

The

enormity of it is what first strikes me. Situated on nearly two acres in the San Francisco Bay city of Hayward, California, Scott Drnek and Stacey Toland's Virtuoso Performance occupies a massive multi-bay building of 30,000 square feet usually occupied by 50 to 60 vintage race cars ranging from elfin Formula Juniors to brute-power Can-Am and GTP cars, along with a variety of F1, Sports Racing and other category machines. Outside sits VP's 53-foot transport semi alongside 17 shipping containers full of race car bodies and molds, myriad spares, tires, wheels, parts of every description and size and you-name-it shop equipment, plus other paraphernalia needed for car prep and track support on stand-by for domestic and international events.



The ex-works Ginetta G4R development car gets finishing touches, while behind it an Elva Mk. 8 is in the early stages of assembly.

Not knowing Drnek previously, I'm curious about how he got started in this niche enterprise that has evolved for him and Toland to what it is today. A vigorous conversationalist, he paints a vivid picture as we get acquainted.

Chicago born—father was a cop, mother housewife—young Scott Drnek paid his way through school fixing friends' broken-down heaps and turning others into race cars while pursuing a college degree in aeronautical engineering. But the lure of racing won out over airplanes and he began working his way through mechanics' ranks and race car prep until 1994 when he and Stacey Toland incorporated Virtuoso Performance. A former electrical engineer, she now oversees VP's day-to-day operation on the business end.

Touring Virtuoso's shop complex with Drnek, he explains how they do the full span of restoration, prep, tuning and track support, including their own spray booth, to keep as much work as possible in-house. He likes to call it a one-stop vintage racing shop. "We try to take the responsibility of the whole vintage racing experience," Drnek tells me, "as opposed to being in the business of fixing broken race cars."

In the tidy, dedicated engine room, I find Jeff Ritz doing teardown on a Cosworth DFV. Ten years now with Virtuoso, he's become Drnek's right hand man. While Ritz works on the DFV, I'm told that Virtuoso specializes in incorporating modern materials and engineering advances into these engines to lengthen time between overhauls and also improve reliability. "All of the engines that go through this room are then pre-run and dyno tested," says Drnek. "We use an engine parameter data logging system in conjunction with the dyno. Once the engine performance baseline is established, these engines are tracked throughout their service life by cylinder leakdown testing, digital bore scope photography, oil analysis, life cycle tracking and traditional inspections. It helps us detect problems before they turn into engine failures."

Ritz takes a few minutes away from the DFV to show me a crankshaft that came out of the



Ken Adolf fabricates a chassis fixture using a TIG welder in the VP weld room also equipped with MIG and oxy-acetylene.



▲ Prior to a 2006 Historic F1 event on the streets of Monaco, Scott Drnek and Bob Baker discuss performance of Baker's 1970 Brabham BT-33.



THIS COUPLE'S SYNERGY IN THE DOMAIN OF VINTAGE RACE CAR SERVICES AND SUPPORT HAS CREATED A PARTNERSHIP THAT HELPS KEEP LEGENDARY HISTORIC ENTRIES ON TRACK AND IN THE LIMELIGHT.

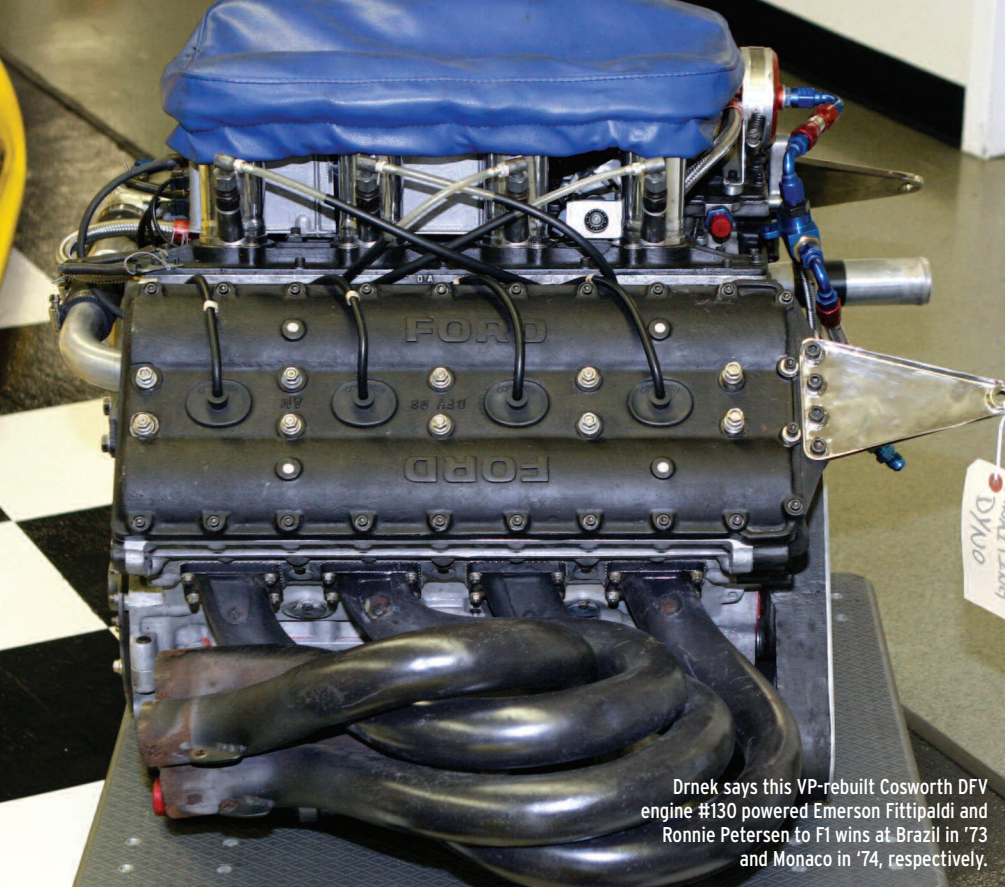
Scott Drnek and Stacey Toland's

VIRTUOSO PERFORMANCE

STORY AND PHOTOGRAPHY BY WILLIAM EDGAR



The Virtuoso Performance Crew.
Top row, L to R: Efen Romero, Jonny Verdugo, Rick Ferrera, Scott "Scooter" McNew, Charles Fernandes, Bill Johnson, Kerry Kiel, Jeff Ritz, Ken Adolf. Bottom row, L to R: Sarah Villanueva, Scott Drnek, Stacey Toland, "Fang" (Chief Canine), Jessica Ritz.



Drnek says this VP-rebuilt Cosworth DFV engine #130 powered Emerson Fittipaldi and Ronnie Petersen to F1 wins at Brazil in '73 and Monaco in '74, respectively.



Scott Drnek and Stacey Toland founded Virtuoso Performance in 1994.

Ferrari 312 flat-12 engine resting on the bench, while Drnek tells me about it.

"In the day," he says, "Ferrari drilled holes in the counterweights to put in slugs of bismuth, a very dense and heavy metal, in order to try to achieve a counter-weight balance. Even then, if you weigh the original Ferrari pistons and rods and then spin up the crankshaft, you'll see that they still couldn't get enough mass opposite the pistons to effectively counterweight it—one reason why they had so many engine failures. The modern crank that we made for the 312 looks exactly like this," Drnek goes on, "but its weight is managed much differently and, because we were able to reduce the reciprocating upper-end mass, the amount of lower-end counterweight needed isn't that much. The way Ferrari and others did it back then was the best they knew how, and, as revs escalated, engines became catastrophically self-destructive."

The lesson here is that it's difficult for many people first coming into vintage racing to understand the total difference of approach that existed when the older cars were raced in period. "Ferrari in the day," says Drnek, "would go to the track with three cars and 10 or 12 engines and change an engine every night! We have to be able to deliver to our customers engines that will last at least 15 or 20 hours, or perhaps more."

In another section of the shop Scooter McNew reassembles a repaired Hewland LG 500 transaxle that had eaten a ring and pinion. Rick Ferrera and Charles Fernandes tend to an ex-works Ginetta G4R, while Ken Adolf is in the early stages of putting a restored Elva MkVIII back together. Making the rounds, I also visit Adolf while he TIG welds a chassis fixture. In the front office, Drnek's daughter Jessica Ritz—she's married to Jeff—manages the shop's labor operation and records on VP's computers, increasingly vital tech tools crucial to this type of business where hundreds of tasks and thousands of parts have to be accounted for and efficiently accessed.

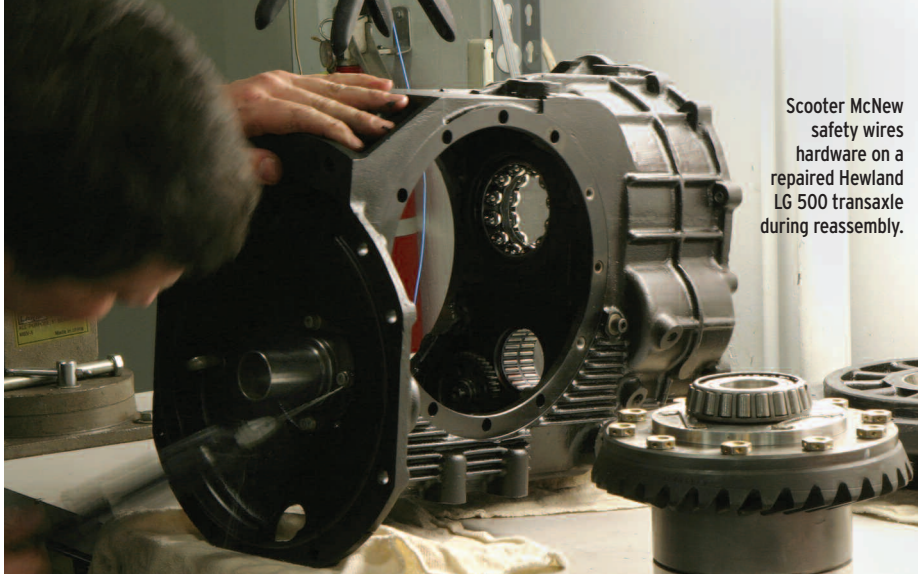
After breaking for lunch, we return to Virtuoso and hustle over to another



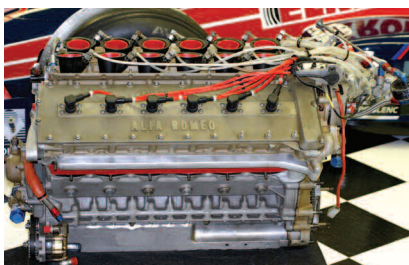
Cars in the shop, L to R: '86 Sachs-Joest Porsche 962 chassis #116; one-off '74 Sting GW1 Can-Am; '64 Elva Mk. 8-BMW Nerus M10; and '69 Lola T163 Can-Am chassis #19 being reassembled.



Serving customers as driver development tools, Virtuoso maintains a fleet of instructional race cars and racing Karts.



Scooter McNew safety wires hardware on a repaired Hewland LG 500 transaxle during reassembly.



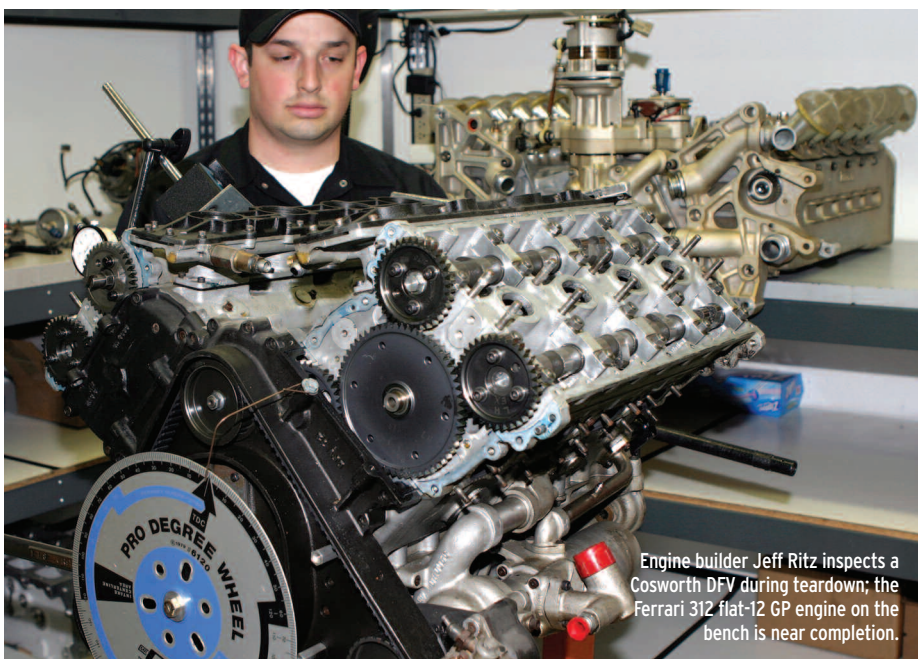
▲ Rebuilt and dyno-tested, a complex Alfa Romeo V12 Grand Prix engine is ready for installation.



Keeping as many resto stages in-house as possible, body sections of the 1984 Le Mans C2 class-winning Lola T-616 Mazda rotary are painted in VP's own spray booth.



VP boss Scott Drnek (standing) and Bill Johnson discuss repair options for a problem on the Ginetta G4R.



Engine builder Jeff Ritz inspects a Cosworth DFV during teardown; the Ferrari 312 flat-12 GP engine on the bench is near completion.

building bay. Cavernous, it houses stored race cars and VP's own fleet of seven shifter karts and six modified radio and computer data-equipped Formula Mazdas used for VP's customer driver development and as a way to extend the racing experience to their spouses and kids.

Drnek's philosophy is to spread the passion. He tells me that clients love the perk and, besides, it's good for business, which is easy to understand in building VP's customer base. Talking about these modified Formula Mazdas, Drnek says, "Choosing different combinations of chassis set-up, tire choice and aero devices, we can approximate the feel and handling of almost any vintage car." And these shifter Karts, as well as being a barrel of fun? "They're fabulous for learning car control," says Drnek.

Back in the main shop's twin bays there's some discussion going on about a fiberglass body section repaired long before VP got it. The exterior finish looks great—smooth, shiny paint—but turned over to reveal the underside there's obvious patchwork hurriedly done to keep the car active during its pro racing days when any scrap at hand might do as band-aid. "Frankenstein repairs" the guys here amusingly call them. Definitely not what a customer wants to remain in a restoration that can cost many times the original factory price of the car.

I'm back at Virtuoso the next morning to have another look around and talk more with Drnek. Yesterday I'd missed his distributor and magneto tester that's derived from aircraft technology, still an interest for him. "This machine," he says, "allows us to spin a distributor or magneto up to about 16,000 rpm, and we can make the test chamber simulate cylinder pressure. That way we can test and fix a mag right here in the shop without putting its, say, \$80,000 race car engine at risk as a magneto test bed."

Prior to my heading for home we're off to a favorite Japanese restaurant and all over the ahi and yellow tail. I'm seeing now that, being part of the many engrossing people in today's vintage race shops, Scott Drnek and Stacey Toland not only share a fascinating life together but also a business that supports what they both cherish.

"Every little thing," they say, "that can make these cars live a bit longer, we're going to do."

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