

THURSDAY
MAY 15, 2003

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A WEEKLY PUBLICATION OF THE DAYTON DAILY NEWS

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Viper infects Butler Twp. trustee

*Joe Ellis a national league champ
for the powerful Dodge sports cars*

By VALRYN BUSH
For the Dayton Daily News

BUTLER TWP., Montgomery County — On the racetrack or in life, Joe Ellis says the secret

to having it all is really giving just that little bit more.

You beat the competition by seconds, not hours; by inches, not miles; and there's only one person certain to defeat you.

"The only thing that holds people back is themselves and I've never held myself back," he said. "I may not be the best person out there, but I'm the one that finishes."

Ellis was finishing the last weekend in April at Mid-Ohio Sports Car Course in Lexington, where he raced his 1999 Dodge Viper in two Viper Racing League

events and placed third both times in the GT-1 division.

Ellis, 49, lives in Butler Twp. and was elected a township trustee two years ago after selling a successful painting contractor business and retiring.

He got involved with auto racing in recent years, somewhat by chance. He got his first Dodge Viper in 1993 and one thing led to

another.

"When I saw it I had to have it," he said. "I was in love with that car. It had a 400-horsepower engine I souped up to 520."

But his wife, Mary, didn't love the idea of Ellis putting the car through its paces on ordinary roads. She suggested he

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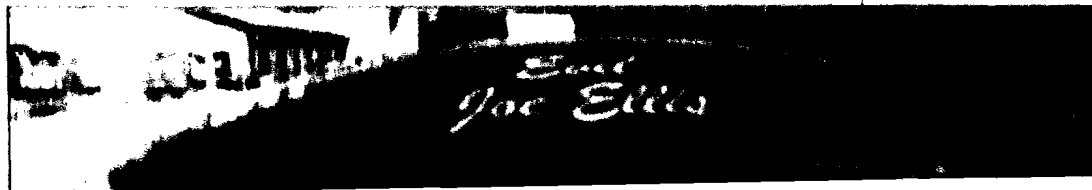
DAYTON DAILY NEWS

NEIGHBORS

THURSDAY, MAY 15, 2003

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known as
Ellis' when



STEAM CLEANED

Living Room & Hall

\$49.05

Additional Rooms

\$10.00

VIPER

*Trustee known as
'Evil Joe Ellis' when
racing sports car*

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participate in a Viper Days event so he could take the car to its limits someplace safer.

Viper Days is a series of 13 annual events across the country where Viper owners can work with instructors to learn how to handle the powerful cars and put them on a track to race against the clock.

The weekends also include Viper Racing League races, wheel-to-wheel club racing for more advanced drivers whose cars meet certain specifications.

At the end of the year, east and west division leaders compete for a championship. Mary videotaped that first outing at a 1996 Viper Days event, including a short interview with Ellis' instructor for the day.

"What do you think of my husband as a racecar driver?" she asked.

"He's evil," was the short response and Ellis' racing nickname, 'Evil Joe Ellis,' was born.

By 1999, Ellis was competing in the VRL events, winning the national championship in 2000 in a new competition coupe Viper.

In 2001, he got his professional license and participated as a co-driver for American Viper Racing in the American LeMans Series. He drove in four races and placed in all four, scoring 11th in driver points overall in the GTS class.

But 2002 brought some setbacks. He hit a concrete wall at 110 mph at a Viper event in Wisconsin. His car was demolished, so he spent much of the year obtaining and learning to handle the 1999 GTS he now races.

He recently purchased a 2003 street model Viper as well, continuing this year to compete in Viper Racing League events while not ruling out the possibility of more pro events.

His wife acknowledges having some reservations, but said she knows how he is and why he does it.

"I'm proud of Joe because there aren't many people with the limited amount of time he has that could perform and do as well as he has," she said. "We human beings have to support each other in



JOE ELLIS OF BUTLER TWP. raced his 1999 Dodge Viper in two Viper Racing League events at the Mid-Ohio Sports Car Course in Lexington and placed third both times in the GT-1 division.

things we feel passionate about. There are financial and safety concerns, but it's about satisfying one's soul."

At the recent Mid-Ohio event, Vandalia City Council member Mike Blakesly, who is also a captain in the Butler Twp. Fire Department, got a ride in the Viper, a privilege he won in a township employee Christmas gift exchange.

"I didn't have a lot of time to think, but I never had a problem with safety," Blakesly said after his high-speed ride. "I felt very secure with Joe. I can see how you get the bug — it's exhilarating."

With Vipers beginning at around \$85,000 for a street model and \$120,000 for a competition package, it takes money to own a Viper, but winning races also requires things money can't buy.

Driving the car is physically demanding and Ellis runs 3.5 miles six days a week and works out with weights for two hours every day.

"You have to be in that kind of shape, but I'm very physical and very competitive and I like doing it," he said. "It takes me a little longer to get in shape now but I'm probably in better shape than I ever was."

Ellis started racing at an age when most people wouldn't consider taking up such an activity, but it's not a fluke.

Born in Piqua and later moving to Covington, where he graduated from high school, Ellis went to

Bowling Green State University to earn a degree in business administration.

Having worked for a painting contractor through high school and college, he was approached to start a painting business shortly after graduating from BGSU in 1976.

"I said no, that's not why I went to college," Ellis said. "I figured I'd never have to paint again."

But he did end up signing on as co-owner, then buying out his partner's share in 1980. By the time he sold the business in 2001, Midwest Painting was the largest commercial painting contractor in the state.

In the early days, one of his employees was a boxer and needed a place to train. Ellis, then 27, built a complete gym for him in a company warehouse. He soon asked the trainer if he could work out, too.

"I was intrigued by boxing," he said. "I was out of shape then, and when I mentioned I wanted to learn how to box, they laughed a little bit and said, 'Well, it's your place, you can do what you want.' So I trained every night. And the more I trained, the better I got."

Two years later in Dayton, he won a regional Golden Gloves tournament in the light/middleweight division, reaching his goal.

Ellis returned to boxing two years ago, when heavyweight Rocky Phillips out of Dayton needed a sparring partner. He also

trained a little with Tony Tubbs of Cincinnati, another heavyweight.

It wasn't long before he considered taking it even further.

"I was going to do the Toughman contest, train for another Golden Gloves and then try to turn pro," Ellis said.

But a broken rib ended that plan, at least for now.

"I still want to do the Toughman contest, look for me when I'm 50 there," he said. "If I feel as good then as I do now, I'll do it."

And he embarked on something totally different when he became a township trustee.

"It's been interesting, seeing how a local government is run," Ellis said. "I've learned a lot and enjoyed it."

And whether it's racing, boxing, business or being an elected official, he said he approaches it all the same way.

"There is a difference between being good and being a champion and what most people don't realize is that it's not that much of a difference. But it is that extra 10 percent and it counts for a lot.

"I know a lot of pros and, yes, they're good and, yes, there is some natural talent involved. But it's that little bit extra that sets them apart. Those who try hard and try hard enough can compete with some of the best."

