

LIFE IS GOOD



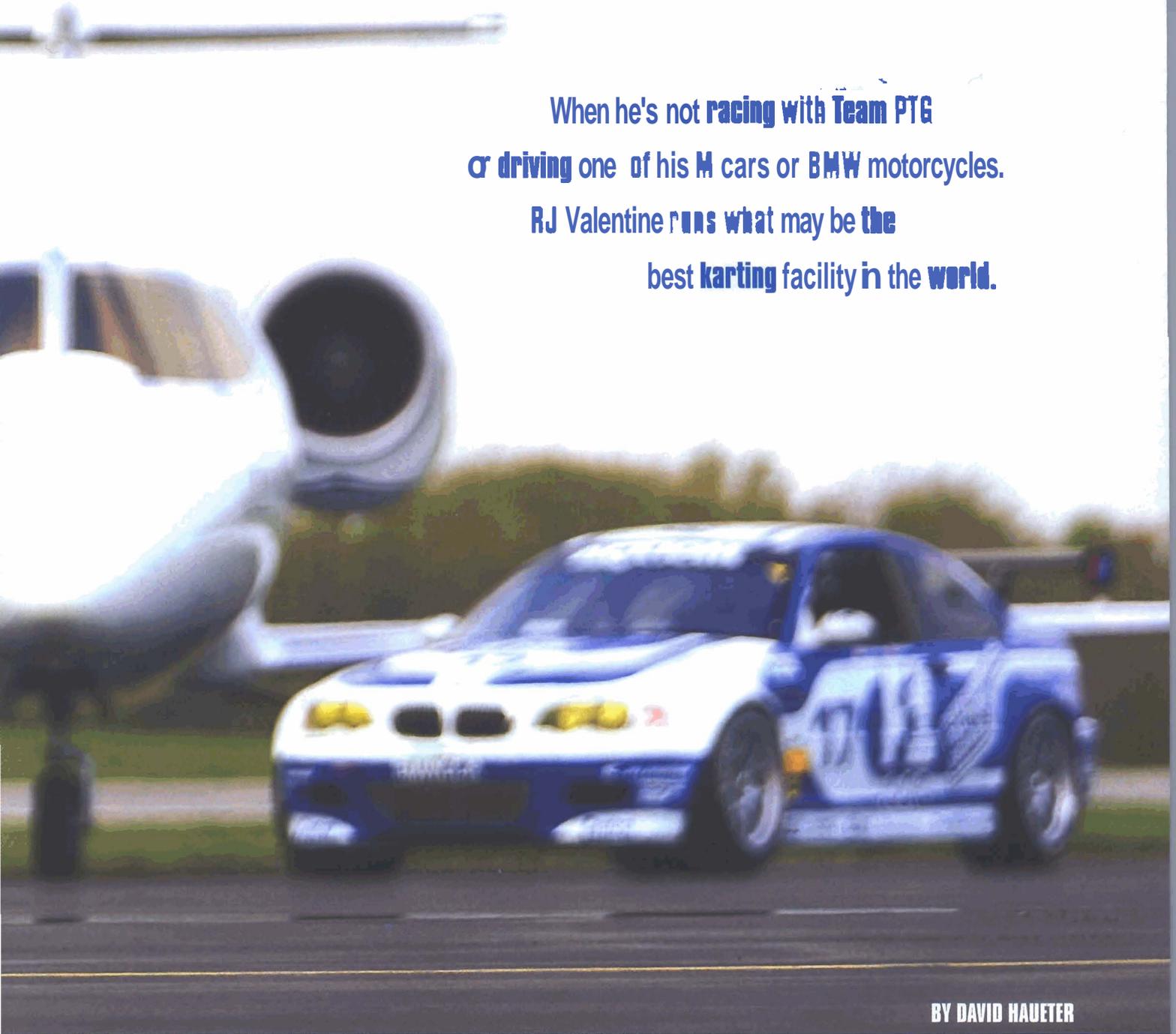
RJ Valentine's wife, Penny, has a description that sums him up nicely: "If it doesn't make noise or have tires, RJ doesn't want any part of it." For the past three decades, cars, motorcycles, and racing have been a big part of his life, both in his business and on the personal side. CCA Boston Chapter members may be familiar with RJ through his F1 Boston karting complex, and he has become known to

BMW racing fans in North America as a driver with Team PTG in the Grand Am Rolex SportsCar Series. *Roundel* got to know RJ a little better with a visit to his stomping grounds in Braintree, Massachusetts, home to his business, his karting facilities, and a large collection of very fast machinery that he drives on the street.

Wow, I hope I have this much energy when I'm 61 years old! That was my first

reaction when RJ Valentine strode out of his office at the MBA Group to meet me. Valentine has a spring in his step and a spark in his eye that is usually found in men 30 or 40 years his junior, and he lights up even more when the subject of cars and racing comes up. That doesn't take long, as his office is filled with racing memorabilia from throughout his career; old helmets, pictures, and trophies line the

When he's not racing with Team PTG
or driving one of his M cars or BMW motorcycles,
RJ Valentine runs what may be the
best karting facility in the world.



BY DAVID HAUETER

office, and his bike hangs right on the wall next to his desk. That bike is one of the reasons for his abundant energy; he's a hardcore bicyclist, putting in many miles every week to stay in shape.

Valentine is a local. Born and raised in Dorchester, he worked his way through college at Suffolk University by working three different jobs and ultimately started his MBA Group company in 1969. Today, the

MBA Group is a \$500,000,000 business conglomerate that now has around eighteen different segments, from insurance and real estate to business management software, jet aviation, and the karting business. Valentine's first taste of racing came at Daytona in 1975, when he attended the 24 Hour race. "I stayed up for the whole 24 hours," he says. "I went to every angle and every corner and thought to myself that these guys doing this must

have really big balls." Bitten by the racing bug, Valentine bought a race-prepared Corvette and joined the SCCA, competing in regional and national events.

Eager to move up to faster cars, Valentine progressed up the racing ladder, making his pro debut in the IMSA GTO series in 1978. Since then, he has racked up over 340 starts driving in various series and cars, from Trans-Am — where he spent six seasons —

F1 Boston is appealing on any day, but especially one where clouds threaten any driving plans for the outdoor track.



to prototypes in World Sportscar and Grand-Am. In 2004, Valentine competed against BMW, driving a Porsche 911 GT3 RS for The Racer's Group, and it was during that season that he had the first discussion with Tom Milner about driving an M3 this year. "I've always admired Tom Milner for his preparation, and he really has the will to win," said Valentine last year. "At Mont Tremblant last year, we came in second behind PTG, and Chris Gleason and I went down and congratulated Tom. At the end of October, he asked Chris and me if we were interested in driving for him this year. I said absolutely! Tom runs his team the same way we run our businesses—we don't like to come in second in anything we do."

Going from a Porsche 911 GT3RS to an M3 makes Valentine uniquely qualified to compare the cars from a racer's perspective, and he found he favors the BMW. "The Porsche is a durable car, but every time I got out of it, I felt I had been in a log-rolling contest," says Valentine. "It's a difficult car to drive, but with the BMW, you're talking balance—it's an easier car to drive." Valentine was teamed with various PTG drivers last season, with his best result a second-place finish with co-driver Kelly Collins at Laguna Seca.



One of F1 Boston's indoor tracks is nearly as much fun—more, if it's raining—as the outdoor track.

Besides his role as a driver, the addition of Valentine to the PTG team gave them the sponsorship dollars to run four M3s for many of the races, which put them in a much better position to compete with a plethora of Porsches for the manufacturers' and team championships. The #16 and #17 PTG M3s both wear the colors and logo of Valentine's F1 Air, a private aircraft management and charter firm—and a great fit as a sponsor for professional sports-car racing.

Driving a BMW race car on the track is also a good fit for Valentine, as he has several BMW road cars in his garage, including a 2003 M3, a 2002 M5, a beautiful original 1984 European-model M6, and a 1995 750iL, all of which get driven. Also in his garage are a 1992 Mercedes 500E, a 2003 Porsche 911 GT2, a 1996 Porsche 911 twin-turbo, a new Porsche Cayenne Turbo, a 1996 Dodge Viper Venom 650 by Hennessey, and a 2003 Dodge Viper Competition Coupe. A two-wheel fan,

RJ Valentine transitions off the banking at F1 Outdoors.

COURTESY RJ VALENTINE



Valentine has a couple of K1200 LTs, a 1998 K1200 RS, a 2003 Ducati ST4S, a 2001 Ducati 996 Jon Fogarty edition, and a 1994 Harley-Davidson Heritage Softail. He also purchased the Yokohama Advan-sponsored PTG M3 that competed in a few races last season, just to own for the fun of it and display at F1 Boston.

Remember Penny Valentine's description? We think she was on to something there.

Valentine's fascination with speed and an eye for marketing also led him into the karting business. In five years, F1 Boston (www.f1boston.com) has become the premier karting facility in North America, and one of the best—possibly the best—in the world. The formula for such achievement involved seeing what was already out there, and improving on it. "We visited karting tracks all over Europe around seven or eight years ago to see what others were doing," says Valentine, "and I wasn't particularly impressed with the whole experience—it was arrive and drive, and that was it—so I thought we could do it better here in the U.S. Most of the European tracks spent between one and two million on their facilities, and we spent around ten million on ours."

That money went into the main facility which has two indoor tracks, as well as F1 Outdoors, an outdoor track that offers a range of configurations with up to seventeen different turns.

One reason F1 Boston is such a standout



The karting track at F1 Outdoors measures 1.3 miles, with up to seventeen turns in various configurations.

COURTESY RJ VALENTINE

facility is that they target a different type of customer than typical karting facility. While anyone can walk into F1 Boston and do some karting, the majority of Valentine's business comes from corporate traffic, from Fortune 500 companies that want to take an executive team or group of employees to something besides the usual golf outing. To cater to those corporate clients, F1 Boston not only has the karting tracks, equipment, and gear, they also have conference rooms, banquet rooms, and the Ascari restaurant that overlooks the indoor track. "Eighty percent of golfers are there

for social reasons or to communicate with clients," says Valentine. "We mix employees together in an endurance karting event, and they have to work together. That transcends back to the company—what happens here with teamwork should happen back at work in the company."

Many of the companies that use F1 Boston for events come back as repeat customers, and many people who participate in corporate events have so much fun that they come back on their own for more. F1 Boston also caters to the more hardcore racing crowd; they have the resources to

RJ Valentine joined Team PTG in 2005, the #17 M3 wearing his F1 Air company sponsorship.



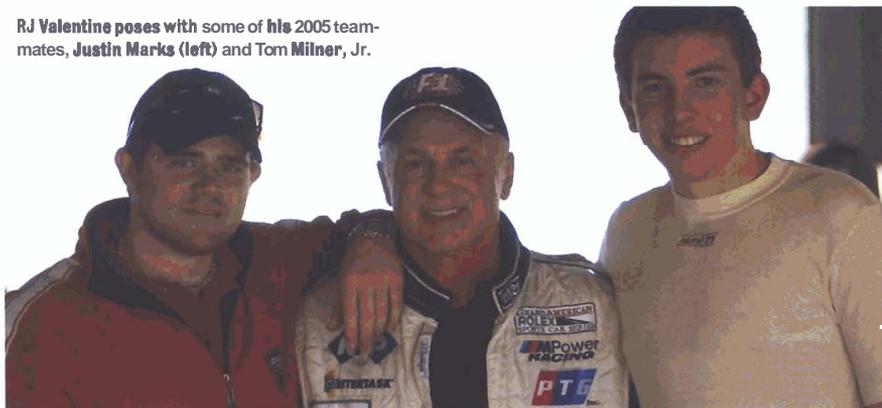
STAN AM



BOB CHIPMAN

RJ Valentine sits focused and ready to race in the PTG M3.

RJ Valentine poses with some of his 2005 teammates, Justin Marks (left) and Tom Milner, Jr.



CHIPMAN

move people up through the karting ranks within their own facility.

Valentine's formula is working, as there are now over 3,500 drivers competing in weekly karting leagues, as well as a new league school for kids. "We started the program for kids about two and a half years ago, and close to 1,500 kids have participated," says Valentine. "They come in and get trained, then get into a league, and their parents buy them a kart. We have kids now that have come through the program that we feel could step up into a formula car and be fast."

To that end, F1 Boston is also a host for the East Coast finals of the Red Bull Driver Search program, which has the goal of getting American drivers back into Formula 1. To provide a full range of services, Valentine is also president of SSC Northeast, which provides a complete line of karts, as well as Darts, race preparation, and maintenance.

Being a serious journalist, I of course had to try out the karting facilities at F1 Boston, and Valentine was gracious enough to let me try out four different karts of varying horsepower on both the indoor and outdoor tracks. I grew up driving a go-kart on dirt tracks in my parents' back yard, which seemed pretty fast at the time—but that was also the last time I was in a vehicle like this. Valentine joined me, and we started out in the six-horsepower karts at the indoor track, which seemed pretty tame.

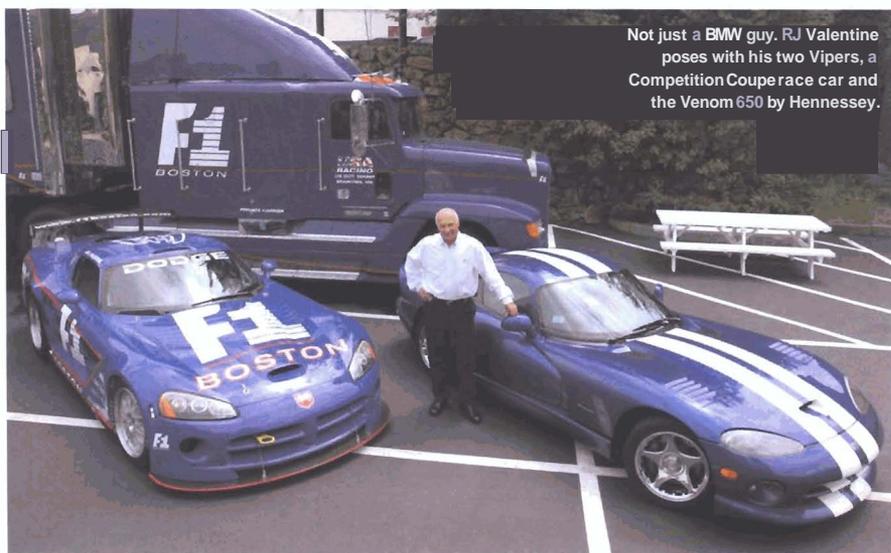


RJ Valentine poses with just a few of his BMW road cars and bikes, a beautiful 1984 European M6, a K1200 RS and a 2003 M3. To the left of the M3 is a K1200 LT.

But even moderately powerful karts are pretty fast on a short track, and it took several laps and some advice from Valentine to start getting around quickly. From the slower kart we moved up into the faster thirteen-horsepower karts on the indoor track, which were much quicker and required some lifting off the throttle and braking to get smoothly around the track.

One thing about karts that takes some getting used to is that you **straddle** the steering column, with the brake on the left side and the throttle on the right. With no braking sensitivity built up in my left foot, it took some time and practice to start getting the car slowed down smoothly; for the first few laps I was putting way too much pressure on the brake pedal, so I was upsetting the balance of the car and slowing down too much.

After an hour or so of karting indoors, we headed to F1 Outdoors. My first drive was in a Rimi nine-horsepower racing kart, which is lighter than the indoor karts, and again I followed Valentine around to learn the line. Valentine is incredibly fast around the track, and I was feeling bog-slow compared to the times he was **turning**, but what a blast this was! For the final session of the day, we took out the **Rotax RM1**, which has **32** horsepower and a two-speed sequential **gearbox**; this kart can reach close



Not just a BMW guy, RJ Valentine poses with his two Vipers, a Competition Coupe race car and the Venom 650 by Hennessey.

to 100 mph on the straight. For someone not used to going that fast **really** close to the ground, it takes some time to get acclimated; these karts have a power-to-weight ratio similar to Le Mans prototypes!

I left my karting experience at F1 Boston with two distinct impressions: one, that I have to get back here as much as I can, as it is incredibly fun and addictive. The other is that I realized how much karting on a regular basis would improve me as a driver, because the skills you use on the kart track

are the same skills you use on the track in a road car. A kart lets you hone your car-control skills much more than a track day does, as you are sliding around and correcting a lot more than you would in a road car. Karting also gives you that left-foot braking sensitivity that could come in handy, and lets you use muscles that you won't use in a road car, so it's a good workout.

Besides, as RJ Valentine himself might point out, karting is definitely something that makes noise and has tires! •