

NTPA Legends: Where are they Now?



An early shot of Wilson's pulling career with his 1966 Bronco



"The Virginian" in Hamburg, N.Y. in 1986

Diehl Wilson's Active Motorsports Career

After high school, Diehl Wilson was employed at the local Winchester, Va. Oldsmobile dealer's body shop. He progressed to manager at the local Ford body shop. In 1976, he started his own body shop known as J.R.'s Auto Body.

The business has witnessed substantial growth over the decades and had three different locations, with the present location serving as home since 1995. "We have a group of pretty good people," Wilson shared, which includes 20 employees. Rather than specialize in one area of body repair, J.R.'s diversified to capture more revenue. "We'll do about anything that walks through the door." That includes auto, motorcycle, trucks and trailers of all sizes, motor homes, fire trucks and rescue equipment body repairs, along with custom painting and custom fabrication. "We're always thinking outside the box." They have painted farm equipment parts, vehicular fenders, unique bicycles and even kitchen refrigerators.

FWD PULLING

Soon after starting the business, Diehl showed Corvettes before taking his 1966 Bronco to the first local, FFA-sponsored pull in 1974. This helped spawn the

creation of the Shenandoah Pullers Club, a local member club of the Virginia Tractor Pullers, an NTPA state charter member. Many founding members' names will be recognized by long time NTPA FWD pulling enthusiasts: Bob Smith, Hylton Clark, Kevin Omph, Scott and David Athey, and Diehl.

Diehl Wilson's "Bronco Buster" was pretty much stock featuring the optional 289 V-8. He pulled it in the 3,000, 3,500, 4,500, 5,500 and 6,500 pound classes. Eventually, the wheelbase was stretched with the body remaining to the back. The elongated engine compartment allowed lots of room for the Ford 427 motor. To comply with a rule's "gray area," the grille was cut and remained ahead of the radiator.

"It was a pretty strong unit for the day," Diehl remembered. But in the 6,500 class, it would blow the transfer case almost every hook. This was before the advent of the custom designed SCS drive train components.

Debuting in early 1979 was a new truck, a 1971 Ford F-250. The "Vigilante" debuted inside the Fort Worth, Texas coliseum with a less than stellar performance. That summer initiated Diehl's 10-year campaign

on the NTPA circuit, which was the fourth season of NTPA FWD pulling.

Diehl asked fellow Shenandoah Valley puller, Jim Weaver, with his very clean Ford 9000 Super Stock tractor "The Virginian," if he could also use the name. The personable Weaver agreed. In 2009, the longtime Augusta Expoland pull in Fishersville, Va. was renamed the Wilson/Weaver Track, in honor of Diehl Wilson and Jim Weaver. This legend passed away in November 2011.

The pretty, multi-blue Virginian FWD with the naturally aspirated Ford Boss 429 Hemi, earned its first Grand National win in 1980 at the Buck pull near Lancaster, Penn. Diehl and teammate Bob Smith ("3 Bears" Chevy) shared the third NTPA FWD Truck Puller of the Year award in 1980.

1981 found the friendly Diehl earning the Region I FWD championship in the 5,800 and 6,200 classes and the Grand National 5,800 title while Bob Smith earned the 6,200 title.

In 1982, Diehl defended the Region I 6,200 title, earned the Region II 5,800 title and won the Grand National season finale hook in Syracuse, N.Y. while defending the Grand National title.



In 1986, "The Virginian" took on TWD form in an F-150 body. In 1987-88, Wilson switched over to a Mustang body.



Wilson kicks up some dirt at the Fishersville, Va. event in 1982.

He updated the existing truck to the new style 1983 Ford sheet metal in 1983. "The Virginian" was now powered with the AR (Allen Root) aluminum block at 672 cubes. Diehl attended the first Indy Super Pull featuring the FWD class in 1983.

"Being two time Grand National Champion and sharing the Puller of the Year award with my teammate, friend and neighbor, are my pulling career highlights. That was an honor to share it with the Smiths."

"Virginian" TWD

Diehl purchased Chris Holdorf's F-150 "Gator" for the 1986 season and then installed an '87 Mustang body for '87 and '88. It, too, was powered by the AR motor and of course, was known as "The Virginian." During this era, there were several TWD competitors with funny car bodies. Corvette, T-bird, Daytona and Porsche immediately come to mind. Interestingly, Diehl just located where this "Stang" body is and may purchase it.

PULLING MEMORIES

The "Buckin' Bronco" progressed from the stock 289 to the Windsor 351 and then desired more power for the stretched frame.

A racer across town had a Ford 427 motor, but to buy it, Diehl had to buy the whole car plus two or three pickup loads of parts. That man, Arthur Hartman, became Diehl's crewman for a couple years. The first pull in this version was in Fishersville, Va. Hartman loved fried chicken. Diehl told him if the Bronc won, he would buy him all the chicken he wanted. It took three plates full to satisfy Arthur's huge appetite.

Diehl's favorite indoor pull was the Pontiac, Mich. Silverdome. Diehl will never forget the time when Evil Knievel jumped his motorcycle, breaking something, and then came to Diehl to borrow his hacksaw. "It's unique little things like this that you'll never forget. It was the first major indoor pull that saw thousands upon thousands of fans in the huge stadium plus it had the puller's name on a huge marquee." Because of his favorable FWD experiences here, he returned two years ago with "Virginia Giant."

"Virginia Giant" MONSTER TRUCK

Virginia Galleries Furniture, which was sponsoring the FWD "The Virginian," wanted to build a monster truck. Diehl contributed his "brain power and sweat equity" to build the "Virginia Giant." It

featured another Ford Boss 429 Hemi built by George Montgomery, and a 6-71 supercharger with dual Predator carburetors.

Today, this truck, with its original 66" tires, is repowered with a stock Ford 460 to give rides to monster truck spectators. It mildly crushes cars and climbs over them prior to the main event. This "monster truck ride truck" can accommodate 12 passengers.

The current "Virginia Giant" features a two year old Dan Patrick ("Samson" monster truck/former puller) state of the art chassis. It is powered by a Sassy 526 Hemi with the maximum allowed 8-71 supercharger at 10 percent overdrive, making 1,500 horsepower in the dry block coupled to a Crower clutch and Lenco transmission. For 2012, the five-ton machine features another new paint design.

When Diehl built his first "Virginia Giant" monster truck in 1985, Bob George, a cofounder of USHRA, told Diehl that the passing fad would be gone in two years. During the late 80s, Diehl performed in Aruba, Carousel, St. Martin and Canada. He has performed with the "Virginia Giant" nationwide, but today he limits himself to a 500 mile radius.



"Virginia Giant" doing what it does best



Wilson debuted the "Vigilante" FWD Truck in 1979.

"Performance Motorsports" EVENT PRODUCTIONS

Diehl feels he accomplished all he could in pulling. He left to raise cash to buy out his monster truck partner. Diehl continued to concentrate on the monster truck exhibitions and show competitions. This led to forming his own company, Performance Motorsports, a promotional and production company selling shows to predominantly fairs that showcase monster truck shows but also feature pulling.

Diehl has been promoting the high horsepower tractor and truck pull in Fisherville the past quarter century but changing demographics witnessed the last of the high horsepower tractor and truck pulling in 2011. However, the younger people continue to love the monster trucks, spurred by TV's popular Monster Jam program. Diehl will continue promoting the Fisherville monster truck show.

"Equalizer" TANK

Adding to the motorsports adventure was the "Equalizer" tank car crusher that Diehl built after a promoter wanted another unit to compete against Bigfoot's tank. Even though the stance of the tank was narrowed 14 inches, it was basically a Modified tractor with Banter's big SQHD rear end fitted to the tracks. It also featured the AR motor with the Crower and Lenco. It had one breakage problem after another. "We had it for four or five years and I doubt it ever made a dollar," he said. "It was just too heavy at 23,000 pounds to be successful." Diehl recently saw it for sale on racingjunk.com.

FAMILY and HOBBIES

Diehl and Deborah continue to enjoy time with their three children, two grandchildren and dog, Mo. Diehl enjoys watching drag racing and showing his vintage cars. He owns a '24

Ford T-bucket, '65 Ford Cobra Mark III, a pristine 1970 Oldsmobile Rallye 350 and a 2002 Thunderbird with 3,000 miles. He wheels and deals in this industry, too.

WORDS OF WISDOM

"To be honest, things in life couldn't be any better than they are. We're fortunate in business that we have a good reputation and business is good. The monster truck industry is good. It was a right decision to get into it and we still enjoy it. Never take a gamble that you can't afford to lose. Also, stand by your word. Be the person that you're supposed to be. Do the things you claimed you would do. If you do not have your word of trust, you have nothing. It's a person's way of life that demands these attributes."