



## ash - through the esses

### Through The Esses - Ritch Marziale Has A Concrete Plan For His Viper In SPEED

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Ritch Marziale is a successful businessman with strong family ties and a keen interest in Vipers. Not the slithering kind that most people would rather dodge, but the four wheeled variety built by Dodge. He will pilot the Viper that can be driven at speeds far in excess of any reptilian variant.



Photos: Mark Weber

After several years of competing in the Viper Racing League, and after many years of hard knocks taken atop a motocross bike, Marziale has decided to step up his racing activity a few notches and run a full season in the SPEED World Challenge series.

Running under the name Muzzy Racing, Marziale has assembled a core group of talented support personnel and is busy getting ready for an assault on his prior personal best performance. 2008 marks the first season he has committed himself, and his resources, to running in every SPEED race. And he has every intention of making the season one to be enjoyed for all the right reasons.

Marziale grew up in California, moved to Utah, and then settled in Arizona. He has built a successful business there, starting with virtually nothing in the way of assets. He has what he refers to as a wonderful family - "My wife is just awesome!" - with whom he enjoys spending a great deal of his time, and he is looking forward to putting his best effort towards what will be his first real full-time commitment to racing his Viper.

Marziale's story is one of determination, success and passion.

"Muzzy Racing is a way for me to maintain my sanity. Racing is something I am passionate about. I raced in motocross for years but I finally got tired of healing!"

"I ran bikes from the time I was 11, while I was living in Southern California. I have always had a passion for motocross, and I still do. I was racing bikes for a long time. As my interests changed I decided to purchase a Corvette."

While his first sportscar was a Corvette – a car many would love to have parked in their driveway - Marziale felt he needed something more.

"Honestly, the Vette was a bit of a disappointment. Let's just say it was less than I expected it to be. I always wanted a Viper but I wasn't sure how much I wanted one until I drove the Corvette. Well, I sold the Vette and bought a Viper and I have never looked back."

Looking forward, Marziale decided to see if racing a car in competition held nearly the same attraction for him as did riding motocross. He knew it at least had to be easier on his body.

"A buddy of mine invited me out for a track weekend and before I knew it I had a roll cage installed in my Viper, I got a fire suit and a trailer, and I was off to the races. I ran in Viper Club of America events. Tony Estes, soon to be the president of VCA, and Frank Parise – whose nickname is 'The Mad Italian' – were getting into racing just as Skip Thomas was putting the Viper Racing League on the map. Frank was running in the west series and trying to get it off the ground. I decided to do the east coast series and I started winning right away. I eventually went over to England to see Hugh Chamberlain. I bought one of his Viper GTSRs and had it flown over to Chicago. I picked it up on Friday and I had it on the track at Mid Ohio on Saturday and I raced it on Sunday.

"I probably won a dozen events in several different classes. I had some good battles with some really talented drivers and we won the pro finals in Texas in 2000."

Marziale supplemented his racing laps with time spent at several driving schools. And though he told us he bought the Viper and 'never looked back', he did have one time where he made an exception, but only because the situation was out of his control.

"My first driving school was Skip Barber at Laguna Seca. I also did one at Sears Point and one in Pahrump, Nevada. I did a few others too. At one point, I was even asked to help out and be an instructor. I did it one time, and one time only! While I was riding alongside a guy learning to go fast, I suddenly found myself helplessly going backwards at about 120 miles per hour! I said, 'OK, this is not for me!' I just remember seeing my life flash before my eyes so right then and there I decided I was only going to be a driver!"

With driving schools and Viper League experience under his belt, Marziale tried his luck a few times in the Grand-Am Rolex Series, back before the current Daytona Prototypes became the

cars of choice for that series. He ran his Viper at a time when open-top prototypes like the Riley & Scott MKIII and the Ferrari 333SP were still in action.

His first race in Grand-Am would give him a taste of what real speed – and real driving talent – is all about. And the experience was sweetened with a taste of victory.

"In 2001 I ran in the Grand-Am Rolex series. The gods were with me at the Sun Automotive race in Phoenix and I won the GT class in that race. It was at that race that I was 'introduced' to the prototypes. I was going into turn one when James Weaver and Andy Wallace came up on me with Weaver taking the inside and Wallace the outside through the apex. They went by me like I was tied to a tree! I'll never forget that experience! I didn't know it was possible for a car to have that much grip coming into a corner and how they found room to get around me is simply amazing."

His rather rude introduction to prototypes aside, for 2002 and forward, Marziale decided to throttle back on his racing activities a bit.

"I sold the Chamberlain Viper the next year and ran a few races in NASA and some SPEED World Challenge races off and on in another Viper. Our current car is a Competition Coupe, purpose built and sold through Dodge for racers like me. Roush builds the body and the chassis is basically a street chassis that Roush adds a roll cage too. We ran the car last year and the low point was the quality of the motors we received. We had one issue after another, and I felt that we never had a shot at achieving our full potential. And not having the support personnel in place only made it that much tougher. But I feel I have been blessed in that I am at a point where I can now seriously go after it.

"This year, I hired an engineer named Mike Williams. He actually helped land the NASA rover on the planet Mars! He has been involved in racing for 25 years on and off. When Mike first looked over my Viper he immediately found opportunities to improve the handling. One of the things that used to make me so nervous was when I would hit a bump, the car would just skate on me. He set the car up and I wound up thinking I had no idea the car could be so good. His skill gave me a lot of confidence. I actually started to believe that I could compete. And that made me think that, for as long as I am going to be racing, so long as I have Mike, and two great mechanics in Ken Micol and Mark Barton, I decided I would go full time in SPEED World Challenge.

"In the past, I would drive the car to the races, set the car up and race it. The whole experience really started to burn me out. I started bringing some guys with me to help out, but now that I have Mike, Ken and Mark, I'm at a point where I can make a full season run."

We mentioned that Marziale built a successful business from the ground up. He told us how he was able to start with next to nothing and come to a place that allows him the opportunity to be a professional racer.

"My construction business started with a dream and now I have a clientele base of over 600. We do concrete cutting and demolition. We cut window openings, or drill holes to run pipes through, that sort of thing. We don't pour concrete we just remove it or drill through it. For instance, when it was first built, we drilled a couple hundred holes in Cardinal Stadium - where they just held the Super Bowl. The holes were cut to run the piping for the water, electrical, and beer lines. And we drilled more holes for the beer lines than we did for plumbing and electrical combined! There are more beer lines in that stadium than any other kind!"

As Marziale was growing up on the west coast, he came to see that the years after his teens would begin to shape the foundation for the rest of his adult life. He made a decision to move away and seek a future for himself outside of his familiar surroundings. And his decision is one he has never come to regret.

"I grew up in California. As I got into my 20s I knew I had to make a change and simply break away from my friends. I went to Utah, where I have a lot of family, but there was nothing there of interest to me so I moved to Arizona. And that move was an answer to a prayer. I literally came to Arizona with a minimal amount of money in my pocket. But I came to find a career and eventually start a family and settle down. I went to work for someone in the concrete business and I found that I enjoyed the work and that I had a skill for it. After awhile I decided to branch out on my own and after a long road, I've come to where the business is today."

When he isn't racing his Viper, or supervising his construction firm, Marziale Enterprises, Marziale enjoys being with his family, including traveling with them and simply enjoying each others company.

"My family includes my awesome wife Barbie – we have been married for 20 years - and my daughter Marissa, who is 15, and Larsen who is 7, and my youngest son, Reese, who is 4. We do a lot together. We travel a lot. We go water skiing here in Arizona. We spend several weeks a year in California, enjoying the ocean. Being with my family is very important to me and so my racing has never been a top priority. Barbie has often been with me at the races but the kids haven't because of school and what have you. But this year I expect they will be at the Salt Lake City race as I have a home there."

We asked how he came to name his team Muzzy Racing. We weren't too surprised to hear there was a family connection.

"My grandfather was from Italy and his nickname was Muzzy. My father, a New Jersey police officer, also had the nickname Muzzy. Both of them passed away and I just decided to call my team Muzzy Racing as a tribute to the two of them. The name has sentimental value to me."

Also of value to the racer within him, is getting laps in so as to improve his on-track performance. When we caught up with Marziale for this interview, he was one day away from getting up to speed on a circuit he had never been to before.

"Right now, I'm sitting here in the restaurant at the Chateau opposite the hairpin at Sebring International Raceway. I've never been here before. Tomorrow I am going to do some laps in an open wheel car with the Skip Barber guys and then I will head back home the day after. The laps will help me get used to the track so when I arrive here again in three weeks for the season-opening SPEED race I should be ready to go."

Marziale has set a modest goal for him and his team this season. He is getting himself ready to improve his on-track performance level by improving his personal performance level.

"For our first full season, we would like to at least finish better than our previous high of 7th place. That is my personal goal. We expect to be competitive and I have stepped up my personal conditioning and training routine considerably. I have worked out more in the last three months than I have in the last three years. I'm cut! And my wife likes it too!"

And it feels great to feel healthy again."

And that feeling of health extends beyond his physical state, all the way to his soul.

"Not very many people get to live a dream. Racing is cruel and it can be hard on anybody. And if you are not an upbeat and positive person it can really beat you up financially and mentally. But I feel blessed and I have a great deal of gratitude and I am thankful to be where I am in my life. What can I say? My heart is full and I am ready to go racing!"