

Remembering the Life of Bob Wilcox

I'm not too sure where I should begin so I'm just going to do some highlights of my experiences with Mr. Bob Wilcox. I first met Bob at the 2001 show in North East, MD. Having just come off a very disappointing few weeks of not being able to make the trip to Nashville for Chevelle~abration (due to mechanical issues of the tow vehicle at the time), I went in search of finding others that had attended the event. I talked to quite a few folks that weekend about different things, looking for something to really get involved with. Many of those same people pointed me towards Bob as "The Man" when it came to Chevelles. After several conversations with him over the course of the weekend, I made the decision to join the MCC and jumped in with both feet. I was looking for something more than just taking my '70 out to shows and sitting in parking lots. I looked at this as the perfect opportunity to make something more out of owning a Chevelle.

Throughout the course of the following year, I regularly attended MCC meetings, coming from Southern New Jersey each time. Some thought I was nuts, but hey, I wanted to be involved. During each of my visits, with or without the car, I'd chat with Bob about my '70; how it was setup, what could be done to improve it, and talk about drag racing quite a bit. The time finally came where I was able to go to Chevelle~abration in June of 2002 with quite a few other MCC folks. The highlight of that event was the Thursday night drags. I had full intentions of putting the '70 on the track and beating the tar out of it, that's why I built it. Upon arrival at the track, I had pulled in next to Bob in the pits, noticing him unloading his roving parts department in the trunk. I remember commenting, "Is there anything you don't have in there?" His reply was, "When you drive them and race them like I do, you carry anything you might need on the road". I knew at that point, I had found someone else like me that wasn't just content sitting on a show field, but someone that liked to push his car to the limits. The final time trial I made that night I was paired against Bob. Little did I know at the time, that this would be the beginning of long-time friendly drag racing grudge match. That particular run, I ran an 8.18 to Bob's 8.86. I still have the time slip in my folder. That would be the one and only time I would beat him on the race track.

In the subsequent years attending Chevelle~abration, Bob's car became increasingly faster while I had mildly detuned mine with a rear gear change. A few months before every event in Tennessee, I would start ribbing Bob a little bit that I'd be gunning for him on the track. He always replied smiling "bring what you got; you're going to need it. You beat me once, that's not going to happen again!" He never would give up any of the secrets of what was in that engine in the '68. He just kept raising the bar higher and higher every year. Before our last match up in Tennessee in 2010, I had pulled the engine out of the '70 to put in a new torque converter and a whole new top end (heads, intake, and bigger headers) just to try and climb up to the bar which had been raised so high. I was able to inch closer but still not come close. Bob made drag racing more fun than I could have ever imagined it. There will be a huge void next time I set foot on Music City Raceway in Goodlettsville, TN.

Now time for a quick story. While I was restoring my '69 Malibu, I had been scavenging for a pair of exhaust manifolds, as the original ones were MIA. Naturally, I thought to ask Bob if he had any, which he did. After an MCC meeting in November of 2002, Bob suggested I follow him back to the house and he would hook me up with a set. What started out as picking up a part turned into a mini-adventure on the 30-minute ride to Bob's place. Bob had brought a recently acquired '70 Pontiac Bonneville 455 to the meeting; I had my '86 Cutlass. While heading West on MD-32, someone in a late model Camaro decided to start playing games with us. I paid no mind to it as I was following Bob in the dark, in an unfamiliar (at the time) area. Bob on the other hand wasn't going to have any of this. Before that Camaro had got so much of an inch past the Pontiac's front bumper, a black cloud of unburnt fuel came out of the tailpipes and he was off. As I previously stated, I was in unfamiliar territory and had no idea where I was going... sooooo, I put the hammer down too so I didn't lose sight of the Pontiac. Soon the speedometer needle was buried deep within the gauge cluster and all I had to go by was the tachometer. I can only guess as to how fast we were going, but the tach read 4200 RPMs. Upon arrival at Bob's, he had lifted the hood on the Grand Prix to check a few things and noticed the accelerator cable has hanging on by a thread...LITERALLY! All of the strands of the cable had snapped except one. "Good thing that cable held up back there on route 32!" was all he could say.

Now on to some final thoughts. Anytime when we would be on the road attending a long distance event, Bob was always there to look out for me just like my own father. Whether it was taking me to a parts store in Tennessee or helping fix a problem in the pits at the race track. What meant more to me than any of that was his reaching out to me when I lost my own father in February of 2008. I will miss our drag racing match-ups, cruising side by side on Coastal Highway in Ocean City, and getting thrill rides in the '68, but most of all our long talks about muscle cars, other experiences, and always being greeted with a smile and a firm handshake or one of those big old bear hugs Bob was famous for.

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