

Rick Hendrick Building Engine for His Corvette Z06

WIXOM, Mich. – One of the world's foremost experts in NASCAR Sprint Cup Series racing, Rick Hendrick, is building his own 7.0L 505-horsepower LS7 engine that will go into his Corvette Z06 Carbon Edition.

The Corvette Engine Build Experience is the world's most hands-on super car program. Customers who order a Corvette Z06 or ZR1 can choose an option allowing them to assemble their cars' LS7 or LS9 engine at General Motors' Performance Build Center (PBC) in Wixom, Mich. "As a Chevy enthusiast and lifelong gearhead, having the chance to experience GM's hand-build engine assembly is a real privilege," said Hendrick, owner of Hendrick Motorsports.

"I want to thank everyone at the Performance Build Center for this opportunity. It's incredible to spend time with the people here and see first-

'Having the Chance to Experience GM's Hand-Build Engine Assembly Is a Real Privilege' – Rick Hendrick

hand these processes that produce some of the best engines in the world."

Even with the hands-on experience, the engines are covered by Chevrolet's five-year, 100,000-mile transferable powertrain warranty.

The Engine Build Experience is a \$5,800 option when a customer purchases a Corvette Z06 or ZR1. The PBC option includes lodging, local transportation and a concierge, who contacts the customer to help coordinate arrangements, including the scheduling of the build and the customer's activities at the build center. Travel to and from Detroit is the customer's responsibility, but the concierge can help with booking.

Hendrick is the 13th partici-

pant to build his own engine at the build center.

"For me, participating in this engine build is the ultimate connection to my Corvette," said Hendrick. "This is one of my favorite cars in the world, and now it will be that much more special knowing I personally built the engine. It's a really unique experience that Chevrolet is offering its customers."

When the engine is assembled, a personalized nameplate is added to the engine next to the builder's name. The engine is then sent to the Corvette assembly plant in Bowling Green, Ky., for installation in the customer's car.

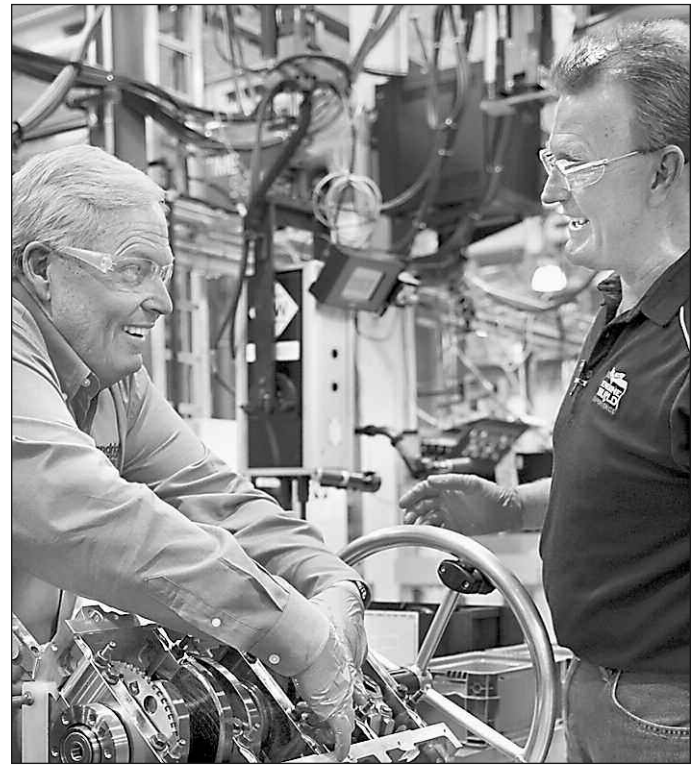
In addition to building their own engines, Corvette buyers can attend driving school in

Arizona or Nevada, take delivery of their vehicles at the National Corvette Museum or watch their vehicles being built at the Corvette assembly plant in Bowling Green.

Hendrick Motorsports has a NASCAR record of 13 owner's championships and 14 overall: 10 in the Sprint Cup Series, three in the Camping World Truck Series and one in the Nationwide Series (driver's title only). Its roster of stock-car drivers includes Mark Martin, Jeff Gordon, Jimmie Johnson and Dale Earnhardt, Jr.

The Corvette Engine Build Experience is proving to be one of GM's more popular offerings to its customers – the "gearheads" who participate in this project tend to love it, then they go back to their hometowns and speak well of GM and Corvette when discussing the auto industry.

It is a paid option on a Vette buy.



Motorsports team owner Rick Hendrick, left, works on building his own Corvette engine at the GM Wixom plant as part of the facility's "customer build" program. The Engine Build is actually an option on a new Corvette purchase.

Fabled Indy 500 Hits 100th Anniversary

INDIANAPOLIS (AP) – Indianapolis 500 veterans are used to working amid all the May distractions.

They've never attended a party quite like this.

With 40 drivers vying for 33 starting spots, they aren't just looking for a career-defining moment May 29. This year's winner gets to claim a little extra piece of racing lore – the title of champion at the 500's centennial celebration.

"At the 100-year anniversary, I do think the winner goes in that same book as Ray Harroun, and it's a great pressure to have. I wouldn't want it any other way," said Ryan Hunter-Reay, the only American to win an IndyCar race since April 2008. "It's part of history, part of American history."

There are few comparisons to Indy in the sports world.

The Brickyard is racing's version of Wrigley Field or Fenway Park, and few of America's highest-profile sporting events – the Kentucky Derby, the Boston Marathon, the World Series and the Rose Bowl are on the short list – started before the 500.

So when race organizers decided to throw this anniversary bash, they left nothing out.

Practice opened last week with a classic car show. The 269 living starters from previous 500s have been invited to participate in the world's "largest autograph session" May 28.

Longtime track announcer Tom Carnegie and four-time winner A.J. Foyt will be honored with their own special days, and Foyt, who Hunter-Reay calls Mr. 500, will drive the pace car. Organizers have billed this the "most impor-

tant race in history."

For drivers and teams, that's hype.

What's real is the pressure leading to this race.

"For me and most of the people that work here, we're not going to see the 200th race, so this race is very important," said Mike Hull, managing director for Target Chip Ganassi.

"But I kind of look at the Indy 500 as the most important race we'll ever do, every year. If you win the 100th race, you will go down in some special book somewhere, but in reality, winning it is the most important."

Hull knows.

His team has won three of the last four 500s and will try to put four drivers – defending champ Dario Franchitti, 2008 winner Scott Dixon and budding American youngsters Charlie Kimball and Graham Rahal – in this year's starting field.

It's not just the best teams, hottest drivers or fan favorites coming here with big story lines.

Some drivers with limited schedules or one-off deals are hoping a solid performance this month will give them a career boost.

Paul Tracy will change teams this month, the result of an unusual combination of deals. First, he signed with Dreyer & Reinbold to run at Indy, then he later signed a five-race deal to run for Dragon Racing, Jay Penske's team. Dragon Racing has two other drivers in the cockpit this month.

"Not being full-time, that would play into the history books, too, having a non-full time guy win it," said Dan Wheldon, the 2005 Indy winner and two-time runner-up.

Restrictor Plates Still a Topic of Debate in NASCAR

By PAUL NEWBERRY
AP National Writer

TALLADEGA, Ala. (AP) – Jimmie Johnson didn't mind a little tag teaming.

Of course, he won the race.

Matt Kenseth thought it was a terrible idea.

Then again, he was knocked out by a crash.

NASCAR drivers have always had a love-hate relationship with restrictor-plate racing, essentially based on how they finish. It's the same for the fans, who moan and groan about how boring it is – until there's another nail-biter of an ending like the one at Talladega Superspeedway on Sunday.

Johnson, with a big push from teammate Dale Earnhardt Jr., edged out Clint Bowyer by two-thousandths of a second to tie for the closest finish since NASCAR started using electronic timing.

Hard to complain about a four-wide sprint to the line. Jeff Gordon and Carl Edwards were also in the mix, and the top eight – each of the contenders was accompanied by a pusher – were a mere 0.145 seconds apart.

Throw in a record-tying 88 lead changes among 26 drivers (more than half the field led at least a lap) and it comes across as the most exciting event in the history of racing.

Johnson certainly saw it that way from Victory Lane.

"Statistically, you look at the race, and it looks pretty awesome," he said. "From where I was all day long, I thought there was a lot of racing that took place. I thought it was a great race."

That might be a bit of a stretch.

Before Johnson and the others made that mad dash down the long front straightaway at Talladega, there was a lot of cars just riding around, two by two by two. Drivers took turns swapping the lead in what seemed more choreographed than good, hard competition.

In a broad sense, the focus was the same as it's always been in a restrictor-plate race: stay out of trouble, conserve the car and try to set up a run for the checkered flag in the last few laps.

But the tactics are different now.

Drivers have figured out they can go even faster when they pair up with just one other car – one guy leading, the other pushing his back bumper – rather than lining up in long drafting formations that used to be the norm at Talladega and Daytona, the two high-banked tracks where horsepower-reducing devices are required on the carburetor to keep speeds from getting over 200 mph.

Now, you've got rivals swapping radio frequencies before

"I think it would probably have an asterisk by it."

Wheldon is making his season debut with Bryan Herta Autosports this month.

Others are chasing a different kind of automotive racing history.

Brazil's Helio Castroneves could become the first foreign-born four-time race winner. Dario Franchitti, of Scotland, is trying to join Castroneves as the second foreign-born three-time winner.

Among the eight rookies trying to make the field are Ho-Pin Tung, who can become the first Chinese starter at Indy; Pippa Mann, last year's Freedom 100 pole-winner and the only woman to ever sit on the pole at Indy; Kimball, who is trying to become the race's first openly diabetic driver in the field; and Scott Speed, who can become the first American to complete Indy's trifecta with starts in the 500, Brickyard 400 and U.S. Grand Prix.

And there's more angst for drivers at the back of the field than those at the front of the pack.

"I lived through that (Bump Day) once, fortunately, it was only once," 1986 winner Bobby Rahal said.

"You talk about pressure for the team, for the driver. It's a very stressful time, you've got to give it your best shot and you've got to be prepared to go back out. That's a lot of pressure for a whole day."

This year, it will be even tougher.

Gone are the days of having a starting spot virtually guaranteed if a driver can avoid crashing.

Instead, the sudden boom in car-driver combinations has included an influx of sponsorship, many of those

companies counting on their cars making the 33-car grid. Some drivers acknowledge appearance requests are up, schedules are getting tighter and free time is becoming sparse.

Former CART driver Townsend Bell, who will drive Sam Schmidt's No. 99 car, believes that's a good sign.

"It's not like you can look at the list of drivers and say 'Oh, there's so and so, he's a waste and he shouldn't be out there anyway,'" he said.

"The more pressure, the more that means it's a big-time event and a big-time sport, and the more I feel like the Indy 500 and IndyCar racing is alive and well again. In the big picture that's awesome."

It also creates incredible tension for drivers and crew members.

"I can already see it in my engineer's face," Kimball said this week before practice started. "If we can go home Saturday (May 21) having made the field, that will be a huge relief."

But for some team owners, namely Ganassi, Roger Penske and Michael Andretti, who employs three young Americans in Hunter-Reay, Marco Andretti and Danica Patrick, it's all about winning the 500.

And to have their names linked alongside Harroun, the first race winner, Foyt, who won 50 years ago, would be, well the ultimate celebration.

"It's going to be huge and maybe more important than any other Indianapolis 500 to win," said Ryan Briscoe, one of Penske's three drivers.

"I think to get it on the 100th anniversary, it would only be fitting for the winningest owner in history. I

like he was standing still.

"At least you can kind of control your own destiny and you can kind of draft a little bit," Kenseth said. "Here, if you don't have a car locked on you and shoving you, or vice versa, you're going to get lapped in 15 to 20 laps."

But Johnson remembers hearing many of the same complaints about the previous style, which could turn into nothing more than a couple of long, boring lines snaking around the track for much of the race in a game of follow the leader, everyone trying to avoid the sort of mistake that would lead to an even bigger crash than any of the ones in Sunday's race.

"From a driver standpoint, we have a lot more control now with what we do," Johnson said. "Yes, it is still plate racing, but it's a race. You can make stuff happen and there is a technique required to stay together and to work traffic together and to communicate. It puts it back in the driver's hands a lot more than the old combination of racing."

"I think it's entertaining," he concluded. "I don't remember people excited about the way it was before."

NASCAR has shown no indication to tweak things with the cars or the rules, so it appears there will be another tag-team event at the return race at Daytona in July.

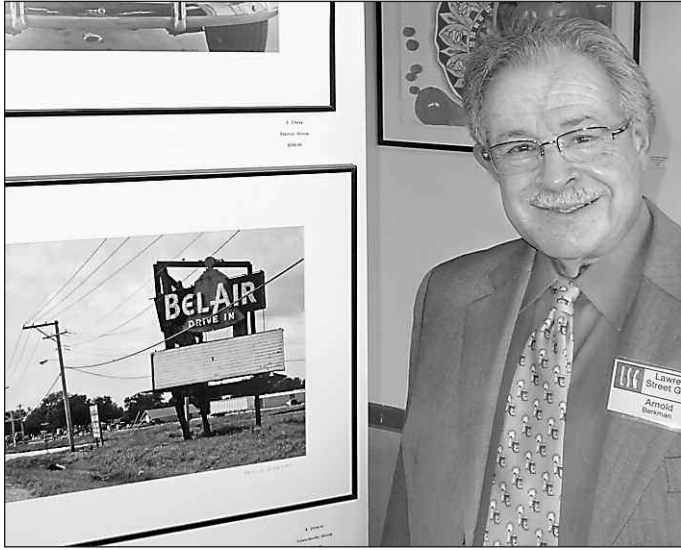


PHOTO: GERALD SCOTT

Lansing photographer Arnold Berkman hosted an opening night party for his artwork celebrating the legend of Route 66 at the Lawrence Street Gallery in Ferndale.

Photo Exhibit Recalls the Legacy of Old 'Route 66'

by Gerald Scott
Editor
Detroit Auto Scene

The legend of Route 66 gets its due – and its kicks, presumably – in an intriguing new photo exhibit that just opened at the Lawrence Street Gallery in Ferndale.

It seems that retired Michigan State University psychology professor Arnold Berkman, 68, is also a photographer and he recently sought to capture what was lost as once-proud Route 66 went from being America's Main Street into decline and decay.

"I made four trips with my eyes and my camera along the still intact segments of what was once Route 66," Berkman wrote in the exhibit notes.

"I wanted to capture in photography this legendary highway, and the spirit of a time and place long gone, yet still hauntingly alive. I wanted to capture what once was, and what now is.

"This exhibit is the result of that journey."

Indeed, even though Route 66 seems to live more in history, pop culture and folklore of late, its impact on the American landscape is not to be diminished.

Even the recent Disney movie "Cars" used the same theme of the federal highway and expressway system replacing the charming U.S. routes like Route 66, which in its heyday stretched 2,448 miles from Chicago to Los Angeles/Santa Monica.

"Known as the Main Street of America, Route 66 was quintessentially American," Berkman further writes in the exhibit notes.

State AIDS Population at 19,500

Barbara Murray, executive director of AIDS Partnership Michigan, is extending a personal invite to Big Three employees to help her cause.

"We are now 30 years into the HIV/AIDS pandemic. . . . it's a reality lived daily by 19,500 Michiganders," Murray said. "That's right 19,500 people in Michigan now have HIV/AIDS."

AIDS Partnership Michigan, located on Jefferson Avenue very near the GM RenCen headquarters, has been on the forefront of the fight for 28 of the 30-year history of the virus.

Murray passed along a note

asking GM, Ford and Chrysler employees in particular to help the cause by attending her big summer fund-raiser, Summer Solstice III, which is an evening wine and cheese party scheduled for June 11 at the Michigan Design Center in Troy.

Running from 6:30 to 10 p.m., the social event will include entertainment by the Ben Sharkey Trio, dancing, great food and wine and an auction, all to raise funds for the charity. Tickets are \$95 per person and all proceeds benefit the educational and treatment programs offered by AIDS Partnership.