

Joe Evans and Team #550

Joe Evans was born in the Anderson, SC area (many, many, years ago). He attended his first races at the Anderson Speedway (when it was still dirt) and at the Greenville-Pickens Speedway (also when it was still dirt). When Joe finished school, he joined the Air Force. Later, he took a break from the Air Force, but rejoined and continued until his retirement in 1985.

While in the Air Force, Joe (and his wife) built his first car - a 1927 Ford Model "T". He raced it in the mid-sixties at the Manzanita Speedway near Phoenix, AZ. Check out Joe's hat in the left picture. After the Air Force transferred him to George Air Force Base in California, he and his wife towed back to Manzanita for several months to race the little Ford.



Joe later sold the Model "T" in California and built his first 1957 Chevy. He towed it with a 1950's Chevy pickup whose motor Joe had beefed up to pull the big Chevy. Notice the 550 numbers on this first car. They were hand lettered by Mrs. Evans. (Remember that these were the days before custom graphics!) Joe raced the original #550 at the Orange Show Speedway near San Bernardino, California.



The original #550 car was raced in primer paint, but was later painted in the now familiar blue with white lettering.



The current #550 Chevy was built in 1969 and raced (with an inline six) in 1970 as a NASCAR Late Model Sportsman at the Orange Show Speedway. It too was painted dark blue and trimmed and lettered in white. The picture below shows the current #550 after it had been painted and lettered the first time. The lettering on the car (as it is run today) has not changed much since this 1970 picture was taken.



While in California, Joe was allowed to run the #550 with a group of “modifieds” visiting the local track. The only change he had to make to his car was to remove the front fenders! Whow! Removing the fenders must have really lightened the car! But he got to run with the modifieds.



When Joe was assigned to Viet Nam, he put the #550 into storage in California. Upon returning from Viet Nam, Joe was assigned to Georgia. He left the car stored in California until he retired in 1985. Between 1978 and 1985, Joe tried his hand at racing wedge cars on dirt. The wedge car shown below was raced at Myrtle Beach Speedway (SC) and several other South Carolina tracks such as Lakeside Speedway and the I-95 Speedway.



After Joe retired from the Air Force in 1985, he totaled the wedge car at Lancaster Speedway (in SC), rebuilt it, and raced it later on at Hartwell Speedway near Hartwell, GA.

Joe eventually went back to California and brought the #550 1957 Chevy back to Anderson, SC where he raced it a few times against the cars running in Anderson Speedway's "B" Limited Class. Joe's six cylinder ran well, but had a hard time competing with the stronger V-8 cars in that class.

Around 1988, a group out of the Gastonia, NC area started restoring and showing old racecars. They called themselves the Carolina Vintage Stock Car Racing Association. In 1994, Joe gave up racing his beloved #550 on a regular basis and started turning laps as a "vintage" racer with the Carolina club. In 1996, the NVRA was formed and Joe became one of the original members. In later years, Joe also joined the Virginia Old Timers and the STARS group out of the Northeast. He has raced the #550 all over the Southeast from Virginia to Florida. He and his wife towed the #550 to Daytona Beach several years ago and participated in the annual beach run. When interviewing the Evans about their most special moments with the old car, they both agreed that their cruise up the Daytona Beach was one of their most special moments. (The car has a passenger seat that allowed Mrs. Evans to also ride along.)



Joe and his #550 Chevy have been winners for many years, as shown by the decals below his passenger-side window.



When talking or writing about Joe Evans' racing career, one must also talk about his wife and daughter who have seen it all with him behind the wheel of his racecars. They helped build and maintain the #550 cars over the years. When daughter Lisha was in middle school and in high school, she helped work on the car, both at home and at the track. She was beauty queen at one of the California tracks.



I've known the Evan family for almost 20 years and have yet to learn Mrs. Evans' real name. The only name I have ever heard her called is "Mike". Mike and Joe are great representatives of our sport. Wherever they go, they are more than happy to hand out pictures of their car and to sign autographs.



Over the years, Joe and Mike have been more than generous with their time and money in support of vintage racing. They have shown the #550 for numerous charity events, or at promotional events for the club. Once such event was a company party held in 2005 at a major hotel in downtown Greenville, SC. Buddy Baker was guest speaker for the event, but he spent a lot of time in the parking lot visiting with the Evans team and with Steve Penson, who was also there representing the NVRA. The picture below shows Buddy Baker with Joe and Mike beside the #550.



Thanks to Joe and Mike Evans for being great representatives of both the NVRA, and vintage racing in general. May they turn many more laps with the #550 Chevy.