

POPS LOSI

THIS ISSUE, OUR SERIES OF INTERVIEWS WITH THE MOST FAMOUS PERSONALITIES IN RC MODEL CAR RACING CONTINUES WITH ONE OF THE NICEST PEOPLE IN THE BUSINESS AND THE FOUNDER OF TEAM LOSI - GIL 'POPS' LOSI SNR

Pops, as he's affectionately known, is one of the most relaxed, honest and nicest people you could ever meet. His love, dedication and enthusiasm of radio control model car racing is clear for all to see and has taken his cars and products to the very top of the sport. We caught up with him near his home in California.

Pops, how long has Team Losi been in business?
There's been Team Losi on racecars for many, many years, since the late sixties. We started in the RC retail business in 1980. At first it was a hobby with Gil Jr. and myself racing along with my other son Allen a little bit. The business started when we bought the famous Ranch Pit Shop at the end of 1980.

Why did you get involved in RC car racing?
I've always loved racing cars and like a lot of people I'm a frustrated racer. I raced real sprint buggies at Ascot and stuff like that. Having raced sprint buggies and some off road stuff, I was immediately interested when I saw the first Tamiya RC buggy that was based on a Volkswagen. These models were very similar to the buggies I did some full-size racing with. Everyone thinks my kids got me into RC, but I bought the first car and started racing with it, then I got my kids into it. Racing was fun and almost as exciting as racing the real thing, but a lot cheaper and you don't get hurt.

So you've actually raced RC cars yourself then?
I raced for a long time. I won some big championships. I raced in the 1985 Worlds, in fact, I won the 1985 World's warm-up race. I didn't do so well in the actual event because it's pretty hard to organize a race and race in it as well. I think I finished about fourth in the B main or something. I raced for a long time and I loved it.

Do you ever race now?
I race once in a while. At the ROAR Nationals we have an over 40's class, I call it the 'Legend's Class', but they call it others things and I normally do quite well and never usually finish worse than third and often take TQ. I can hold my own with the old guys!

Team Losi and Team Trinity seem to have a close relationship. How has this come about?
When it comes to business, we are two totally separate companies. We work with a lot of companies. There's no doubt that some of our best drivers such as Brian [Kinwald] and Matt [Francis] are Trinity drivers, but we also have a good racing relationship with other companies

such as Peak Performance, GM and Orion. We work together with a lot of different drivers and indeed Team Losi and Trinity have shared some noteworthy wins. The main thing is that when we get to a big race we all work together to win. Our relationship with Trinity is based more on my personal friendship with Ernie [Provetti] and sometimes we get along better personally than we do business-wise.



What plans do you have for the future?
By developing our World Champion XX-4 four-wheel-drive, XXX buggy, XXX-T truck, XXX-NT nitro truck and a new touring car, you can see that we are in the business for the long term. We've spent a lot of money on tooling and trying to make the very best cars we can.

What do you see as the future for RC car racing?
I wish I knew the answer to that. The last few years since Nineteen ninety-seven have been the biggest in Team Losi's history with the launch of the XX4, Street Weapon, the XXX car and trucks and off course winning both a 4WD and 2WD World's. You know back in the early nineties this was an unbelievable business, it's a lot more work now. You have to make a lot more products, everything has to be a lot better, but I think the business has a bright future. I think

people still and will always love cars and love to race. Obviously sedan [touring] car racing has taken off and is doing well, but the biggest part of our business is still off road. Off-road has established itself as the foundation of RC racing.

What other hobbies or interests do you have outside of RC cars?

It's all cars. I'm involved in an IRL Indycar team. I've been involved with Indycars since 1991 and I have the first one that I ever owned and which made the Indy 500 sitting in my garage at home as a souvenir. I try to get to as many of the races as possible, when my RC racing commitments allow.

So cars are your main interest?

Yes, I've put a collection of cars together. I love Street Rods and I have four of them. I built a restyled '33 roadster with billet aluminum independent suspension. I own a 1932 Chevy Roadster which is an award winning show car that's been converted to drive on the street. I have a 1947 Ford convertible with a big block fuel injected Chevy motor. I also own a pretty rare 1970 Trans Am which I bought new and have since restored. Yeah, I just love cars. I had a Ferrari but I sold it 'cause I never used it. I love all types of cars. I wish I could have one of everything. If I had the money and the room and a way to take care of them I would.

What have been the highlights of your time with Team Losi?

I need to answer this in a couple of different ways. You know in the early days my son Gil was one of the dominant racers and he used to win a lot of races. It was really exciting for me when Gil won the first IFMAR World Championships in 1985. This was particularly memorable as he won the first main pretty easily, but in the second one he had a radio problem and finished last. So, we had to put a whole new radio system in the car



Losi's latest 2wd car - the XXX

FACE TO FACE



for the last man and Gil had to start toward the back but he came through for the win. That was probably the most nervous I've ever been in my life. Another highlight for me was obviously winning our first World Championship with our own car in 1997 with Brian Kinwald. We'd come pretty close at Detroit and in England, and in Japan where we had five cars in the A-roads, but to finally win at the Ranch was something special.

I think it has been gratifying going around the United States and around the world and have people walk up to me and tell me nice things about how they've enjoyed our product and how they do well with them. It blows me away to go to these countries and see people wearing jackets and T-shirts with the logo name on them. I never thought that would happen in a million years. I think the experiences I've enjoyed with the people and all that is really more important

than the victories or the money or any of that stuff. If I were in business just for the money there's another business I've involved with that I could spend more of my time on and make a lot more money, but I just think that RC is the best thing. It's also been most gratifying to work with my immediate family and the handful of loyal employees that have been with me since the start in building this business while enjoying a family-like atmosphere.

There are quite a few drivers who have been at the top for a long time. Who do you see as the next Hinatake, Kinwald or Spidoni?

That's a tough one. There are probably ten or fifteen drivers who could come to the top, but I don't know if they'll have the dedication of those three guys. There are a lot of guys who have the talent to do it, but they may not have the dedication to get to the top. It takes a lot of hard work to get there. I don't know if those three are the most talented drivers in the world, but they are the best drivers.

Model Car Plus would like to thank Papa for his time and for his honest and frank answers which certainly show why Team Losi have done so well. We'd like to wish Papa and his team all the best for the future!

