

A Racer's Racer Passes the Finish Line

By Bob Vitrikas



Photo courtesy photographer Dick Dole and Getty Images

We lost a national racing treasure on 20 March. Bob Tullius lived a long and full life on this earth, passing on at the age of 95. His passions were racing fast cars and flying really fast planes like his P-51 Mustang which he flew into his early 90s. Yes, Bob Tullius was an amazing man! You can read all about Bob in this wonderful tribute written by Autoweek's Jonathan Ingram <https://www.autoweek.com/racing/more-racing/a70781675/bob-tullius-obit/>

I would like to add to the Autoweek story that Bob and his Group 44 Racing team were headquartered in Falls Church and later in Winchester, Virginia. Sponsored by Quaker State Oil and later by British Leyland, Group 44 raced British sports cars including Triumph, MG, and Jaguar. It was logical for them to kindly host the MG Car Club, Washington D.C. Centre to an exclusive open house where we got to enjoy a private viewing of their immaculate shop and equally spotless race cars accompanied by suitable beverages and snacks. Group 44 was always a class act! I recall spending nearly an hour admiring the engineering and fabrication excellence of their gorgeous IMSA GTP sports prototype racer the XJR-5. The 600 hp, Jaguar V12 propelled the XJR-5 to a top speed of 230 mph and its first win at the Miami Grand Prix in 1984. In its first race season in the IMSA GT Championship, it scored four race wins.



Has there ever been a more beautiful modern race car design than this Lee Dykstra designed XJR-5?

Group 44 co-founder and lead driver Bob Tullius, paired with Group 44 co-founder, driver and mechanic Brian Fuerstenau and legendary crew chief and lead engineer Lanky Foush e were often on hand to entertain us with their stories. Sadly in July 1993, Brian, also an avid aviator, crashed his WWII era T-6 Texan near Berryville, VA not far from the Group 44 Winchester shop. In his honor Jaguar instituted the Brian Fuerstenau Trophy awarded annually to Jaguar's number one U.S. Master Mechanic. Lanky left us on November 8, 2012. Those three men changed the face of amateur racing in the U.S. forever and will be remembered fondly by all who knew them. "We few, we happy few, we band of brothers" Shakespeare's Henry V, Act IV, Scene III delivered in the St. Crispin's Day speech. Amen!