



Courtesy of Michael Reynolds

Bar and Driver

Orange County bankruptcy lawyer Michael Reynolds has become a prize-winning driver.

By Shane Nelson
Daily Journal Staff Writer

Orange County bankruptcy lawyer Michael B. Reynolds piled up a number of speeding tickets as a teenager.

Already an aspiring attorney, he contested one of them while still a senior at Fresno High School and managed to get a police officer to admit under oath that he had no idea how fast Reynolds was driving. Insisting there was no evidence against him, Reynolds urged the hearing officer to dismiss the case.

“Bob Wiens was a very nice man,” recalled Reynolds, who’s now a partner at Snell & Wilmer LLP. “And he told me, ‘You’ve done a terrific job defending yourself, Mr. Reynolds. ...But I’ve seen you in traffic court too many

times. You’re getting this ticket.’”

That violation, one of several relatively recent infractions, resulted in a 30-day suspension of Reynolds driver’s license.

“I crashed my car more than I should have as a teenager, and I had a lot of speeding tickets,” he admitted, chuckling. “There were also some stop signs I ignored, thinking the law didn’t really apply to me. The state of California had other ideas.”

As a kid, Reynolds said he “loved going fast” and grew up idolizing Mario Andretti, the legendary driver who won not only the Indianapolis 500 and Daytona 500 but also a Formula One World Championship. Reynolds stayed up late to watch rebroadcasts of Andretti’s Indy races and read regular recaps of the driver’s outings in “Road & Track.” He also



Juliane Backmann / Special to the Daily Journal

Michael Reynolds, leaning on his street-legal McLaren 650S Spider, stands in front of another of his street-legal supercars — the Lotus Evora Sport 410 GP Edition.

spent a fair bit of time emulating his hero.

“I had a little tractor that I pedaled around, and I raced on that” Reynolds explained. “I had a big wheel, and I raced around on that. The day after I learned how to ride a bicycle, I raced on that and cracked my jaw crashing into a telephone pole.”

It wasn’t until 2007, however, that Reynolds drove for the first time on a racetrack, roaring around the 6-mile Spring Mountain Motor Resort course in a street-legal Corvette ZO6.

“It was an incredible adrenaline rush,” he said. “And I was hooked. That was my new addiction.”

The experience was part of a



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race driving school Reynolds enrolled in not long after buying the supercar, figuring he could use a little instruction on how to operate the powerful vehicle. The attorney said coursework there required him to reconsider his ideas about good driving.

“Things we do that make us better drivers on the street — many of them make you worse on the racetrack,” Reynolds explained. “It’s a very different discipline, so you have to unlearn a lot.”

He moved on to racing events in 2013, competing for the first time in a Lotus Cup USA series race at Willow Springs International Raceway north of Los Angeles. Reynolds finished fourth in a field of more than 20 amateurs, making good on one of his pre-race objectives.

“My number one goal was not to crash,” he said. “My second goal was not to finish last.”

Friend Tom MacMillan, a fellow Lotus Cup U.S. competitor and the owner of Allied Plastics Inc. in Bell, said Reynolds is an extraordinarily determined competitor behind the wheel.

“The guy’s stamina is unbelievable,” MacMillan said, adding that it’s not uncommon for drivers to lose “two pounds of sweat” in 30 minutes of racing on hot days.

“It’s incredibly, physically taxing driving a race car,” he continued. “The entire time your entire body is reacting to the g-forces.”

And race cars aren’t loaded with a lot of plush amenities, according to Reynolds, who noted the carpet-free floorboards in his Lotus racers reach 170 degrees.

“They’re like inhospitable alien landscapes,” he said.

Still, Reynolds is at home in the high-performance environment, approaching top race speeds of 160 miles per hour. He has amassed an impressive collection of results since joining the Lotus series in 2013, winning 25 times in 72 starts and taking home the series championship in 2015.

“He’s also a really straight shooter,” MacMillan added. “If he makes an illegal pass and realizes it, he’ll let off and let you back by.”

Former legal adversary James E. Till, who first opposed Reynolds in a Chapter 11 bankruptcy

several years ago, said his friend pursues the law with similar integrity.

“Michael’s the kind of attorney you want to compete against,” Till said. “He’s very sophisticated, and he’s very strategic, so you’re going to have to bring you’re A game. But you also know he’s not going to play dirty. He’s going to play within the rules, because he takes his standing as an officer of the court very seriously.”

Snell & Wilmer partner Eric S. Pezold said Reynolds is a pretense-free, consummate professional with a reputation among judges and the bar for being remarkably levelheaded.

“He doesn’t get rattled,” Pezold said of his colleague. “And he’s probably the hardest working guy in our office.”

Typically spending every other weekend racing during the March to November Lotus Cup season, Reynolds, a married father of two daughters, has managed to avoid serious injury since the start of his amateur racing career, but there have been some accidents, including a rough T-boning by

another competitor in 2016 and losing the entire roof of his car shortly before winning a race a few years ago.

“I’d never had the chance to try jumping out of a burning car until last June,” Reynolds added, describing a fire he escaped last summer at Sonoma Raceway. “I can tick that off my bucket list now.”

Reynolds said the focus necessary to properly drive a race car is the pursuit’s most appealing aspect, adding that trying cases at times requires similar concentration and attention to detail. Strapping into a race car also provides the attorney with a calming escape.

“If your mind wanders when you’re driving a race car, you could kill yourself,” Reynolds said.

“That level of focus appeals to me; it helps me get away from all the other stuff,” he continued. “I’m not worried about what argument my opponent is going to put in their reply brief. ... I’m just completely absorbed in the moment.”