

JACK ATKINSON

FASTEST CAR IN THE CLUB

Jack was born in Eads, Colorado. His family moved to Missouri, Texas, Louisiana and back to Colorado. He graduated from Grand Junction High School in 1964. He attended Mesa College and was drafted into the U.S. Army in 1967 and served as an ammunition truck driver in Korea. He graduated from Western Colorado University in Gunnison in 1972 with a bachelor's degree in Accounting. From there, he moved to Great Bend, Kansas and obtained a CPA credential in 1975, after which he moved back to Denver for another job opportunity.

Jack has been married to his wife, Jean, for 52 years. They had three sons. Jack and Jean lived in Littleton for some time then moved to Fowler, Colorado in 2002 where they lived for 13 years. In 2015, they sold their house, bought a 27-foot Winnebago Vista Class A motorhome, and started traveling with a 2007 FJ Toyota FJ Cruiser hooked on the back. Since then they bought a 40-foot Winnebago and now pull a Jeep behind. The RV is their home on wheels.

Currently, they are parked in Quartzsite, Arizona for the winter. I asked Jack (kiddingly) if he was inspired by Willie Nelson's *On the Road Again*. He said he and Jean had always been travelers and simply decided to make that lifestyle permanent. BTW: Quartzsite isn't that far from the Lake Havasu area where RMOC members Bob Petri and Don Neumann now reside.

Jack's first car was a 1952 Chevrolet 4-door sedan that he picked up in his junior year of high school. His next car was an Oldsmobile – a 1957, model 98 4-door hardtop, painted Rose Mist Metallic. The '57's transmission blew while Jack was cruising (not drag racing) through Las Vegas. He scrapped the car and bought a 1969 Mercury Montivo, then a 1968 Oldsmobile 98.

In 1969, Jean's mother ordered an Azure Blue 1970 Cutlass convertible to celebrate her 25th wedding anniversary. Jack purchased that car after his mother-in-law passed. It has been in the family for over *fifty* years. He still owns that Cutlass and it is still in great shape (see pictures).

Jack is a self-taught mechanic and could do most of the work on his cars himself. In the process of buying parts for the '70, he learned about the RMOC. He attended a meeting, met Bob Petri, Eric Pope and others, and joined the club in 1984-85.

Jack's racing career started with a 1979 Cutlass. This car came with a 403 CID engine and ran a 20-second quarter mile in stock configuration. Eric Pope recommended he replace the 403 with a 455 CID engine. He did that, along with some exhaust and rear end enhancements, and was able to knock *five* seconds off his quarter mile time to 15 seconds. And that was at high altitude Bandimere Speedway. At normal elevations, the car would have been in the 13-14 second range. He raced this car for a couple years during the late 1980s.

He later purchased another 1970 Cutlass from a local owner in Golden – Matador Red. (Unfortunately, we were not able to find a picture). This one was equipped with a 455 CID engine, TH-400 transmission and 4:10 gears. He was able to run in the 15 second range as equipped. He then added headers, a racing cam, beefed up pistons and clocked in the 13-second range at Bandimere. This would equate to a 12-second or better range at normal (lower altitude) racetracks.

This beautiful Cutlass met a tragic end. Jack was racing at Bandimere. When the light turned green, he took off. At maximum speed (about 115 MPH), he hit some debris on the track which broke the rear suspension and caused the car to veer right and smack into the safety wall. The car was demolished but Jack walked away with only a broken hand and some bruises.

Jack reused the engine, transmission and rear end from the red '70 in a 1984 Cutlass that he purchased for \$100 from a newspaper advertisement. It didn't run, but Jack intended to transform it into a racer. He installed a fiberglass front end and a 12-point roll cage kit, aluminum flooring, fiberglass doors and a 4-inch performance muffler system (see picture). The '84 generated over 900 (rear wheel) horsepower and ran the sea level equivalent of an 8.9-second/150 MPH quarter mile at Bandimere. To my knowledge, this makes Jack's '84 the fastest car in the RMOC ... ever.

Jack received numerous car awards, including a trophy from Bandimere Speedway for having the most wins while racing with the Buick-Oldsmobile-Pontiac team at Club Clash events. He received the Governor's Cup/Best of Show award at a car show in Burlington, Colorado and received this award directly from the hands of Governor Roy Romer. He accumulated over twenty car trophies in total.

Jack was RMOC's representative on the Old Car Council for many years and served as RMOC Treasurer for a few years as well. Jack and Jean have maintained their affiliation with RMOC for the same reasons most give: friends and fun ... always.

As a postscript, as I noted in my book, *Racing with the Wind*, I owe a debt of gratitude to Jack. Back in 1994, he spotted my newly purchased 1967 Cutlass Supreme at a 7-11 store near where we both lived at the time. He was very complimentary about the car and encouraged me to join RMOC, which I did.

Thank you Jack!





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