hitch on the tow car and went into the trunk. I think it occurred on Rt. 301 or Rt. 5 and he rear-ended a little old lady, who had stopped dead at a yellow light at Route 5 and Allentown Road intersection, so he locked up his brakes, but could not avoid the collision. This was one of the times the '68 Chevelle was totaled. The '69 racecar was fine, but he couldn't drive it on the street (no tags).]

I'm sure you knew Bob was married to a woman named Aimee at one time and they had two boys together: Robby (Robert Lewis Jr.) and Stevie (Steven Robert). Notice that Bob got his name in both boys' names. I know they split up while they were both still living in Langley Park.

Anyway, those are some of the things that stick out in my mind from the times I spent with Bob. His love for cars, drag racing and helping people really stand out. Oh, also, he was very meticulous about anything he did, not just cars. But, this really helped me out when it came to working on my own car and other things. I would like to think that a little bit of Bob rubbed off on me, because I've had people tell me they've never seen anyone as meticulous (actually, they use the word "picky") when it comes to maintaining my car and my home.

I almost forgot the first time I went to the drag strip with Bob. It was around the first of March and the season had just started that year and we went to 75-80 in Monrovia, MD. It was a bitter cold day and I about froze my butt off!

Bob and I lost contact when one of us moved; I don't remember who moved first though, but it was shortly after he and Aimee split up. Then a year or so ago when I was on Tagged, I saw his name and a picture of a Chevelle at a drag strip. I knew it had to be the same Bob Wilcox, but I sent him a message anyway asking him if he had lived in Langley Park in the early 70s, had a 1970 Chevelle SS 454 that he used to race at MIR, etc., etc. He responded that it was and he remembered me. I called and talked to him twice and said that I'd drop by his shop and see him if I was ever up his way, but never got around to it. Now, I regret that I never did.