



# Jim Chini

by Newton "Buzz" Rose

When photographer and historian Jim Chini was asked how he got involved in automobile racing, his answer was short and to the point, "I sneaked in!" As it turned out, it was the truth.

Jim grew up in a small town called Pacoima that is located in the Northeast corner of the San Fernando Valley area in southern California. "Pacoima," and its neighbor city San Fernando, was

home to at least two dozen serious race car drivers at that time and not one of them was more than a 20-minute bicycle ride from my house," said Chini. Jimmy Davies, Bill Homier, Cal Niday, Roy Prosser, Nick Valenta and Al Sherman were among the drivers who could count on seeing young Jim in their driveway a couple times a week peeking into their garages to see if he could catch a glimpse of a race car.

"There were only two active race tracks in the Los Angeles area at that time; Culver City Stadium and Carrell Speedway," said Chini. "Both were more than a two-hour drive from my house in that pre-freeway era, so I had a lot of trouble getting my dad to give up a Saturday night and drive for five hours just so that I could be entertained! Speed Age magazine and the trade papers National Speed Sport News and Illustrated Speedway News were my primary sources of information up to the time I got my drivers license."

By the time Jim got that license, Gardena Stadium and Los Angeles Speedway (later known as Ascot) had replaced Culver City and Carrell and he began spending a lot of time in the grandstands of these tracks but he wanted to be closer to the action. "I would hang around the pit gate and try to slide by the guards when they were busy. That worked a couple times but pretty soon they got wise to me and I had to come up with a different plan."

Jim was an avid photo buyer and decided that he would learn how to take his own photos and -- he thought -- save money. "I found a spot at L.A. Speedway where I could climb over the fence and sort of hide out down in the north corner with a camera around my neck and nobody paid me any mind."

Within a year the loquacious teenager (still without a pit-pass) managed to talk his way into his first paying job in auto racing when he was hired for the staggering sum of \$10 to announce a midget car race that "Buzz" Rose co-promoted with Norm Hall at Barstow in late 1958.

"That job in Barstow got me my first legal pit-pass and it was all down hill from there! I quickly figured out that auto racing was a great place to be for someone who hated work, was scared to death of having to grow up, and loved to party all the time. Over the years since, I did some more announcing, worked as a manufacturers rep, 'stooged' for Don Brown, took motion pictures for Fred Bailey and Dick Wallen, worked in the United States Auto Club (USAC) offices and generally anything else I could find that would allow me to continue taking photographs."

From the early sixties through the late eighties, Jim's photos appeared in virtually every major automotive publication of the time. "The photography was easy for me and I enjoyed it," said Chini. "I probably spent ten dollars for every dollar I made but I got to see some of the best races ever contested up-close and personal. It also made me more aware of the history of open wheel racing and what I could do to help perpetuate it. I have been purchasing other photographers work since I was ten years old and, still today, when I'm impressed by a really spectacular or different photograph."

Jim has acquired the negatives of Jack Fox, Ernie Lovingood, Ted Manning, Tommy Thompson and part of the work of Lafayette/St. Dennis and Herb McLaughlin.

Chini was forced to put the camera away after 1986 due to eyesight problems. "My eyes got old and I even have to wear glasses now to pick my nose! I can't see through the viewfinder with the glasses on and I can't see the race track with them off. Additionally, they have destroyed my peripheral vision, which was the only thing that prevented me from getting run over. I figured that I had enough negatives anyway between my own and the ones I have purchased from older photographers to keep me busy for the next 40-50 years, so maybe it was time to move on to something else that I can do but don't like as well---write."

In recent years, Jim Chini, also known as "Doctor Vodka", has assisted friend and racer-turned-publisher Newton "Buzz" Rose on a number of Rose Racing Publications, both as editor and co-author. Motor Sports Press Association (MSPA) member Jim Chini lives with his wife Nancy in Palm Springs, California, today.

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