

WALK THROUGH THE COMPETITION

BY AINSLEY JACOBS
PHOTOS BY BRIAN HOGAN

SAUL WALKER II HAS BEEN THERE AND
DONE THAT IN FLEX-A-LITE OPEN COMP



WALK THROUGH THE COMPETITION

If there's one thing that's true about Flex-A-Lite Open Comp racer Saul Walker, II, it's that his "been there, done that" experience has allowed him to develop a calm, meditative state of mind when he's at the track or just going about his day to day life.

Walker is a third generation racer who takes keeping the family tradition alive quite seriously. His grandfather, Richard Adkins, Sr. and his uncle, Richard Adkins, Jr. were responsible for instilling in him a love of drag racing and a passion for performance. The two Adkins men raced Stock cars in NHRA, and Walker followed in their footsteps. "If you can make a Stocker, run, fly, and be competitive, you can make anything run. That was their motto," Walker remembered of his early days. What really inspired him, however, was the challenge of taking whatever he had and making it run as fast as he possibly could. "It's a slower road to travel, but it's the travel that's well worth it."

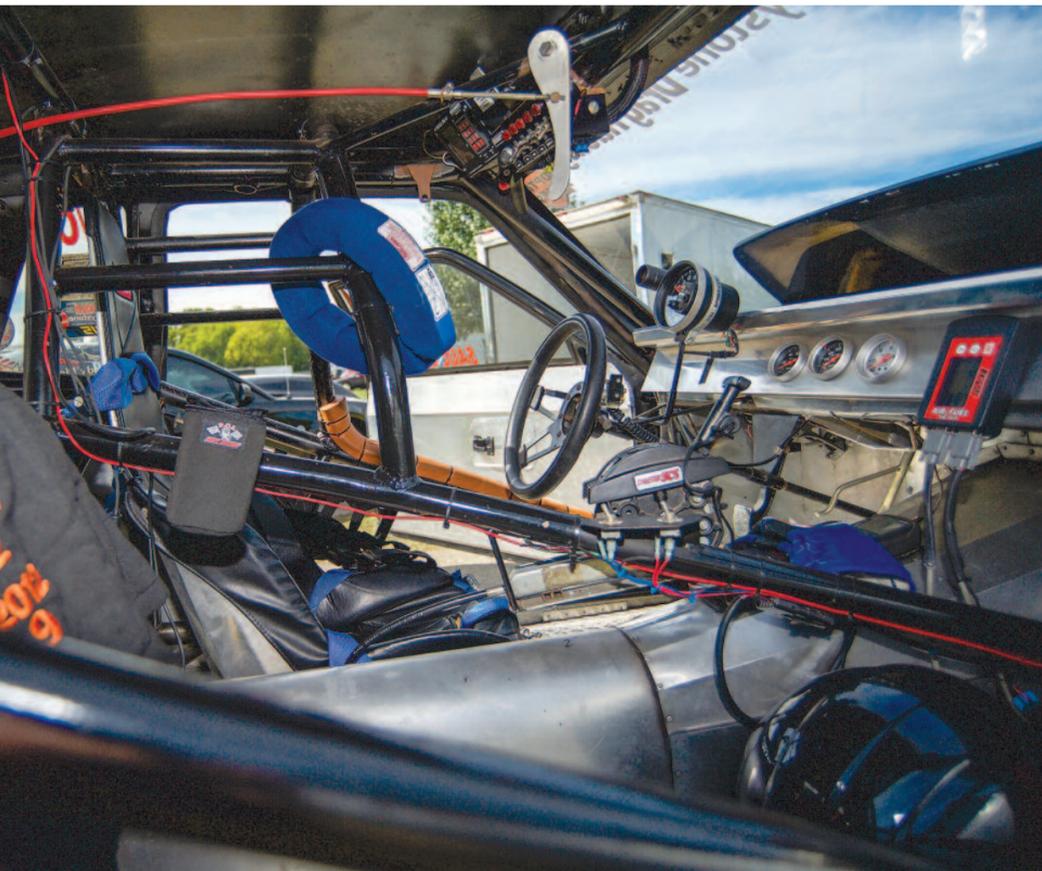
In his early days of racing, Walker campaigned an orange, stock-suspension, small tire '85 Ford Mustang. He ran on the NHRA circuit from the mid '90s up through the early '00s, and was quite successful in his endeavors. "I had a small block 302, and it took a long time to get that car to run in the 10.90 index," confessed Walker, "but once we got it there, it would run all day." What he learned along the way was invaluable, whether it was about how to make

horsepower or about life.

During '04, while at a test session at Atco Raceway in his home state of New Jersey, Walker's Mustang met an untimely end. "I barrel rolled it, and completely destroyed the car," recalled Walker. Despite his orange Mustang being totaled, he was able to walk away from the wreck without serious physical injuries. The challenge of getting back into the swing of things, mentally, was not an easy one, but Walker's excellent support group of friends and family convinced him to give racing a go.

As he had previously been focused on racing at Atco almost every weekend for their local points series, it was the "positive criticism from friends to try a new challenge" that spurred Walker on to investigate other options. "Larry Geddes asked me if I thought I could run with the Open Comp guys, and my answer was 'yes', so he asked what was stopping me," Walker said. When Walker found NMRA, he felt as if he had found his new home.

Walker waited for a while, searched around a bit, and bought his current '93 Mustang in '06. "The car belonged to a minster in North Carolina," he shared. A sticker, which had been placed on the car prior to the sale, proclaimed "Body Piercing Saved My Life" and featured a picture of Jesus' hand with a nail going through it convinced Walker, who is deeply religious and spiritual, that he had made the right choice in his new ride. "That sticker is still on the car today, and on the back is the Serenity prayer."



Shortly after taking ownership of his Mustang, Walker handed it off to Gene Giroud at Wild Rides Race Cars in Farmingdale, New Jersey. Giroud looked the car over, and Walker admits he was not happy. "I told him that if I'm going to get back to driving, he needed to do whatever he needed to do to get it right and give the car his blessing," laughed Walker, whose new tube-chassis car was originally equipped with a set of big slick tires.

"When I rolled the orange car, I told myself I'd never go back to another small tire car," proclaimed Walker, but eventually, his love for a challenge took over. "We thought

it would go faster with a smaller tire, so we put a set of Mickey Thompson 10.5" tires on it, and it sure did."

Originally, the new-to-him Mustang featured a 351 Windsor motor with a production block bored .60-over, Edelbrock Victor Junior heads, and an Edelbrock Victor intake. "It was a consistent 9.60s car. There was no trick to it, it was like building a Stocker," Walker explained of his early days with his now familiar companion. "It really taught me to pay attention to certain details that matter – things like valve lash, timing, even what type of oil we were using."

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"It took me a while to get well-acclimated to the new car," Walker stated. Although the calm, humble man may not have been as comfortable as he once had been behind the wheel, his performance parlayed a different story – one of a successful, talented, and driven man who is a serious contender with a positive attitude. That same year, Walker finished tenth in NMRA Open Comp championship points. "That's what fueled me to keep coming back and to get better," he added. "I wanted to run up that ladder."

Bio: Saul Walker I I

Driver/Owner: Saul Walker I I **From:** Trenton N.J.
Car: 1993 Mustang LX **Class:** Open Comp for its Family Environment
Crew: Sue, Gianitta Lim (Mom), Mattie Espeu, June (Brother), Fallun, Jeremy, GOD as my Co-pilot
Sponsor: Wild Rides, F.P.S., Comp Cams, Vertex Spark plugs, F.O.P. Lodge 96



Get better he did. The following year, Walker moved up to finish eighth in points for the season. In '08, he finished sixth, in '09 he was fifth, and in '10, he improved significantly and finished second overall for the season in Open Comp.

Unfortunately, Walker hurt the Mustang's motor in 2011 and wasn't able to get it repaired fast enough to come back in time to race. After a year off, however, he made his comeback. "I was feeling anxious and nervous about getting back in the saddle because I had taken a year off," he admitted. "I had a lot of fear about whether I



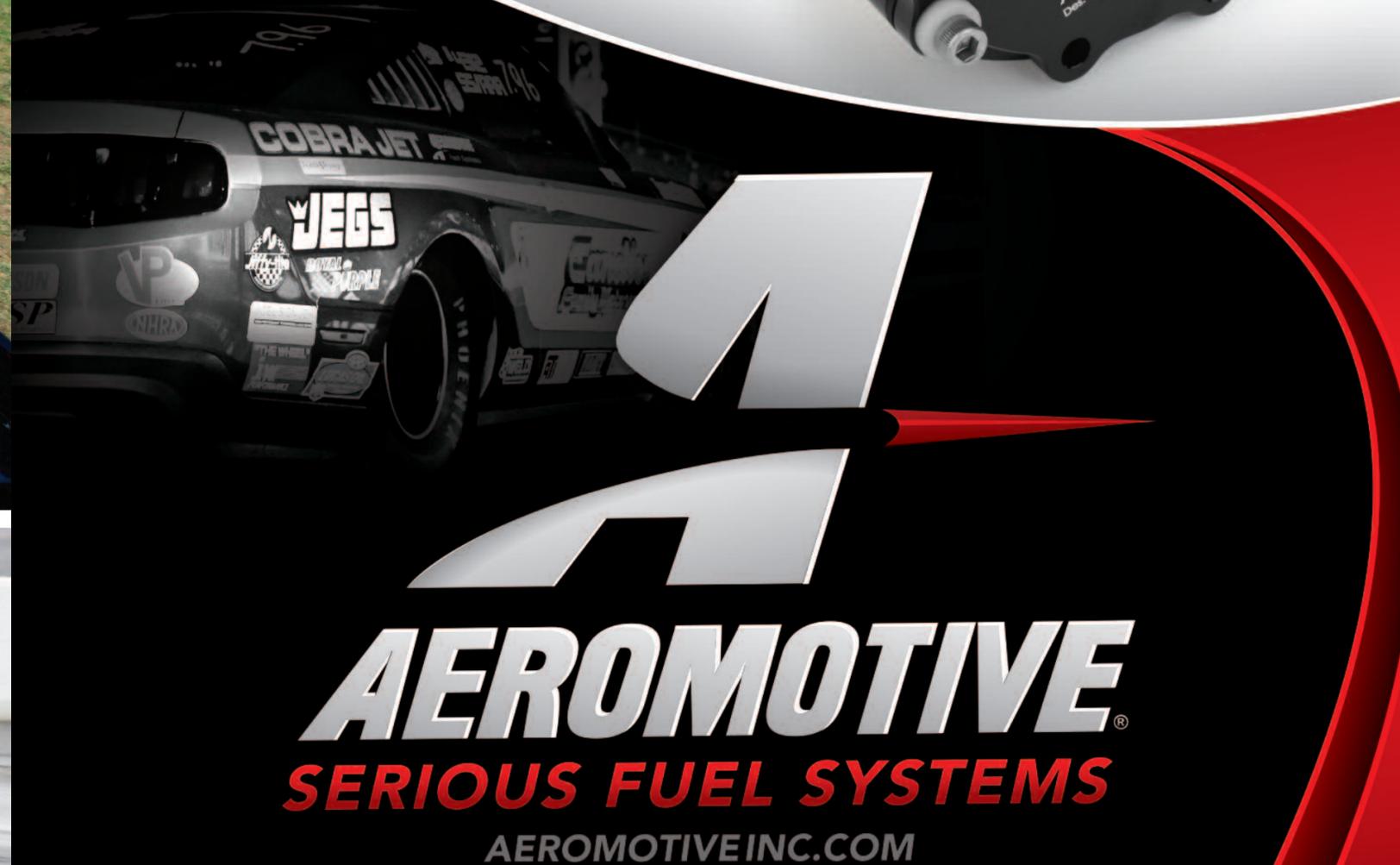
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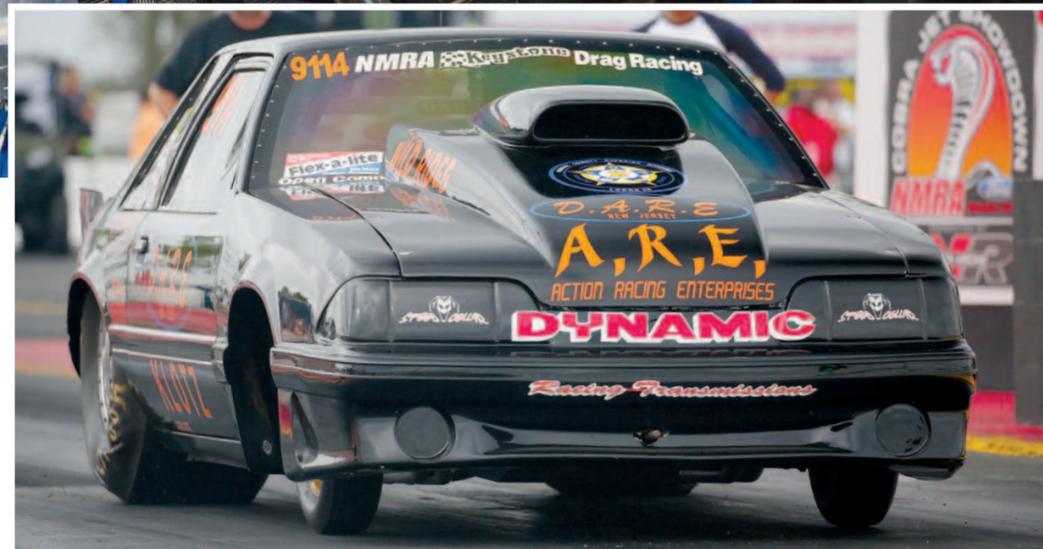
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could still compete, and mentally, it was really tough." Fortunately, Walker's previous positivity had garnered him a large fan club and support group of fellow racers, and his Open Comp brethren were able to calm his nerves and help him get back in his rhythm. "Anyone can jump in, shift gears, and go down the track, but you need consistency, and a positive influence from fellow competitors and true friends to do well," he added.

Health issues plagued Walker in 2013, and once again, he found himself on the outside looking in. "Most drivers overlook the human factor," he said eloquently. "Ask yourself, are you in the mental and physical condition to compete? If not, you must realize it's not worth the risk of hurting yourself or someone else. If you're not mentally prepared, these cars can kill you in less than a second. Why go out if you're not ready?"

Fully recovered, both physically and mentally, Walker returned to NMRA Open Comp competition in 2014 and finished eleventh overall in points. Despite not breaking into the top ten, Walker received an honor that was truly priceless – he was selected by his peers as the NMRA Sportsman of the Year. "That in itself was touching, and emotional for me, because it meant my fellow racers thought of me in a good way, and respected me," said Walker, who was truly appreciative of having been chosen.

For his 2015 season, Walker was ready to step up his game more than ever. His significant other, Sue, also played a key role in helping him prepare. "I was putting in long days between work, getting the car ready, and traveling to events, but Sue had me eating the right food to build energy and get my mind relaxed. She's the love of my life, and she does so much to keep me focused," he said proudly of the woman who is the driving force behind his driving career. Their efforts paid off, and Walker wound up seventh at the conclusion of the NMRA year.

With the peace and quiet that comes with the off-season, Walker took advantage of the down time and went through his car with a fine-toothed comb. "We found some things wrong that we're going to fix for 2016, and with the help of Gene at Wild Rides checking the car over nose-to-tail, we're getting it done," he said. The current 388 ci Windsor small block motor, which was the culmination of a combination of work from Simonek Performance, Ford Performance Solutions, and several others, will receive a refresh as well.

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Walker has been running in Open Comp practically its inception, and he has no desire to leave the class he has come to know and love. For 2016, he'll be chasing the point's championship once again, and the professional approach that the seasoned racer takes to his events practically ensures he'll succeed in meeting his goal.

Walker's love for Open Comp stems primarily from the "family" atmosphere that the class attracts. "My initial draw to Open Comp was the challenge of man against man, machine against machine, but I've realized no matter who you are, or where you are, you will get the help that you need. We all come away with handshakes, hugs, and laughter. We hang around for each other and root each other on, and that's what makes me such a huge fan of the class," he professed.

Walker also finds enjoyment in racing in such a highly competitive class, one which he says is "a driver's class" where it isn't unusual to have the top fifteen or so contenders can be separated by mere thousandths of a second. Open Comp entries have grown over the years, and Walker believes "that's a great thing for the class, and now, there are more new drivers coming into the class than ever. We all learn through experience - that's the greatest teacher there is."

He credits much of his success to his faith in God, and his superstitions which help to keep him focused. He uses incense to ward off negative feelings, negative thoughts, and to put his mind and body at ease. "When the mind is at rest, it calculates better and is more acute to things," said the sagely wheelman. "When we're stressed, I light incense. It has its own essential order. It's something old that many cultures and religions have used for generations."

With so many years of experience under his belt, it's no surprise that Walker has such a relaxed demeanor. Intrinsic to his personality, he enjoys the sport of drag racing tremendously but does so with an inner calm that inspires others to follow suit and to better themselves along the way. He's found his peace, and it just so happens to be on the drag strip. ■



SPECIFICATIONS

Car Weight	2,510 (w/ Driver)	Camshaft	Comp Cams (custom by Chris Ryan)	Front Suspension	Strange Engineering Spindle Struts
Chassis Modification	Tube Chassis with 4-link Suspension	Intake Manifold	Edelbrock Super Victor 2828	Rear Suspension	Strange Engineering Double Adjustable
Chassis/Roll-Cage Builder	Wild Rides Race Cars	Power Adder	N/A	Steering	Chassis Engineering
Engine	Ford Windsor	Ignition System	MSD 7AL-3	Wheels	Weld Racing Magnum 2.0
Total Displacement	388ci	Fuel System	Holley Ultra Black	Tires	Mickey Thompson front / 33 x 10.5 rear
Builder	Simonek Performance/Ford Performance Solutions	Headers/Exhaust	Custom by Wild Rides Race Cars	Brakes	Strange Engineering
Block	Ford Sportsman W-Block	Transmission	Dynamic Racing Mighty Mite C4	Best ET	8.31
Crankshaft	Eagle Ultra Lite	Torque Converter	Dynamic/TCT 8-inch	Best MPH	161
Rods	GRP Aluminum Rods	Rear-End	Strange Engineering 4.30	Best 60 FT	1.19
Pistons	Diamond Pistons	Axles	Strange Engineering 40 spline		
Cylinder Heads	Edelbrock Victor GV1 by FPS.	Gears	Strange Engineering 4.30		

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