

BOB GERDES



The site was Green Avenue in Lyndhurst, New Jersey, a residential area in the 1970s but one where at any one time there may be a slew of fiberglass bodies sitting outside one particular garage. That “garage” was the home of Circus Custom Paint and it’s proprietor Bob Gerdes.

Gerdes had started painting cars with a friend Bob Campy in the 1960s. After several Best Paint awards at car shows, Gerdes traveled to the west coast visiting some of the best painters in that part of the country. Upon his return, Campy moved on to other ventures but Circus Custom Paint became a reality with many of the top race drivers of the day finding their way off Route 3 in New Jersey, some ten minutes west of what eventually became



the Meadowlands Sports Complex. Joe Amato, Frank Manzo, Al Hanna, Chuck Etchells, Jungle Jim, and many more all showed up at Gerdes’s door.

“Back in the day when everything was ‘analog,’” says long-time friend Kenny Youngblood, “there were only a handful of painters that could accurately bring a rendering to life on the skin of a race vehicle. The west coast had the majority; Don Kirby, Bill Carter, Tom Stratton, George Cerny and Nat Quick (among a very few others). On the east coast, there was just one guy: Bob Gerdes and Circus. I am blessed to have not only worked with Bob, but even more so to know him as a friend. Bob always had your back. He’s a stand-up, Jersey kind of guy and one of the best painters to ever squeeze a trigger.”

Conveniently located in the garage next door to Circus back then, was renowned artist Mr. J. The two often worked hand-in-hand with Gerdes doing the painting and Mr. J the graphics. “Bob was a marvel when it came to painting,” he said. “If a car was damaged, Bob was a master at matching the paint color, no matter who painted the car.”

In 1979, Bob and his wife Eileen moved to upstate New York, converting an old



barn into a paint shop. The same racers and many more who trekked to the urban confines of New Jersey, now found the same quality work in the Gerdes’s new rural setting. A move back to New Jersey in the late ‘80s precipitated a move back to the quiet confines of upstate New York eight years later where he lives today. And the racers found their way there also.

Still painting cars, Bob now works with his sons Josh and Jonathan building a ’32 Ford as a project, all while still maintaining the friendships he has built over the past decades. Along with his young grandchildren Harlan and Avery, Bob Gerdes is and always appears a very quiet but happy man.

Inducted into the National Nostalgia Drag Racing Association Legion of Honor in 2019 for his work and expertise on so many different race cars, Gerdes is certainly a worthy *High Performer* recipient for the work he has done to color our sport.



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