



Zeitler

there's more than one winning Vee
spelled with a Zee

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photo: KEN FAGAN

FOR THE PAST three seasons Ed Zink has had things pretty much his own way in the competitive world of Formula Vee racing.

Matters reached absurdity at the 1967 Daytona run-offs when his cars finished 1-2-3-4-5, completely blowing off the other big name builders like Autodynamics, Bobsy, Beach and Crusader.

And the '68 Riverside run-offs looked like a certain repeat, for 13 of the 19 cars present were Zinks. But as he watched practice, Ed Zink looked worried. A dark orange car from Connecticut was going much too fast for his liking. The car was a Zeitler, a one-of-a-kind Vee designed by engineer-race driver John Zeitler and driven by aspiring pro-racer Steve Burtis.

When practice ended, Ed Zink had good reason to be worried. The Zeitler sat third on the grid, just behind

the rapid Zinks of Jim McDaniel and Bill Scott—and ahead of division champions Harry Ingle, Butch Harris and Vern Claiborne, all in Zinks.

While other Vee manufacturers claim to be America's largest builders of racing cars, John Zeitler's Zeitler Racing Design is certainly one of the smallest. Really a prototype, Burtis' car was developed in Zeitler's garage behind his Stamford, Conn. home. But there is certainly nothing homemade looking about it.

Zeitler began the '68 season running two cars, Burtis' and an earlier model which he drove himself. After a slow start at the Marlboro and VIR nationals, Burtis came on strong. He finished second at Cumberland, first at Lime Rock, second at Steel Cities, first at Grattan, first at Bryar and second at Marlboro. In addition, he picked up a second at the Lime Rock pro-Vee race, working his way

Steve Burtis' Zeitler leads at 1968 Lime Rock Nationals. Northeast champion Jim McDaniel is second, author Davey is third and John Zeitler is fourth.

through the pack after a first lap shunt dropped him to nearly last. Meanwhile, designer Zeitler, in addition to maintaining two cars and launching the manufacturing side of Zeitler Racing Design, found time to drive to a second and a third at Lime Rock, along with picking up a big win at Watkins Glen. He ended up fifth in the highly competitive Northeast (Burtis was third).

The Riverside race is now a legend among Vee buffs, as the first five cars (four Zinks and the lone Zeitler) went at it for thirty minutes, with the lead changing as many as four times in one lap. Burtis led going into the last lap, only to have Scott and McDaniel slip by, leaving him third only a few hundredths of a second back.

Although his car didn't win the national championship in its first try, Zeitler was sufficiently pleased with the effort. Other Vee drivers were sufficiently impressed to flood him with requests for cars. He is now busy building a limited number of kits for sale. Today, the frames and other parts are built to his specs by a Boston engineering firm. The bodies are farmed out to another company, but Zeitler's hand still goes into the building of every car.

"I never want to reach the point where I'm turning out cars like they're sausages," he says. "I do this for fun and want a personal hand in each car. And, of course, I like to see my cars up front."

Everywhere they ran the Zeitlers impressed people with their handling. Handling that let Burtis stay with cars that at times had as much as a five horsepower advantage. What makes a Zeitler handle better? Is it greater torsional rigidity? Is it a higher polar moment? A lower center of gravity?

The answer is really John Zeitler and his approach to racing. Zeitler is an engineer, whose non-racing job centers around quality control. And quality control was never more evident than it is in his cars. He will tinker with a suspension endlessly to get a car to handle just right. Or assemble and reassemble an engine five or six times to get that extra half-horsepower. Instead of using an inexpensive motorcycle cable for throttle linkage like other Vees, Zeitler has fabricated a clever mechanical linkage that puts many high-priced production car set-ups to shame.

The 43-year old Zeitler began his racing career building and racing power boats in the midwest. In 1956, his last season with boats, his Chevy V-8 powered special picked up six firsts and four seconds in ten races.

"The terrific pounding of the boats just got to be too much," he says. "It got so I couldn't eat for two or three days after a race."

He then turned to the more sedate world of sports car racing, first driving an MGA and later piloting a G-modified Elva to seventh in national points in 1959.

John Zeitler was never really happy

driving a car built by someone else. So, when Formula Junior came along, he designed and built a rear engine DKW-powered special which he called a "Zeter". While the homemade Zeter could never really hope to compete against the exotic and expensive machinery that eventually destroyed Formula Junior, it did have its moments of glory—such as leading Walt Hansgen and all the other hot shoes at the Montgomery National in 1960. The Zeter also provided Zeitler with his worst racing moment, when he demolished it in a spectacular flip at the Heyner (Pa.) Hillclimb. The introduction of Formula Vee was greeted with a yawn by Zeitler. "What an awful class," he thought, "all those underpowered cars droning around and around."

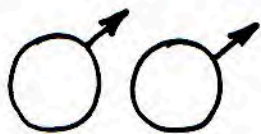
But eventually the simplicity of design and intense racing appealed to him. In 1966 he built his own chassis, covered it with an Autodynamics body, named it an "AD and Z", and captured the Area 1 championship. In 1967 he built and ran a prototype Vee called a "Z-4", and began to think seriously about building Vees on a bigger scale.

So, a class which he initially thought was awful has treated John Zeitler pretty well. Can he dethrone Zink this season after coming so close at Riverside? All Zeitler will say is, "Ed Zink builds a fine car, and you can bet he won't be resting on his laurels."

But neither will John Zeitler.

SPEEDEES

from Tom Thornton, Art Director,
Iowa Region's monthly RACE & RALLYE



He just came back from the national convention.



Fred sure has changed since he traded his MG for a Buick.