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## Jim Lowe Is On A Racer's Journey To Make Dreams Come True

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If you are a fan of contemporary music and movies, no one probably has to tell you who J-Lo is. Fans of contemporary sportscar racing however, are probably just starting to learn about this sports very own JLowe, as in Jim Lowe Racing.

But we suspect awareness levels amongst the car crowd will soon be rising.

Jim Lowe is a Neurosurgeon specializing in spine surgery and he is the Chief of Neurosurgery at the AtlantiCare Regional Medical Center in Atlantic City, New Jersey. He is also a racer who began his journey towards building his own competitive GT race team just a few years ago. It is a journey that he is not taking alone.

Lowe ran a Porsche GT3 Cup car (No. 64) in the 2009 Rolex 24 Hours at Daytona. He partnered with his good friend and racing mentor, Jim Pace – a former winner of the Rolex 24 (With Wayne Taylor and Scott Sharp in the Danka Oldsmobile- Riley MKIII in 1996)– and with

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Johannes van Overbeek and Tim Sugden. They went through some early torment in the days leading up to race day, only to find that the often cruel Daytona Fate Fairy had not yet finished with them. Due to mechanical issues, the team was forced to make the unpopular but probably most sensible decision to withdraw from the race after just eight hours.

We talked with Lowe about his Rolex 24 experiences, dating back to his first race there in 2006. We came to learn that this skilled surgeon and professional racer in waiting has found two venues in which to ply his passions. And for the 2009 season going forward, he has even found a way to blend one of the tenets of his Hippocratic Oath – caring for the benefit of others - with his love for going fast.

JLowe Racing began as a dream of Lowe's, brought on by his exploits in the Jim Russell and Skip Barber racing schools. It was at Barber that he met Jim Pace, a veteran sportscar driver and instructor with a well-earned reputation as a gentleman and talented driver and coach. Lowe picked Pace's brain for a route to take to begin his racing career and together they decided to start with what is arguably road racing's toughest challenge, the Rolex 24.

Lowe has an enormous amount of respect for Pace.

“Jim Pace started out as coach and mentor to me and since we have been together he has become an even better friend. You won't find a guy more respected and well thought of everywhere we go. He is a tremendous individual and a hell of a driver. And I bet you didn't know he went all the way to his fourth year of medical school before he came to his senses and decided to go racing. We have a little bit of similar history in that but he was smart enough to get out and go to the racetrack!”

We will begin the story of Jim Lowe – the racing surgeon – by letting Lowe recap his team's unfortunate end in this year's Rolex 24.

“This was our fourth year running the Rolex 24. In my first Rolex 24 in 2006, Jim Pace and I were teamed with another rookie named Revere Greist. In 2007, JP and I ran with Johannes van Overbeek and Ralf Kelleners. In 2008 and 2009, it was JP, Johannes, Tim Sugden and myself. In 2008, RJ Valentine also joined us. Last year we finished fourth in class and the year before we finished third. We basically brought the same crew back this year and we really thought we would improve on our prior performance.

“We were part of the axle epidemic that seemed to strike many of the Porsche's in this race. Some were affected more than others. During the course of the weekend, we broke five of them. The boots kept rupturing and that allowed the grease to drain out. We found three of the boots had cracked and two of the axles had broken at the CV joint. That may have been as a result of the boots first failing, leading to the axle breakage.

“Porsche had plenty of the axles on hand but unfortunately the ones they had all came from the same manufacturing batch. Three of the Farnbacher-Loles cars had axle failures. I know that we lost 25 laps repairing our first broken one in the race.

“But the axles weren't the first problem we encountered in the race. We had an accessory oil pump reservoir on the front of the car that has a sensor on it that can automatically add oil to the engine if it senses the levels are too low. My crew guys, who also have run with the Flying Lizards team, said they have run with this system for years and never had a problem with it. At Daytona, every time the car went up on to the banking it sensed oil deprivation and pumped oil into the engine to compensate.

“In the first 20 minutes of the race it pumped eight liters of unnecessary oil into the engine.

“Johannes started the race and he radioed in that he thought he had a tire pressure problem as he was having trouble slowing down for the braking zones. It turned out there was oil dripping on the wheels. After five or six laps he got on the radio complaining the car wasn't braking very well. By about the 10<sup>th</sup> lap the car was smoking a little and with just 45 minutes of the race down, we were in the pits with oil leaking out of the car. We took it behind the wall and it promptly caught on fire. They put the fire out quickly so the car wasn't too badly damaged. But repairs took close to an hour and that basically ruined our chances of a top ten finish.

“We went back out and ran for about another four hours until we broke an axle. We replaced it and I went out and ran until almost the eighth hour of the race when we decided to retire the car. At that point we were already 50 laps down. We all hated to retire a running car but we basically said we weren't in the race for the sake of finishing. We were there to try and win the thing. And knowing that our chances had essentially evaporated we decided not to continue on with what would have been an expensive test day. We retired and set our minds to coming back to fight another day.

“When we checked the car afterwards we found that both boots had ruptured again so, even though we made the decision to retire it was entirely probable that the axles would have made the decision for us.”

Lowe started racing in the Grand-AM Rolex Series by renting a ride with Kevin Buckler's The Racers Group, teamed with Pace and Sugden at the 2006 Rolex 24. It was the first time Lowe had ever driven a Porsche on a race track, and the first time he ever ran on the banking at Daytona. But once bitten by the speed bug, Lowe knew his involvement in racing at this level would soon increase.

“That race was my baptism by fire. I went from open wheel amateur stuff to running the test days for the biggest race there is. I soon found I wanted more of this so I bought a car of my own in 2007. I then bought a second car the following year. We campaigned as JLowe Racing but we ran under the TRG umbrella. We used them for all the support details and car preparation and so on.

“In 2008 we put our own team of mechanics and drivers together; I was basically hiring everybody out myself even though we were still running within the TRG structure. Half way through the 2008 season Kevin and I agreed it was time for me to branch out. We had talked about it extensively and he was very good about letting me become more and more independent. I really wanted to develop my own team and my own entity, investing all of myself in the effort. In the middle of the season we did enlist the support of the Farnbacher-Loles guys which turned out to be another step towards our own independence as a team.

“This season we are pretty much on our own, except that we don't yet have our own shop so the Farnbacher-Loles guys will transport our car and help with prep. I flew my mechanics down to Farnbacher's shop at Road Atlanta to set up the new Porsche. We have been sharing tools and such with them but we are slowly collecting our own bits and pieces. All my cars are down in their shop.

“Why do I now own three cars? Well, one wasn't all that bright and two makes me dumb and three confirms that I am absolutely crazy! It always seems you want to buy the latest model to stay competitive. I am in the middle of selling my 2008 car.”

We wondered if Lowe had visions of being another Kevin Buckler but he soon convinced us his racing aims do not include making the sport his full time vocation.

“No! I have no desire to be a large scale team. I’d rather be a small scale team with the talent and know how to run at the front. No 150 people on staff or renting out cars for us. Kevin and Greg Loles do it very well but it is a big, big deal. But racing is not what I do for a living. In fact, my one and only financial goal with racing is to be able to find sponsors and supporting partners so I can pay less to go racing!

“While I wear a big grin every time I am at the race track I could never devote the time needed to stay at the track several days a week.

“For 2009, economic conditions will preclude us from running more than a few races. We plan to run at New Jersey – which I consider my home track – at Watkins Glen, and back at Daytona for the Brumos 250 in July. I’d rather approach each of these races with everything we need to run well rather than have to thin out our resources and cobble together what we need at each race. We have a couple of options we are considering that might put us in a position to do more races but nothing concrete as of yet. I’d really like to go to Montreal but right now that is a tooth-fairy idea.”

Lowe is a noted neurosurgeon in spine surgery. Perhaps in another life he would have been a mechanic?

“I have a diploma that says I am a brain surgeon but I really don’t do much brain surgery anymore as I concentrate more on spinal injuries. I spend my days in the operating room with drills and hammers and saws. I joke with the mechanics that I have a cooler tool set than they do.

“Surgery is somewhat like what a car mechanic does because it is all about figuring out what is wrong and fixing it. I laugh about the fact that my knuckles get banged and bloodied just like the mechanics do. I tell people that if anyone ever found me lying by the side of the road, and they looked at my hands, they would probably think I am a mechanic because I have so many calluses and skinned knuckles. My hands do not look like the hands of a surgeon!”

We mentioned earlier that Lowe is not in the racing game alone. Besides working closely with his friend Jim Pace, he is also partnered by his wife Ginny, a woman who not only doesn’t try to keep her man from going fast on purpose, she adds purpose by helping him with many of the business aspects that come with running a race team.

“Ginny puts up with all my racing and she takes care of a lot of the grunt work for the team, and for the rest of my life too. She pays the bills and does the accounting, probably because she is afraid to let me get my hands on the money! I try to be responsible and not burn up slicks every time but thank goodness she is there to keep an eye on some of the important things.

“We have been married 11 years and we have a seven year old son named Aidan. He just got his first kart last fall and we have been racing. It is one of my absolute joys in my life that he and I can race together. He is in a full blown kart that probably hits 60 miles per hour. He races against kids in the 6 to 8 category and he seems to love it and I know I really enjoy watching him race. If you were to ask him what might make him happier as an adult I suspect he would say racing as opposed to being in an operating room!

“Ginny didn’t go to Daytona this year because it has simply become too stressful a weekend for her. She spends three days worrying about what might happen before and during the race. She once told me that every time my car goes by the front straight she spends the next two minutes anxiously waiting to see the car go by again! It is nerve wracking for her and she doesn’t get any of the enjoyment because she isn’t driving.

“When I first started racing my wife was afraid I was going to die. Now that she does the books and sees how much I am spending, she is afraid I am not going to die!”

When he isn’t helping people recover from their spinal injuries, Jim Lowe is pursuing his passion for speed. And in both pursuits he has found a way to make a difference in the lives of others. As a surgeon he helps people through their medical issues. As a racer he is helping people who don’t need the hands of a surgeon, but do need a helping hand to find a better life.

“We have gotten involved with a charity called the Urban Youth Racing School, in Philadelphia. It was started 10 years ago by a man named Anthony Martin. Originally it was designed as a place to keep kids off the street. Disadvantaged kids could get into go karts after school and on weekends, and they could take classes in mechanics and other areas related to cars and racing. It has really grown into a world where kids have a shot at going into careers in Motorsports and technology related careers.

“They have a program call STEM, which stands for Science, Technology, Engineering and Math. Basically we are trying to use my racing team as a laboratory for exposing these kids to science, technology, engineering and math careers as they relate to Motorsports. All those disciplines are critical in making race cars go fast and do well on the track. We have developed a mentorship program with the kids. We started that at this year’s Rolex 24. We had three kids come down to Daytona, all paid for by a sponsor. They worked alongside my engineers and mechanics and got their hands dirty and had the experience of running with us for at least one third of a 24 hour race.

“We are going to try and replicate that mentoring experience at all the races we run this season. We are giving companies who want to be involved in racing an opportunity to do so through a charitable effort that they can be proud to be associated with. Most of the companies we are talking to are technology related companies. For example, Analytical Graphics Incorporated (AGI) sponsored the kids at Daytona. They make satellite tracking software which would seem to be totally unrelated to racing but, as part of their sponsorship commitment they have agreed to mentor these kids at the AGI offices. This means kids from some of the poorest areas of inner city Philadelphia will be working in a suburban location alongside the AGI software technicians.

“We are trying to give these high school age kids an incentive to consider furthering their educations and to expose them to some of the opportunities the world has to offer outside their own neighborhoods. We are creating a situation where our team becomes an anchor for the whole effort. Eventually we would like to get these kids in a program where they are on a ladder system where they can graduate to, perhaps, working on my car or as part of my team either on the engineering side or as drivers. Obviously all high school kids like to drive!

“We have the ability as a team to do just about anything for these kids, provided we get the support of the sponsors to make it all happen. While our ambitions are seemingly noble, we do have to point out that those sponsor dollars help us to keep racing. It is those dollars that allow us to provide this opportunity for the kids. A portion of the sponsor’s dollars provides the

support we need to be at the track in the first place. The sponsor dollars go to the charity and they in turn send us what is left after they have satisfied their costs to support the kids in the program. How much each of us receives is dependant upon the level of monetary support the sponsors provide.

“In this economic climate, some look at racing as being frivolous. By joining us through the Urban Youth Racing School charity our sponsors get a real return on their investment both in terms of finding future talent for their businesses and by taking advantage of any tax credits they may receive for their donations.”

We have to admire Jim Lowe for his successful merger of intellectual capacity and compassion for others. He found a way to keep two dreams alive – his own and those of the kids who may not have even known a dream was possible.

“These are kids who have limited opportunities. They are growing up in some of the worst possible circumstances. I find myself visiting the school often and spending time talking with these kids. I’ve even been the ‘celebrity guest’ at their go kart races.

“One of the kids just got interviewed at Harvard, which is where I went for my undergraduate studies. I took this kid aside and coached him for his interview so he would have some idea of what to expect. It was cool for me to be able to pass along some of my experience to him and try to help him to do well in the interview.”

Jim Lowe is on the road to a good life in racing. His efforts to date all point towards a bright future spent behind the wheel of a race car. He has his family and good friends riding right along with him and he is quick to admit his ride has been nothing short of a fantasy come true.

“I consider myself to be living a charmed life every time I go to a race track, just to be there and participating in the sport. The only thing missing is finishing first at Daytona!”



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