



Fueling Their Passion for Speed

Splitting their time practicing law and practicing burnouts.

By Chris Marshall, BA '09

Photo by David Tejada

A bucket list typically consists of once-in-a-lifetime experiences.

But once **Dave Byassee, BA '67** and **JD '75**, got his first taste of racing, he knew the thrill would bring him back many times over.

The Denver-based attorney has served as a paratrooper in the Marines and pilot in Vietnam, sat near Jay Leno at the Kentucky Derby, and vacationed everywhere from Cabo to Monaco, but nothing quite compares to the thrill of sitting in the driver's seat of a racecar.

One driving experience led to another, and before Byassee knew it, he was hauling his own car to all areas of the country to compete in races.

Lawyer and racecar driver may seem like an unlikely combination, but he's not the only Ichabod who splits time practicing law and practicing burnouts. Three Washburn University School of Law alumni who know what it's like to race from the courtroom to the office and from the start line to the finish line recently shared what fuels their passion for racing.

Experience of a lifetime

The latest trip was a mid-July drive to Laguna Seca Raceway in Salinas, Calif. While on the road with his brother/crew chief and a trailer hauling his Porsche Boxster, Byassee took a brief break from his navigational duties to reflect on how it all began.

"About 20 years ago, I was at a law firm that was Chicago-based," Byassee said. "One of the partners said, 'Hey, I want you to go with us to take a client to a Richard Petty Driving Experience in Las Vegas.' So, I went, and that got the blood flowing, and that's why I am where I am today."

Although Byassee said the Petty experience mostly consisted of beginner-level instruction, it served as a gateway for more classes on various forms of racing. Now, Byassee's the one doing the instructing.

In addition to serving as the counsel for Jackson Kelly PLLC in Denver, Colo., Byassee said he races eight or nine times a year and is on the track nearly every weekend teaching performance driving for the Porsche Club of America.

Byassee's wife, Anne Smith Myers, has qualified for her racing license and retired from the practice of law in 2014, allowing her to frequently join him on his cross-country adventures. For Byassee's California trip, she was flying in later in the weekend to spend time in Monterey and visit wine country.

It's just the latest in a long list of adventures the couple has enjoyed together. High-profile races like the 24 Hours of Le Mans and the Monte Carlo Grand Prix have already been checked off the list. The next race in their sights is the Indy 500.

Their do-as-we-please attitude led to a fitting name for the team Byassee competes on.

"We've got a team of guys — they're not as old as I am," he said. "But they're all doing things on their bucket lists, and so we named the racing team Bucket List Racing, because racing was on all the bucket lists at one time."

Byassee said he plans to join his wife in retirement after this year, 26 years after retiring from the military to practice law. He said his racing days may soon be over too, but there are other things to look forward to on the horizon.

"I'm 72 years old, so I'm not gonna do this forever," Byassee said. "I don't know what will happen then. I'll probably spend more time with my five grandkids."

Changing gears

Ever since she was a teenager, **Sabrina Standifer, '99**, knew she wanted to race cars. The decision to become a lawyer took a little more time.

The Wichita resident used to sneak away from home to race at the local drag strip and compete in street competitions. Considering the illegal nature of the street races, and the fact that her parents didn't find out until she turned 21, Standifer never could have imagined she would one day work as an attorney in the same city.

"That was the thing to do back then," she said. "We'd go down Douglas and South Seneca on Friday and Saturday nights. There were certain streets where the races took place because there wasn't any traffic. You'd go down with your car, make arrangements, and then go race."

Standifer first made a living in computer training before switching things up and serving two terms as a state representative. It wasn't until she sat on a panel with Washburn Law professor Charlene L. Smith that Standifer decided to try her hand at law school. She was editor in chief of the *Washburn Law Journal* and graduated *magna cum laude*.

"I obviously could've run for re-election again," she said. "I usually do things backward."



Photo submitted

No matter what professional endeavor Standifer was pursuing, racing was always in the back of her mind. After graduating, her passion for the sport swelled. She and her husband, Duane Hawkes, flew to Florida to have a dragster built that Standifer still races today.

“It’s a completely different kind of racing than what I’d done before,” she said. “You have to do the burnout completely different for a dragster as opposed to a door car, and dragsters leave the starting line much harder. It’s like being shot out of a cannon.”

Her best time to date is 7.97 seconds at 175 mph in the quarter-mile.

Standifer and her husband are currently building a second, street-legal racecar. The couple has enjoyed spending their marriage tinkering with the cars and traveling the country for races. The engines in both cars are currently under repair, but Standifer said she hopes to be racing again toward the end of the season. Her race experience includes trips to Dallas, Texas, Tulsa, Okla., Oklahoma City, Okla., Heartland Park in Topeka, Great Bend, Kan., and, of course, the track in Wichita.

Even when she’s on the road, Standifer has found a way to keep up with her work at Morris Laing, where she practices in real estate, business, and employment.

“My workload has gotten to the point where I still need to work even at the races,” she said. “So we bought a motor home a few years ago that I can go in and work between races. It’s almost as if I’m in the office. The only hard part is being on a phone call with all the cars running outside.”

Although Standifer’s work as a legal professional is a far cry from her dodgy street racing experiences, she recognizes there are similar mindsets between her two passions.

“You have to focus on your own race,” she said. “You can’t worry about what the other person’s doing in the other lane. One of the biggest keys to winning is consistency. A lot of it is showing up, being prepared, and doing the work ahead of time. So those things do cross over.”

A great escape

Although he’s technically retired from racing, **Ed Nichols, BBA ’64** and **JD ’71**, still makes regular trips outside of town to take laps in his Porsche.

“I just go out there and play now,” he said of his visits to the High Plains Raceway, located about an hour away from his

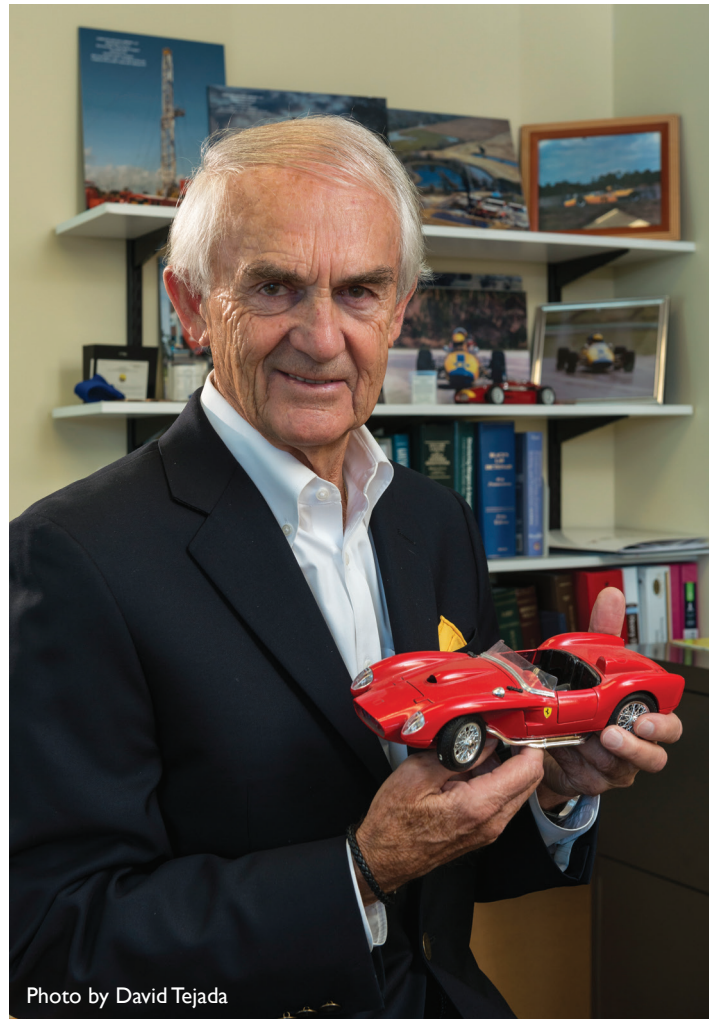


Photo by David Tejada



Photo submitted

Denver, Colo., home. “There’s a lot of elevation changes. It’s a great sports car track.”

While he may race for fun now, that wasn’t always the case during his 20+ year competitive career. Nichols said he had 14 cars at one point, including a Brabham BT21, an Alfa LDS Formula One car, Formula Libre and Formula B cars, and his favorite, a Lotus Elan.

“I didn’t race to race, I raced to win,” Nichols said. “When you get on the track, you forget about everything else. Practicing law can get pretty intense, so one of the great things about racing is there’s so much focus on what your car can do, I’ve found it’s a great escape.”

His racing career started in Topeka shortly after he finished law school. But as he began taking the sport more seriously, and developed a desire to ski, Nichols and his late wife, **Karen Nichols, BA ’80 and JD ’83**, made the move to Colorado.

“We went there, and I got more into racing and bought a car,” he said. “Then Karen decided she wanted to race, so that cost me again. One thing led to another, and at one point, we had a team with three mechanics and a rig to haul four cars.”

The couple traveled together often as Nichols competed in a national campaign with vintage cars, highlighted by trips to Florida and the Road America course in Wisconsin. But as

much as he’s raced, Nichols has put in many more miles for his legal career. He served as CEO of Three Forks, Inc. and Gulfstar Energy, Inc. and was the counsel for several public and private companies in the U.S., Europe and the Far East. Today, he works as counsel for several financial transaction companies.

The younger of the couple’s two sons, **John Nichols, JD candidate ’17**, currently attends Washburn Law. Ed makes regular visits back to campus and attends Washburn football games when his schedule allows it.

At this point, John is the only family member who doesn’t race, but if he spends enough time listening to his father describe the rush it provides, he might someday be tempted.

“It’s like temporarily taking a vacation,” Ed said. “There’s a relationship there between law and racing. It’s just a fantastic release. They’re both intense, but racing’s a different kind of intense.”

Museum home to historic hardware

The NASCAR and NHRA halls of fame are both filled wall to wall with artifacts and memorabilia documenting their respective histories.

One thing you won’t find in either venue is the organization’s first trophy. That’s because they’re both located in Chapman at the Kansas Auto Racing Museum.

Doug Thompson, ’78, an Abilene native who founded the museum, has fielded several requests to give the trophies up, but the answer is always no.

“I always say I won’t loan it out, because I’d never get it back,” Thompson said. “They’d want to keep it, and being a lawyer, I know my chances of winning a lawsuit against the NASCAR Museum in Charlotte are slim.”

Thompson said his museum is the rightful place for both trophies, not just because the winners gave him the awards, but because they’re both Kansans.

“A lot of people don’t realize the incredible racing background and history Kansas has,” said Thompson, who has a racing history of his own that dates back to the 1960s, before he even had a license to drive.

Throughout his time at Washburn Law, Thompson said he’d race every night of the weekend and even some weeknights as a form of supplemental income.

Now, he’s found a way to satisfy both his enjoyment for racing and practicing law, splitting his time between running the museum and working as a municipal judge



Photo submitted

in Abilene, Kan., and county counselor for Dickinson County.

“It’s because of Washburn Law that a lot of these things happened,” Thompson said.