Story by Jim Hill

Cuddy, Pennsylvania’s Mike Kosky has been addicted to alcohol for nearly 50 years, but it’s OK with his wife Janet. Fortunately, it should be noted that Kosky’s addiction is not through excessive consumption, but the fuel of choice for a long line of very fast, exceptionally competitive Top Alcohol Dragsters.

Kosky’s career as a drag racer spans six decades, and his participation has always been as a Sportsman racer, a “weekend warrior” who worked Monday through Friday, prepared his race cars nights, and headed for the track weekends. Although Kosky is now retired from the daily eight-to-five grind, he once spent his days managing a fleet of municipal vehicles that included street sweepers, snow plows and dump trucks. After-hours were occupied building and maintaining his lengthy line of race cars.

Kosky’s first race car was built with his late brother, Butch. This was an eclectic combination of a ’32 Desoto sedan powered by a Studebaker V-8 engine. It was considerably less than a winner, but served the brothers as a hands-on training vehicle for their expanded drag racing ambitions. Wanting to go faster, the Kosky brothers next built a homemade, short wheelbase dragster. That car was powered by an Olds V-8 they acquitted after scrounging a junkyard for an Olds engine and a four-speed Hydramatic transmission. This first effort’s 130 mph performance was equally unremarkable, but it did prove its worth as a launch pad for better, faster race cars to come.

In the mid-60’s Mike and Butch built an A/Altered powered by one of the then-new big-block Chevys. The itch to go even faster remained however, and the altered was replaced with a front-engine, Kellison chassied A/Dragster. The brothers again chose to run an injected big-block Chevy. Kellison was one of the first to offer a complete, ready to outfit, chromemoly tube, three-point cage dragster chassis with a shorty style, molded fiberglass body.

Mike Kosky followed that up with a Logghe chassis dragster, with a blown big-block Chevy for power. At the races Kosky had by-chance made the acquaintance of legendary racer Connie Kalitta. “The Bounty Hunter” referred him to Gene Logghe at Logghe Stamping Company, in Mt. Clemens, MI. His Logghe car was fabricated and welded on Logghe’s chassis jig by Chuck Kurzawa, who had his own career as driver for The Ramchargers and later, the Bob’s Drag Chutes Top Fuel cars.

Kosky’s Logghe car was also fitted with a handmade aluminum body created by Logghe’s favorite tinsmith, Al Bergler. The Logghe car ran in Top Gas, with solid performances and success against name teams such as Frakes & Funk, Bill Mullins, Motes & Williams, Peters & Frank’s “Freight Train” and even Shirley Muldowney, before she moved into nitro Funny Cars.

Kosky was an early proponent of minimizing weight and of the advantages of an aluminum alloy engine block and heads, especially for a supercharged engine. That led Kosky to obtain and modify an original 1969 Chevrolet C.O.P.O ZL-1 aluminum block for supercharged racing use. The factory Chevy block came with cast iron, pressed-in cylinder liners, but was nearly 100 pounds lighter than a cast iron Chevy 427 block. Being aluminum, it could also be repaired via heliarc welding, a cost effective advantage for a budget racer.

The big-block Chevy was a wonderful engine, but it also had a few shortcomings. One of Kosky’s discoveries involved the problem of incompatibility between the iron cylinder liners and the cast aluminum cylinder block. The expansion rates of the two metals are notably different. In a supercharged configuration head gaskets and sealing were compromised. Through trial and error Kosky found a way to fix the problem.

Kosky not only improved the factory alloy blocks, his ingenuity led Mike to design and produce his own variation of the ZL-1 Chevy block. Kosky’s hybrid design proved plenty tough for Pro Comp and later Top Alcohol Dragster (TAD) competition as well as tractor pulling and drag boat applications.

Working a weekly day job, maintaining a competitive race car, developing and manufacturing a capable aluminum block left Kosky’s plate grossly overloaded, yet he somehow managed to successfully multi-task all these activities.

When NHRA abandoned Top Gas Eliminator in 1971 Kosky moved into Comp Eliminator, running an injected big-block Chevy. When NHRA created Pro Comp Eliminator as an alternative to Top Gas, Kosky and many other racers were intrigued by its possibilities.

The new Pro Comp category was a somewhat confusing mixture of blown, alcohol dragsters, Funny Cars and even supercharged altereds as well as injected, nitro burning A/Fuel Dragsters, all running against each other heads-up. Weight and engine displacement rules were created to maintain competitive parity among the entries, and car counts jumped as the racers embraced the new idea. Pro Comp has since evolved into today’s Top Alcohol Dragster and Top Alcohol Funny Car Eliminators, and the overall brackets have been simplified.

Kosky’s first Pro Comp car was a rear-engine Stebbins chassis dragster with a blown, alky-fed big-block Chevy, planetary transmission and slipper clutch. Since then Kosky’s baseline has remained close to that same combination, although with competitive updates worked in over the years. After he sold the Stebbins car Kosky began building his own cars using all he learned during decades of racing both front and rear-engine dragsters. His current TAD entry is the latest in a now lengthy line of Kosky-built cars.

Like any fast racer, Kosky has experienced a few close-calls while running 250+ mph, but it took a 2007 crash to seriously injure the veteran driver. No, Kosky’s mishap did not occur at 250 mph, but while riding his home lawn mower. Kosky bounced back quickly from the mishap. However, many of Kosky’s racer friends suggested he build a tube steel roll cage around the offending mower!

Interestingly, Mike Kosky is the only NHRA Top Alcohol drag racer to have won major NHRA events using three different engines! His big-block Chevy earned him his first win followed by an Alan Johnson big-block, an aluminum big-block Oldsmobile DRCE and finally his current Brad Anderson alloy hemi.

Mike Kosky and his wife Janet have been married 46 years. As she has from the beginning, Janet remains a vital part of their racing effort.

Kosky’s current TAD is powered by a Brad Anderson aluminum hemi. The switch from trusty Chevy power came reluctantly for Mike. However, the demands of currently competitive TAD racing were far too much for the now 50 year old Chevrolet Mark IV engine design.

Mike Kosky’s many years of racing winning, utilizing his own talents and a carefully managed, out-of-pocket racing budget rank him among the most successful sportsman racers of all time.

**The East Coast Drag Times Hall of Fame salutes 2015 inductee Mike Kosky.**