
The Mild Mannered Joe Kolek Terry Brim

What I love most about being the editor of the Chapter news letter is doing the interviews for the Vette Gazette's Feature Article....Why is that one might ask? Because it's always a surprise!

Such was the case with this issue's Feature Article. I thought I was going to interview...well, a mild mannered Clark Kent so to speak. Instead, what I discovered was anything but....the mild mannered Joe Kolek. Read on and you will discover many things about Joe you didn't know!

Joe grew up, like many of us, in a working class family about 30 miles northeast of Pittsburgh. His father was a welder in the steel mills. In his high school years, Joe says cars were important, but then again, not many kids had a car. Joe's first car was a 48" Desoto 2 door coupe which belonged to his dad, but like many of us, it soon became "his" car.

Back then, Joe didn't know much about cars but the

old Desoto was a good car to learn on. The first thing Joe did was take all the chrome off the car, fill in the holes and then had a buddy paint

I thought I was going to interview...well, a mild mannered Clark Kent so to speak. Instead what I discovered was anything but....meet mild mannered Joe Kolek..

a mole hair interior). Joe says his dad welded another pipe under the car to make it look like it had duels! To spruce up the interior, Joe bought tuck & roll door panels and seat cover from J.C. Whitney. The rest of the mole hair interior Joe says he dyed black.....sweet!

During this time, Joe and some of his buddies were also interested in airplanes so, after graduating from high school, Joe applied to the Air Force Academy. At the time, although Joe meet all of the qualifications, his family was not "politically connected" so Joe was offered the "secondary" slot and was asked if he wanted to go to the Naval Academy prep school first. (At that time, the Air Force Academy did not have a prep school).

the car a silver blue color. (I should note here that the original color of the car was Green with

Lacking family finances to do otherwise, Joe signed up as an Airman 3rd class in the Air Force reserve and enrolled in the prep school for 6 months. After graduation from the prep school, he opted to remain in the Air Force and did his basic training at Lackland AFB, Texas.

During this time, Joe has many stories about the ole Desoto...engines blowing up, black dye coming off the Desoto's interior onto his buddies uniforms as they sat in the back seat sleeping while driving down to Lackland...Eventually however, Joe was accepted into the Air Force Academy, so the Desoto had to go. Back then you couldn't own a car until your senior year and even then you were limited as to the amount of debt you could incur when you bought a car. As Joe recalls, it was around \$3200. Although Joe knew some guys that had Corvette's and would have loved to have had one, back in 1965, \$3200 wasn't enough money to buy a new Corvette. It was enough money however to buy a new GTO convertible with a 4 speed, 3 duces, a tach, and a radio. Sooo, that's

Continued on page 2

The Mild Mannered Joe Kolek (con't)

Terry Brim

Continued from page 1

exactly what he did. According to Joe, his GTO could smoke the small block vette's between the traffic lights anyway! Turns out the Corvette Big Blocks didn't come out until half way through the 65' production year. Once they did however, that was the end of smokin the Vettes.

Having smoked all those small block vette's, Joe got the bug for drag racing. Around 1967, he traded his motorcycle (he still had his GTO) to a guy for a 39' chevy drag car with a Pontiac 347 under the hood. Unfortunately, the 39' chevy didn't make much of a drag car, so Joe bought a 56' chevy and he and a buddy proceeded to stuff the Pontiac 347 in the 56' and made a street drivable drag racer out o fit.

In 1968, as part of the newly formed Air Force Special Operations, Joe was assigned to fly UH-1 helo's to ferry parts to minute-man missile cylos in Grand Forks, Mn. As it turns out, Joe needed flying time in the UH-1's before being assigned to the front

Sooo, our mild mannered Joe rolls into Grad Forks driving his GTO towing his 56' street/drag racer on a flat bed trailer.

Lines in Vietnam. Sooo, our mild mannered Clark Kent rolls into Grand Forks driving his GTO towing his 56' street/drag racer on a flat bed trailer.

Upon seeing that Joe was sort of a "car guy", one of the crew chiefs asked him if he was interested in buying a Corvette? The vette in question turned out to be a wrecked 66' 425 coupe that had been customized with flared fenders, hood etc. The car was damaged from the mid-front fenders forward, so after purchasing the car, Joe proceeded to find a company in California that made a one piece front end. Now the self learning/experimentations started with regards to fiber glass work.

Joe sold the 66' when he got his orders to go to Vietnam, but the Vette bug was set.

When Joe returned to the states in 71', the first thing he did was start looking for a Corvette.

After looking at several cars around the Atlanta area, he found a 67' purple metal fleck 390 hp coupe with A/C in Austin, Texas. Where his next assignment was flying

President Johnston's helo!!

Joe says he remembers taking a perfectly good 390 hp engine and replacing it with a 454 including a L88 cam which was almost undrivable on the street. It was also about this time that Joe got back into drag racing with the 67'

Turns out however the 454 was not very good for drag racing, so Joe and a buddy of his decided to build an engine specifically for the strip. They started with a 302 of all things and built it up from there. Even though it was a small block, Joe says he usually ran on the 9's which was pretty good time back in the early 70's. The one problem Joe did have however was that even though he never blew the engine, he was always destroying transmissions and rear ends with the car.

For awhile, Joe ran the 302 in an Opal, he figured since an Opal was a lighter car, maybe he wouldn't go through so many transmissions and read ends...I never did ask him if that was really the case!

When Joe go his orders to

Continued on page 3

The Mild Mannered Joe Kolek (con't)

Terry Brim

Continued from page 2

PCS to Washington State, he decided to get out of the racing business, but his heart was still into Vette's. His wife's brother and sister lived in Selma Alabama and used to

send Joe newspapers. One day as Joe was looking through the Selma newspaper, he spotted a 63' Corvette for sale. After going back to Alabama and finding a Z28 under the hood with hooker side pipes, the temptation was just to much. He bought the 63' and that started a long string for Joe of buying and selling Corvette's.

For Joe, the buying and selling of Corvette's went on for a number for years. He would buy any vette that looked interesting, fix it up drive it for a while, spot another interesting vette and the cycle would start over again. This went on until Joe retired from the Air Force. Once retired and his location became a little more permanent, he began buying Corvette's without always selling the one he had.

Currently, Joe owns four vettes. A Black/Red FI 59', a Silver Blue/Blue FI 59', a Red/Red FI 61' (I'm seeing a pattern here), and a beautiful Blue/ Black 435 67' coupe.

After going back to Alabama and finding a Z28 under the hood with hooker side pipes, the temptation was just to much. Joe bought the 63' and that started a long string for Joe of buying and selling Corvette's



If anyone is the market for an original C1 Fuelie, Joe is looking to sell his Red/Red 61'.



Continued on page 4

The Mild Mannered Joe Kolek (con't) Terry Brim

