

Jack Reinhard: A Man Ahead of his Time

**B**orn on June 29 1928, Jack Reinhard spent his childhood in Middle Village and attended Newtown High School in Queens. From the beginning Jack always loved cars and engines.

After high school, Jack was employed by Republic Aviation Corp. as a bench mechanic for several years. While in Queens Jack met and married a pretty girl from Woodside named Dorothy. They moved to Centereach and raised four children; daughters Elaine and Karen, and sons, Jack and Karl. After leaving Republic, Jack went to work at West Amity Auto Parts in Amityville where he was an engine machinist. Not only did Jack build engines for himself but for a lot of other racecars on Long Island. Jack was a well respected engine builder. Jack was also known for assisting other engine builders with technical information that he learned during his career. West Amity Auto Parts (owned by his brother, Carl) was also the sponsor for Jack's cars. Almost everyone including myself thought that Jack owned West Amity Auto Parts because anytime you went there day or night for anything, he was there. Jack's cars were always well prepared and had colorful paint schemes. During the 1961 season at Freeport Stadium, Jack and his crew, Harry Keeley and Sherman Gimmler, were presented the award for best appearing car and crew by Freeport Promoter "Duke" Donaldson. Early in his racing career Jack was known as a young Barney Oldfield for his hard charging driving skills. Later on when he had his own racing engine shop, he became known as "Racer Jack."

Jack started his auto racing career at Freeport Stadium in 1952, driving Hudson racecars powered by Modified Hudson engines. In 1954, Jack teamed up with Rollin Hargis, a local Hudson dealer, and the rest is history. Jack, Mario Andretti and yours truly all had something in common: we all started our auto racing careers driving a Hudson racing car. Jack also raced a Studebaker stock car at Langhorne, Pennsylvania, in 1964. One of Jack's well known cars was a 1938 Chevy Coupe powered by a fuel-injected 421-cubic inch Pontiac engine. This car was red, white and blue with the # J-6 on both sides and his wife's name, "DOT," over the windshield. Also on the rear deck



Jack Reinhard (l) & Fran "Franny" Smith (r), one of Jack's pit crew, checking the engine before heading off to Freeport Stadium, 1964



Smiling Jack Reinhard, posing with his J6 before start of Main Event at Freeport Stadium

Fords, Sedans, Modifieds and Three-Quarter Midget divisions. He raced at Freeport Stadium, Islip Speedway, Dexter Park Riverhead Raceway, Island Gardens "Indoor," Speon Speedway, Rhinebeck Stadium, Lebanon Valley and Empire Raceway (all in New York); Thompson Speedway and Waterford Speedway in Connecticut and Old Bridge Speedway, Wall Stadium and Trenton in Jersey and course, the famous

Langhorne Speedway in Pa. He raced stock cars in the summer and three quarter midgets in the winter in the Island Gardens Indoor track in Hempstead. I remember Jack driving the George Beck Black with gold leaf #63 three-quarter midget, winning the opening show at Island Gardens in 1964.



Jack Reinhard's "Racer Jack's" business card. He operated this shop at his home in Centereach. Note: Jack was so well known, he had no phone or address on his card

Jack won many events in his career and is third on the all time win list at Riverhead Raceway. Early in his career Jack won a special 35-lap triple trophy race at Riverhead Raceway. The race was sponsored by the Riverhead Police Benevolent Association. The winning car was a 1937 Hudson with a 1951 Hudson engine. Jack received an engraved three-foot high trophy which from the PBA. In this race Jack started in 13<sup>th</sup>

position in a 16-car starting field. Jack took over first place on the 13<sup>th</sup> lap and led the race for the next 22 laps. He said it was like a dream come true. He was also a member of Freeport Stadium's Grand Slam Club which had only a few members. The Grand Slam meant that you finished in first place in every racing division that raced at Freeport in the same year.

Jack Reinhard's last race was in 1977. His last car was #11. Coincidentally his house number was 11 and he passed away on the 11<sup>th</sup> day of February in 1992. Jack's helmet, jacket, shirt, photos plus other memorabilia are on display at the museum. ●

Marty Himes is the owner-curator of the nationally recognized Hime Museum of Motor Racing Nostalgia in Bay Shore. (631) 666-4912

was a word I have never heard of-I guess it meant very powerful: "Fireschtppenloudenboomer."

This car had to be one of the fastest cars ever to race on any Long Island track. A big part of the show was to watch Jack drive it. The race would start and he would race down to the end of the straightaway, hit the brakes and the left front wheel would lock up and smoke the tire. Lap after lap, Jack would repeat this. This car was very powerful and could only be driven by Jack. I know this because later on, I bought the #J-6 and one day took it out on the track at Islip Speedway. After a couple of warm-up laps, the starter gave me and the rest of the cars the green flag. After a few fast laps I was going down the back stretch starting into the third turn and I lost control and spun the car around and crashed into the third turn wall. Jack built this car from scratch, including all chassis and suspension. According to other drivers, owners and mechanics I have talked to, they all agree, Jack Reinhard was way ahead of his time. He also knew how to get around some of the rules. For example, one of the rules stated that you couldn't mill the heads on an engine so Jack would mill "machine" the engine block. Not only was Jack a very skilled driver he was an honest and straight shooter. If you had a question about racing or how to set up your car you would get an honest and straight answer.

Over the years Jack tried Flathead Fords, Hudsons, Studebaker and Chevy racing cars. During his racing career, Jack's pit crew included his son, Jack (known as "JR"), Sherman Gimmler, Tom Kerensky, Mike Bartolomeo, Dave Frasier, Fran Smith ("Franny") and Harry Keeley. Jack raced in the Non-



Jack and his pit crew (l-r: Harry Keeley, Sherman Gimmler, Promoter "Duke" Donaldson, Jack Reinhard) posing with their awards for "The Best Appearing Car and Crew"

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