



**ROUNDEL MAGAZINE**  
**BMW CAR CLUB OF AMERICA**  
MARCH 2017



# BAD TO THE BAHN

THIS ISSUE:  
YALE R COMES HOME  
KUNO WITTMER  
REACHNOW

A man with grey hair, wearing a dark blazer, light blue shirt, and blue jeans, is sitting on a red and white safety barrier. He is smiling at the camera. In the foreground, the front right corner of a black race car with blue and white stripes is visible. The background is a dense forest of green trees.

RJ VALENTINE

# MANY IRONS

**RJ VALENTINE** HAS MADE A CAREER OF **AUTOMOTIVE AND RACING-RELATED ENDEAVORS—** AND HIS LATEST MAY RESULT IN **SIGNIFICANT ADVANCEMENTS IN TRACK SAFETY.**

ROUNDEL MARCH 2017

STORY AND PHOTOGRAPHS BY **DAVID HAUETER**

# IN THE FIRE



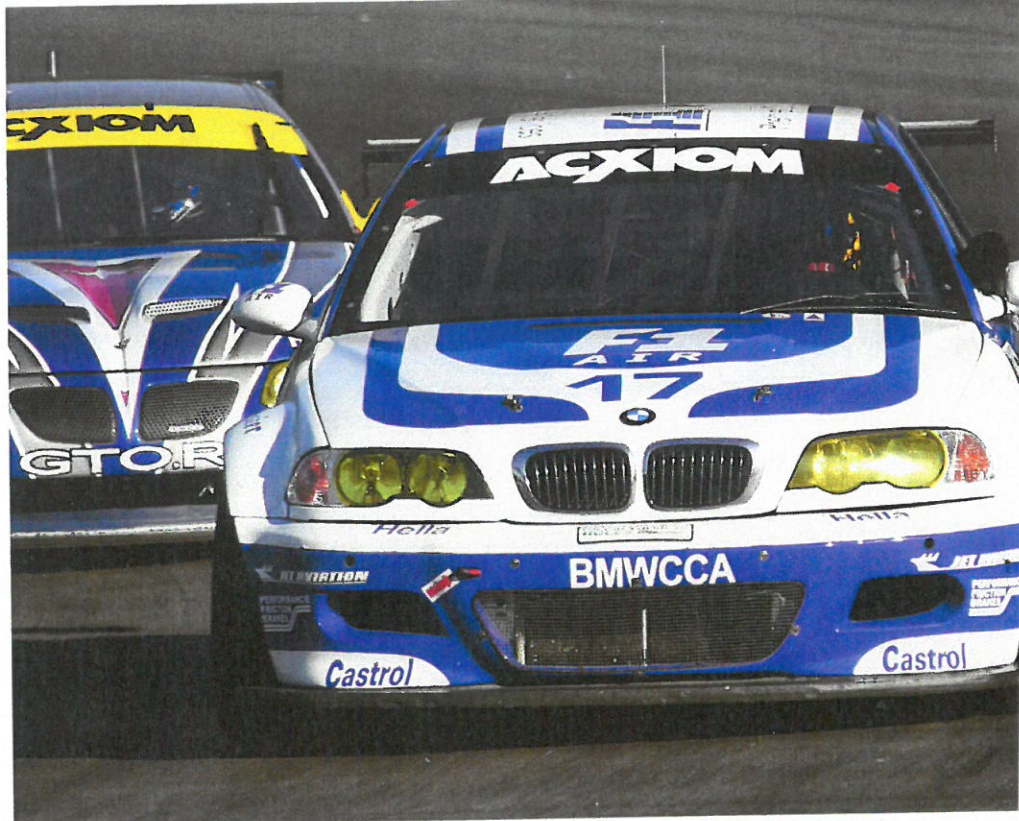
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Bob Dylan once said, "A man is a success if he gets up in the morning and goes to bed at night, and in between does what he wants to do." RJ Valentine is one of those guys who does what he wants to do and pursues work that he's passionate about—and for much of his career, that work has involved cars and racing. At an age when most men would be spending their time relaxing on the golf course, Valentine has been hard at work pursuing new auto-related ventures, including one that may take auto racing another step forward when it comes to driver safety.

Valentine may be best known as the owner of the F1 Boston and F1 Outdoor karting facilities near Boston, but he's also one of the managing partners of the New Jersey Motorsports Park (NJMP) facility in Millville, New Jersey, and he has been racing competitively for close to 40 years. Longtime BMW racing fans may remember that Valentine drove for Tom Milner's BMW Team PTG in an E46 M3 in the 2005 Grand-Am season; he still owns that M3 today, along with a few of the other race cars he's driven over the years, including a Dodge Viper, a Pontiac GTO, and the Porsche 911 GT3 R that he co-drove to several victories in the 2007 Grand-Am season.

With decades of racing under his belt, Valentine has seen his fair share of accidents that have ended a driver's career or even ended their lives.

Of course, racing is an inherently dangerous sport, but Valentine saw an opportunity to improve driver safety by using a different type of barrier than the one commonly found on most race tracks around the country. And he doesn't mind being controversial. "Jackie Stewart was not very well-liked by the sanctioning body and track owners, because he was talking about them spending money



to save lives," says Valentine. "Racing safety made quantum leaps because of what Jackie Stewart did, and it saved a lot of lives—but there's a lot more that can be done."

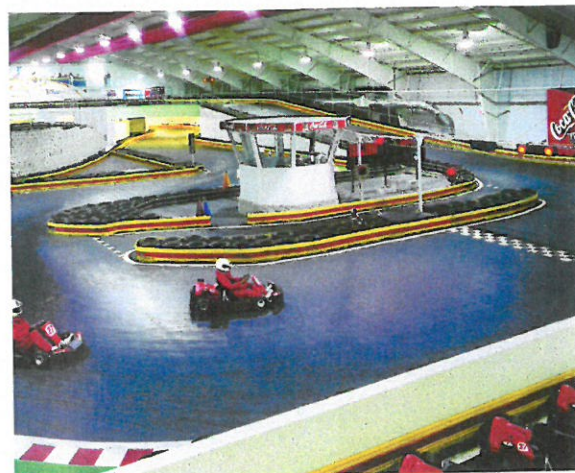
Safety barriers at most tracks typically consist of rows of stacked tires, concrete walls, or Armco barriers, none of which are very effective at absorbing the impact of a car hitting it at high speed. Tires may absorb energy to some degree, but they can also cause cars to ricochet back onto the track, and tires can fly into the air when hit at high speeds. Valentine's approach, which he calls Impact Safety System Barriers (ISS barriers), uses a simple buffer-barrier system designed to absorb energy from a moving car before it hits anything that may lead to serious injury to the driver. "Our goal is to mitigate terminal impact by having a buffer before Armco, tires, or fencing," says Valentine. "Horsepower and speeds have ramped up over the years, but the walls and barriers at many tracks have stayed the same. The

RJ Valentine has decades of racing experience; he still owns the E46 M3 that he raced for Team PTG in 2005.

key with ISS barriers is to make improvements to the contact point where a car hits a barrier, to allow for more space to slow cars down before a driver's body gets shocked by a hard impact or a blunt-force-trauma wreck. We can't keep living with concrete and Armco, or tires that are heavy and can hit other cars or drivers in open-wheel cars when they separate."

Valentine's F1 Boston karting facility may be the best in the country, with both indoor and outdoor tracks.

The design of the ISS barriers is relatively simple, but their safety benefits seem obvious when it's explained how they work. An ISS barrier is a hollow barrier





The ISS Barriers are used at the Thermal Club near Palm Springs, California, site of BMW's Performance Center West.

made of composite polyethylene that can be filled with water or foam as ballast; they can be linked together to form a barrier wall. "The barriers are designed to be malleable and yield, in order to absorb energy and progressively retard speed before vehicles reach an immovable wall," says Valentine. The barriers can be installed in various configurations, depending

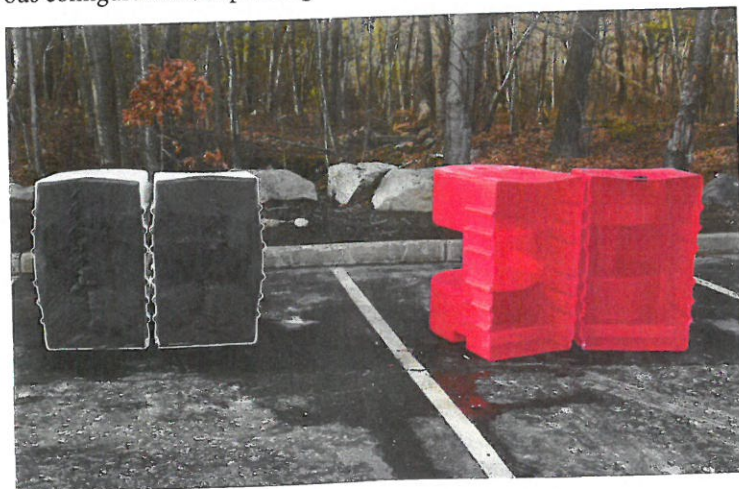
on the track or the speed at which cars may be hitting them. For instance, on a high-speed corner, the ISS barriers could be installed in two layers with five feet between them to absorb impacts, while in other corners, a single row may be sufficient.

Aside from the safety benefits, which seem obvious, ISS barriers can also be beneficial to a track in other ways. They're

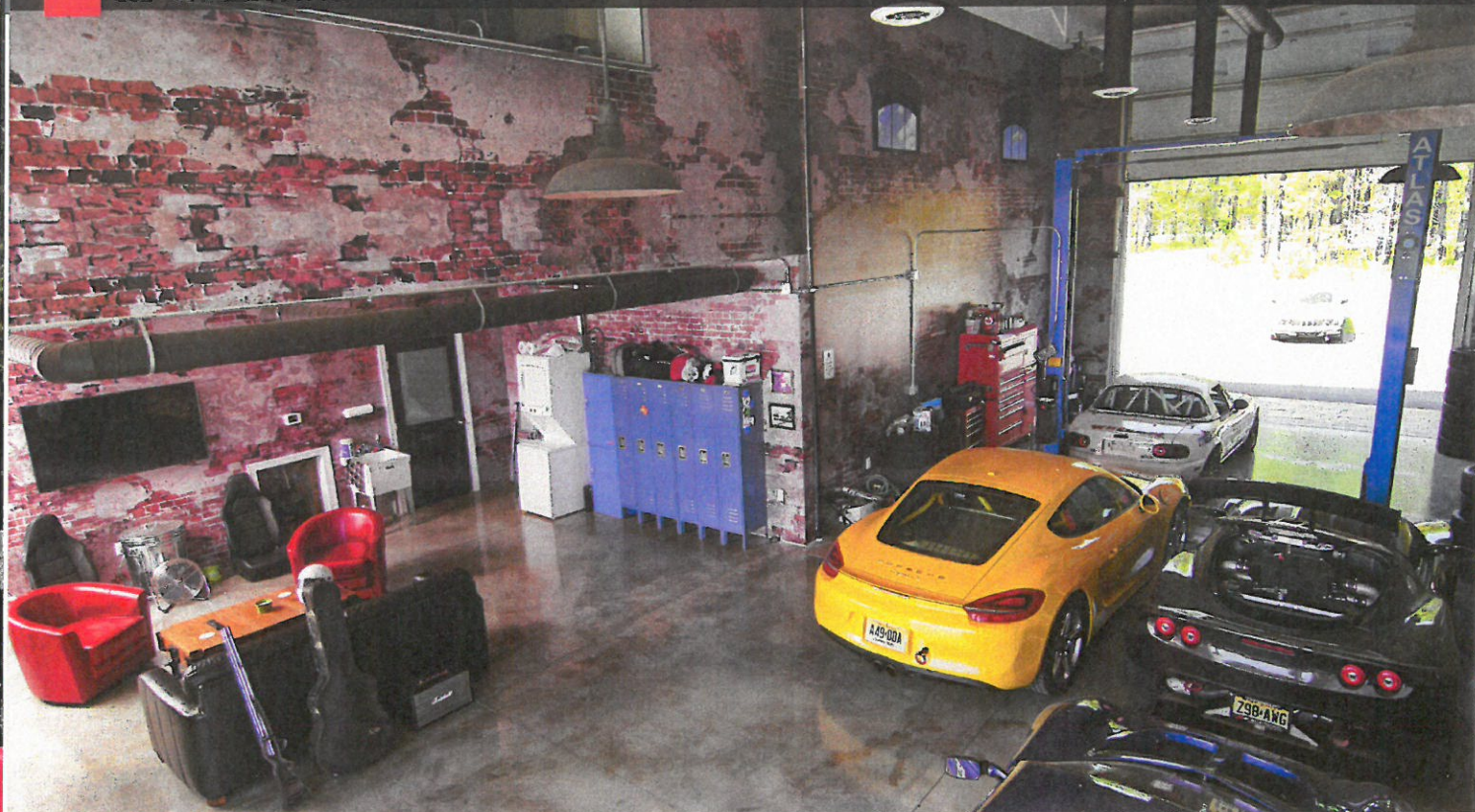
much easier to replace and maintain than stacked-tire walls—which could lead to greatly reduced caution periods during a race—and they aren't susceptible to standing water that collects in tires and attracts mosquitos and snakes. The barriers can be made in any color, and can also have advertising hung on them, or be painted with track or sponsor logos.

ISS barriers are now in place at some tracks around the country, including the Thermal Club that's about an hour from Palm Springs, California, where BMW Performance Center West is located. However, despite the obvious benefits of the ISS barriers, it's been challenging to get the major tracks in the country to install them; track management tends to stay with the way things have been for years, and managers are hesitant to make a change. One issue is that the ISS barriers haven't been impact-tested in a controlled environment—but Valentine points out that they've proven that the design works in real-world situations at the tracks where they're installed, and nobody has ever officially tested the effectiveness of stacked-tire walls, either.

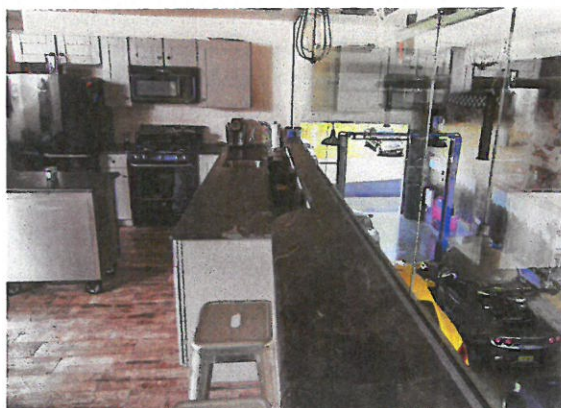
Valentine is working on another initiative as a managing partner of NJMP: the new Exotic Car Garages located at the track in Millville, New Jersey. NJMP is in a convenient location on 500 acres that's near Philadelphia, not far from New York City or Washington, DC. The facility has two different tracks—Thunderbolt and Lightning—and has a newly opened Speedplex high-performance automotive and motorcycle service facility, as well as an outdoor karting track; the ultimate plan for NJMP is for it to be a full-scale entertainment destination. Put simply, Exotic Car Garages are "man caves" for auto and racing enthusiasts who use either of the tracks or the Speedplex facility.



ISS Barriers can be filled with either water or foam to suit a wide variety of needs. The foam filling is more expensive but requires less maintenance than water.



One of the Exotic Car Garages at NJMP comes complete with a lift, a lounge, and an upstairs area.



An upstairs kitchen at one of the Exotic Car Garages at NJMP looks out over the downstairs garage area.



Exotic Car Garages can be built to owners' specs, including outdoor decks that look out over the NJMP tracks.

Owners can customize their garages with nearly anything they want, whether it's a mezzanine loft with a deck or a lounge area with a bar and floor-to-ceiling windows. Some of the garages still in the planning stages include home theaters, office space, and wine rooms, although the track discourages owners from living in them. NJMP has built ten of the garages so far; designs can be anywhere between 1,000 and 8,000 square feet, with room for anywhere from four to 32

cars. Valentine says that the track already has permission to build up to 182 units, and could always add more to that if the opportunity presented itself.

NJMP also has plans to eventually build a clubhouse, a luxury pool, and a restaurant-pub, so the facility may become even more attractive as a motorsports country club for lucky owners. Owners will also have access to the karting facility, as well as on-track instruction and passes to the professional races held

at NJMP.

With his new venture with the ISS barriers, RJ Valentine has a chance to give racing a significant advancement in driver safety, and after seeing how they work, it seems like a logical step for more of the major tracks in the U.S. to adopt them. Of course, people don't make logical decisions all the time, but you might have a little more peace of mind if you drive at a track like the Thermal Club that has these barriers installed.

With his F1 Boston karting facilities, the ISS barriers, and his involvement in NJMP, Valentine has his hands in several aspects of the automotive and racing world. I can't think of a better way to spend leisure time than at the track, and having a man cave at NJMP with the choice of two tracks to drive on is certainly something to dream about. You can find more information on Exotic Car Garages at [www.njmp.com/exoticcargarages](http://www.njmp.com/exoticcargarages).

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