



ERNIE PROVETTI

MODEL CARS PLUS CATCH UP WITH THE CEO OF TEAM TRINITY, MR ERNIE PROVETTI, IN CALIFORNIA AND TAKE THE CHANCE TO ASK HIM SOME SEARCHING QUESTIONS. HIS HONEST AND STRAIGHTFORWARD ANSWERS CERTAINLY GIVE A GOOD INSIGHT INTO THE HISTORY AND DAY-TO-DAY WORKINGS OF ONE OF THE WORLDS LARGEST RC CAR MANUFACTURERS

How long has Trinity been in business?

We've been in business for 20 years, since 1980.

Why and how did you get involved in RC cars and RC car racing?

I got involved in RC cars as an extension of slot cars. I used to be a world class slot car driver, World Champion, National Champion when I was a kid and I quit when I started college. When I got out of college the guy that is now the President of my company was in the slot car business and I took the proverbial two years off to find who I was and I started assembling cars for him and racing again. I was doin' a lot'a travelling 'n' racin', kinda like Brian Kinwald and David Spashett do now and I got really heavily into slot car racing. I started my own slot car company and we were doin' okay for a couple a years and then we saw the first radio controlled car, I believe it was by BoLink or Jomac, and we thought at that time that it was the future 'cause you didn't need a track to race - you could just do it anywhere. So basically on a whim we just shut the slot car business down and started building electric motors for RC. We had a little bit of knowledge from the slot cars and at that time RC was so primitive that they didn't really know anything about electric motors. Mike Reedy had just done the same thing a few years back, he'd made the move from slot cars and was working with Team Associated and we thought there was a good opportunity and we were hoping that there would be more growth and opportunity as an industry for radio control than slot cars. So we started with the motor business and it just grew from there. That was the actual start of Trinity.

Have you ever actually raced RC cars yourself?

I raced four cell electric cars, but I raced so long ago that it was before there were speed controllers and we used to work with resistors and I had a better feel for the resistors. Tony and Bob Emott, who used to work for me, went to the ROAR nationals and they took my car apart and when they came back they put it back together again with one of the first electronic speed controllers which was a Tekin. It was like an on/off switch and I could not drive the car, so I just got disgusted and quit. I haven't raced since!

Is it true that all Sanyo batteries for RC car use come into the USA through Trinity?

Yes, we are the "ONLY" authorised exclusive Sanyo hobby distributor for the United States. All the legitimate cells come in through us, but like any product in the world that's manufactured there are bootleg products. For example, Sony USA supposedly import all the Sony products,

but I'm sure that there's an entrepreneur in Hong Kong who's going to see an opportunity and bring in a small amount of Sony product, and bypass Sony USA. The same thing happens to me.

We don't suffer with a loss of sales due to this grey marketing, but the problem is, which a lot of people don't understand, the RBRA (Rechargeable Battery Recycling Association), we have a world-wide problem with Nicad (nickel cadmium) batteries and unless we recycle that the future of RC car racing could suffer. For instance in Sweden the government put a huge surcharge on Nicads because they don't have a recycling program in place so they just put on a duty which makes them extremely expensive.



I don't think the seal fees are being paid on the majority of the bootleg product. We pay 2 1/2 Cents on every sub C battery that we import from Sanyo and that goes to the organisation to educate people in recycling and try to get used batteries back from the hobby shops and recycle them. The bootleggers are bringing in small amounts of product, bypassing the system and I guess they're doin' alright, but in the long run they're hurting all of us and I think if people are smart in the USA the people will buy US brand cells, the European's will buy the European brand and the Asian's will buy the Asian brand. That's why there's three different colour shrink wraps on the cells, because Sanyo wanted to protect the system, but there's always a few people who don't really care.

Trinity and Losi have always had a good working relationship. How has this come about?

I've known the Losi family for about 15 years. I met Pops at the Anaheim World Championships, near Disneyland, on road, and I first met him when he had a table and was selling larger pinion gears for stock motors and refilling tyre traction cans, and he was a nice guy and shortly after

that he bought the Ranch Pit Shop and we just clicked from day one. They are a great family and when I come out to California I really feel at home. We stay in Pops' house and we just work really well together. He's probably the most honest guy in the industry and he's a real innovator.

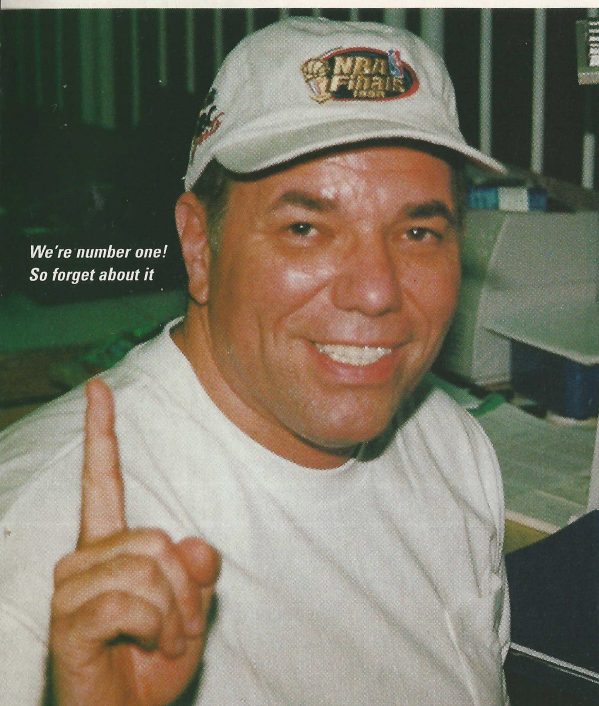
What are your plans for the future of Trinity?

That's a tough question. We try to be a proactive company rather than a reactive one, but in this industry the trends seem to go so quickly in either direction. We feel the next growth curve is Nitro, so we've spent time developing a line of after-market accessory parts for Nitro Cars. We have our own fuel line (Monster Horsepower Fuel) out which is selling very well and is starting to become the most widely used fuel in the United States. We have used quality items and have put on the bottle the percentages of Nitro and oil we are using...this is rare for fuel I guess.

We have also just negotiated an exclusive contract with Pico engines to be their North American Agent. The new Pico .12 and .15 engines are selling quite well in the USA. Our next step is to establish a race team for Nitro like we have done for electric racing. It should be real fun.

What do you see as the future for RC car racing?

I'd like to see the manufacturers act more like businessmen than hobbyists. If we are to have a growth curve in this industry we as manufacturers need to take control not so much over rules, but over promotion. We need to have more big events where we are not embarrassed by our industry or industry is not embarrassed by what we do. I'd like to get to the point of the CART formula where Penske and Haas and those people saw an organisation that was almost bankrupt, came in with some money, put some of the money they made back into their sport and propelled that into a juggernaut. For me Formula One and CART are the only two forms of racing that are run as a business and have been extremely successful. (Well I guess I should not leave out the most successful form of racing...Nascar...hal hal I just don't like Taxi-cabs running in a circle...sorry). I see this as the way forward for RC, but the money has to come from the manufacturers. They made the most money and it's almost their responsibility now to put that money back into the industry for growth for not only themselves, but also for the rest of the industry. And until we do that, we can't prolong this old hobbyist way of thinking from the Seventies that we're all caught in, just trying to win big races.



*We're number one!
So forget about it*

Do you prefer on or off road racing?

Personally I prefer on road racing. I think it's where I started and I don't think there's any more fun for me than watching Joel [Johnson], Masami [Hirosaka] and Spashett racing for eight minutes, wheel to wheel without touching anything and staying just a few inches from the track markers. From a business point of view, off road is much better for us with the Kinwald and the Losi team in the United States we are more geared towards those sales.

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

I have two other interests. I am trying to become an avid golfer. I am playing as much as I can, about twice a week. As a hobby I collect sports memorabilia. Game used basket ball memorabilia is pretty much my love and I'm considered the largest Michael Jordan game used equipment collector in the world. I have his North Carolina college shirts, both his rookie shirts; his Olympic jersey, basically quite a large collection.

Can you see either of these other interests developing into a business of any kind?

The memorabilia is a business, but not for me. A lot of people buy the stuff as an investment. For me I buy it as a piece of history and I like game used equipment, as I like to know that it was actually used in a particular game. Luckily the RC car business has been good enough me that I don't have to sell it and I'm just trying to build a collection to enjoy and hopefully pass on to my son.

What has been the highlight of your career in the RC business?

A few highlights come to mind. In the USA there was a myth that you could only buy electric motors from one source and most people bought their motors from this source. I was either crazy enough or naive enough to think that that shouldn't be and I flew to Japan with 1000 Dollars in my bank account and made a deal to import Kyosho motors, and at that time we were selling 200-300 motors a month and when I got to Japan I realised that I didn't have enough money to buy the motors. The owner of Kyosho, Mr Suzuki, who has since retired, trusted me and gave me 500 motors on account and a think it was seven or eight months later we were selling 40,000 motors a month. We then became the largest importer of Kyosho electric motors in the world, so that is obviously big in my mind as it started my business.



Trinity's new PK2 Pro - the fastest stock motor in the world?

Probably Joel winning in Romsey in 1987, where we qualified for that team as an add-on and not many people gave us a chance to win there and that was a huge win for us and then in 1992, a gain another breakthrough, most people assumed we were going to run an Associated car and we kept the Evolution 10 under wraps and it was the first race we ran it at and we beat everyone and won with our own car. That was a big thrill for me with Joel and [Jim] Dieter. And then in 1997 we won the two-wheel drive Worlds with Kinwald at the Ranch Pit Shop. The most recent highlight, of course was winning three World titles with David Spashett in England in 1998. David has been one of the biggest assets to Trinity that I could ever dreamed of getting. Not only is he a good guy and a great on road driver, but he flew in to help the team with their motors at the 1997 Off Road

Worlds and was a big factor in our win there and it was great working with him as a driver at Ontrack '98 in England.

It's always tough to win the Worlds. Team Associated are a great competitor and makes us want to try harder and drives us as it's always nice to be on top.

Everyone thinks the Trinity web site is very professional and you seem to be on there quite a lot answering questions and getting involved in discussions. Is this something you enjoy?

Yeah, I really do. I get on there every morning and I always take my laptop when I'm away. Like at the Off Road Worlds at the Ranch in '97 we ran a live chat with Kinwald and Pops Losi and it was very popular with each of them getting about 100 questions. I think the web site is really interesting. Now and then I get someone trying to wind me up, but for the most part I think it's good to listen to your customers and other people's customers and the good thing I think about the web is the person is not right in front of you so they are very honest and it's good to hear criticism as well as accolades and I like it! I do it in the morning for about an hour and then when I get home at night I answer some more questions.

There are quite a few drivers who have been at the top of the sport for some time. Who do you see as the next Joel Johnson, Brian Kinwald or David Spashett?

In off road even though he has been around for a while, I think Matt Francis hasn't yet enjoyed the success he deserves. One thing's happened or another, he has done great and won big races but I think you will see a lot more from Matt in the future. Billy Easton, Scott Hughes, Jason Coryl, Scott Brown, are all guys that are on the way up! In on road, Josh Cyrul has been really dominant in the US and is now the 'guy to beat'. He would be followed by Jon Orr, David Chester, Mike McMahon and others..

Just to give people an idea how big Trinity are, is there one particular product that you sell more of than anything else, and if so how many do you sell?

I say probably motors and batteries. Our motor sales would range from 30,000 - 40,000 pieces a month depending on the time of year and the batteries, I don't know what we do in cells, but I do know that we do over six million US Dollars worth of business with Sanyo and Panasonic per year. I don't know how that translates into cells, but it's quite a bunch.

We'd like to thank Mr Provetti for being so open and honest with his answers, which have given us all a look into the world of Team Trinity.