



SUPERCHARGED SUPERSTANG

>> JOE CRAM IS KNOCKING ON THE 9-SECOND DOOR

You can't help but like Joe Cram. Quick-witted and intelligent, he peppers his conversations with phrases like "In Texas, where I'm from, everyone likes speed" and "If you can run a number in Texas, where the temperature on the floor of my shop gets to be 140 degrees, you can run a number anywhere." And while you might expect him to rattle off a list of his accomplishments, you're more likely to hear about the helmets he had signed by Joe DaSilva and Jack Roush among others, and the fact that the one he most cherishes was signed by Steve Grebeck an hour before the wreck that ended his life. "I try to live up to the standards of Joe DaSilva and Steve Grebeck," said Cram, of Houston, Texas. "Joe is personable and Steve was personable." What he might not realize is that he, too, is personable — and successful. Proof of that lies in the fact that he was a strong competitor in the Fun Ford Weekend and Clash of the Titans Series' and even though this is his first full season in the NMRA, he has a cozy spot in third place in the JDM Engineering Super Stang class points as of the Joliet race.

When Cram's not piloting his car down the quarter-mile, he owns and operates DynoJoe Performance in Houston, Texas, where the guys at the shop take it upon themselves to keep track of where he is in points on a prominently-placed board. When he's not working, he and his wife, Kathy, can be found fishing on the Galveston Coast with their friends from the shop and their dogs, Hootch, a mixed-breed they found as a stray five years ago at Houston Raceway Park, Tess, a Rottweiler and Mustang, a mixed-breed. "Our dogs are our children," said Cram. "Hootch comes to the races and likes to ride on the golf cart as though he's a person."

"As far back as I can remember, my family have always been car restorers."

IT'S A LONG JOURNEY FROM PUERTO RICO TO NMRA

Cram was born in Puerto Rico and moved to Texas with his family when he was three years old. His dad, Ralph Cram, was a U.S. Marine. When he was nine, a neighbor took him to an NHRA race at Houston Raceway Park, where he got to meet John Force. "Out of all of the racers, he was the only one who sat and talked with me," said Cram. "I still have the picture of John Force and me standing in his pit area and it's hanging in my shop. To this day, I remember the smell of the tires and the fuel from that race." The car bug had bitten Cram at that point, and he spent much of his childhood helping his dad — who had found work in private security after the military — wrench on various Fords, including a '66 Mustang, '68 Mustang and '68 Ford truck, as a hobby.

"His job was really stressful, and working on cars with me was a stress-reliever for him," said Cram. "As far back as I can remember, my family have always been car restorers. When I'd get out of school, I'd go help sand cars or whatever he'd let me do. It was like a father and son deal, and it kept me out of trouble. In the area where I grew up, not a lot of good things happened, so to work on cars every day and stay out of trouble was an accomplishment."

When Cram turned 15, his dad surprised him with a '68 Mustang coupe with a straight six-cylinder engine. It had belonged to one of his dad's old military friends and it had been sitting around for years. "My father told me the reason he did that for me is because you appreciate something more when you have worked on it and when you have built on it, rather than having someone just give it to you," said Cram. "It took us two and a half years to completely restore it, and we did all the body work and interior work, and we dressed up the engine as much as we could." Cram enjoyed the aqua-colored Mustang for three years before selling it to Bubba McDowell, a former Houston Oiler football player. He sees it every now and then at car shows. Next up was a Calypso Green '91 Mustang coupe with a 5.0-liter engine backed by an automatic transmission breathing through long-tube headers and Flowmaster exhaust. Cram dabbled in street racing with the car here and there, but after a little — um — encouragement from the Houston police, who were giving out entries to Houston Raceway Park instead of speeding tickets, he started bracket racing it. "It worked because it got a lot of kids off of the street," said Cram. "There was a little bit of a learning curve for me in going from

WHO THEY ARE >>

the driver making a move in the jdm engineering super stang class

WHY YOU SHOULD CARE >>

just because he's mannerly doesn't mean he's not motivated

HE GOES BY THE BELIEF THAT, IN RACING, YOU HAVE TO BE PERFECT ALL DAY OR YOU'RE NOT GOING TO BE THE WINNER



street racing to bracket racing because it was different than an arm drop.” The car, which had been running 14s at the track, met its end about a year later when another car blew through a red light and smashed into it.

Not long after, though, Cram bought a new black '92 Mustang coupe from Tommie Vaughn Ford in Houston. It sported a 5.0-liter engine and a T5 5-speed transmission. Cram campaigned the car in bracket and 12.50 Street Stang classes in the Fun Ford Weekend series. “We traveled the entire circuit, from Florida to New Hampshire, starting around '94,” said Cram. “The series went for a long time, and it was fun. It really picked up around '95, '96 and '97, when the Modular motor was introduced. We were taking part in the NMRA at the same time, and the NMRA is more like a drag race than it is a social with friends. We go to the NMRA races to work and to win, and to have a chance to win a championship and be among some of the best drivers that we know in this sport.” Cram had that car for a little while before selling it to a buyer in Kansas City, who ended up selling it to another buyer in New Jersey just a week later. “I had given him a great deal on it because I needed the money,” said Cram. “He sure turned it around quickly.”

GET YOUR OWN DAMN CAR

In March of '06, Cram bought the '06 Mustang GT/Saleen he races now from Tommie Vaughn Ford in Houston. “I really have to credit Evan Smith from Muscle Mustangs and Fast Fords for this car,” said a chuckling Cram. “In March of '06, we went to the Fun Ford Weekend race in Orlando, and I had my wife's yellow '06 Mustang GT, and I had gotten a little tipsy and given the keys to Evan, and there was a burnout contest, and he entered it and managed to melt the bumper from all the hot rubber hitting it and when I got home, my wife said to me, ‘You fix it and get your own damn car’.

“We go to the NMRA races to work and to win, and to have a chance to win a championship.”

The following week, I went and bought the car I have now.” It just so happens that the car has been the most heavily-modified car Cram has ever owned. “The day we bought it, the modification started, including our own custom tune, long-tube headers, 4:10 gears and a cold air intake,” said

Cram. In addition to seeing modification the day it was purchased, the car saw track time, too. It ran 12.80s and, Cram said, he left it that way for just a little while before adding a supercharger, and with the help of Jim D'Amore of JDM Engineering in New Jersey, the car went from running



12.80s to 10.80s on a stock engine. Cram ran the car like that for a full year, in '08, and didn't miss a beat and he even won a Fun Ford Weekend race. "We had caught some good air in Houston and set it on kill, and, well, it was either going to blow up or run a good number and it chose to run a good number," said Cram.

Luckily for NMRA fans, Cram made the decision to run full-time with the NMRA this season. His first race was the season-opener in Bradenton, where he proved he could hang with the big dogs by taking a semifinal finish. The car was running 10.80s at 127 miles per hour with its 3-valve and



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Cram ran that stock engine through the Atco race. "After Atco, I was approached by Jim D'Amore and the folks at Edelbrock about campaigning Edelbrock's E-Force Supercharger and I owe that whole deal to Jim D'Amore for getting the ball rolling," said Cram. "We worked out a deal where a new JDM Engineering-built complete engine and the Edelbrock supercharger and the goodies that go along with it were put in my car." The car's new engine — and wrap — were debuted at the Milan NMRA race. On Friday, Cram made one pass and felt the car needed tuning, and rather than go down track again, he made the decision to park the car in the pit area and work on the tune. That work continued through Saturday, forcing Cram to go without any passes, but the reward was sweet on Sunday, as the car was consistent and strong. "We were 10-12 miles per hour faster



than ever before, and we learned a bunch about the car," said Cram. "Jim D'Amore did the dyno tuning on it on Saturday right there at the track. We know there is even more left in the car." With the new setup, the car ran 10.15 at 136 miles per hour at the NMRA Milan event and carried Cram to the semifinals. "We'll continue to test and tune and try to make the car go faster," said Cram. "I told Edelbrock, Charlie Harmon and Jim D'Amore that I was going to run every race this year to showcase what the car can do and the fact that it's a street-drivable hot rod." Looking at pictures of the car after the Milan race, Cram noticed that it was picking up the driver's side tire about three feet, but the other side was on the ground, and that prompted him to contact BMR Fabrication in Florida for an anti-roll bar and a new tubular K-member. That said, Cram and crew, who use SCT tuning software, are poised to collect some timeslips that reflect 9-second passes in the very near future. ■



IN FOCUS **joe**cram

"During racing, if there's something somebody needs and we have it, we'll give it to them. If I'm racing someone in the final round and he needs a spark plug, I'll give it to him."

What's the deal with DynoJoe Performance? >> We do everything from simple tuning to all-out race cars. We do chassis fabrication, custom-built motors, custom race car setups. We do drag race cars, SCCA road race cars and a little of the restoring of the older cars for some of our customers. We've got two employees: Eric Garza, who helps with fabricating and engineering, and Lloyd Mikeska, who is a part-timer, but goes to all the races with me. At the shop, he does anything we ask him to, and he loves being around hot rods and learning new stuff. Cale Aronson, Matt Jones and Conrad Scarry are among the racers the shop has helped. During racing, if there's something somebody needs and we have it, we'll give it to them. If I'm racing someone in the final round and he needs a spark plug, I'll give it to him. Before the shop, I worked at another shop as a mechanic and tuner on ASA late-model circle track cars. Circle track racing is fun and I did it myself for two years, but I like drag racing. To win a drag race,

you have to be perfect all day, and if you're not perfect all weekend, you're not the winner. (www.dynojoe.com).

What made you choose to run in the JDM Engineering Super Stang class? >> It happens to be the class we fit in, and it's a lot like the class we raced in with Fun Ford Weekend, so it was very easy to cross over. We noticed that a lot of the people who ran in Fun Ford Weekend also run with the NMRA, so that made the transition even easier. We weren't the new kids on the block. Granted, we're the new class in the series, but it wasn't like walking into a room full of people you don't know.

What challenges have you faced this season? >> That would be the economy and the amount of miles we have to drive to get to the races. We're shutting down the shop for a week to come and play, and that's very challenging. I made a promise to my

wife that if I finished in the Top Five this year, I would take a little time off and spend more time with family and maybe fly in to the races to help support some of the other racers, but I'd still campaign the car.

What are your thoughts on how your season is going so far? >> We are doing well. We've been fortunate to be able to make it to the first couple races with this economy and still have jobs waiting for us when we get back.

What's your take on Jim D'Amore from JDM Engineering? >> Without him, we wouldn't be racing this year. He stepped up and sponsored a class for NMRA for us so we'd be able to go out and have a place to race. He was the one who got us together with Edelbrock, and if it wasn't for him, I'd be running the old stock motor and old combination. ■

technical highlights

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<< The engine in this car came straight from the guys at JDM Engineering. It features a Kellogg crankshaft, along with Manley rods and pistons. The three-valve cylinder heads have been ported by M2 Race Systems, and are topped off by a set of Comp camshafts.



<< As this car is only three years old, Joe hasn't done anything with the interior yet. Other than the requisite safety gear, the car still has all of the stock interior pieces in it as per the SST rulebook. We can't imagine how fun of a ride this thing must be when it goes through the traps at 138 mph...rolling on leather seats. We love it!



<< Topping off the engine is one of Edelbrock's new E-Force supercharger systems. It uses a TVS rotor package that comes straight from Eaton, but everything else in the kit is all Edelbrock. They picked Joe to sponsor so he can feature just how good their new supercharger systems work in NMRA competition. So far, he's doing them justice, with a best ET of 10.15 at 138 mph to date.

Driver:	Joe Cram
Age:	31
Class:	JDM Engineering Super Stang
Car:	'06 Mustang GT/Saleen
Car weight:	3800 lbs.
Hometown:	Houston, Texas
Occupation:	Sales/shop owner
Family:	My wife, Kathy. Our dogs are our kids, and Hootch is the team mascot.
Quickest ET, MPH, 60-foot:	10.15 seconds, 138.65 mph, 1.36 sec
Chassis:	Stock, with six-point chromoly roll cage by DynoJoe Performance
Engine:	4.6L 3-valve Modular built by JDM Engineering
Cubic inches:	298 CID
Shortblock:	Aluminum block, Kellogg steel crank, Manley forged pistons and rods
Cam manufacturer:	Comp Cams
Cylinder heads:	Stock Ford aluminum 3-valve CNC machined by M2 Race Systems
Exhaust:	Dynotech long-tube headers, Dynotech catted X-pipe, Magnaflow street
EFI / Engine Management System:	Factory ECU, tuned by Jim D'Amore using SCT Tuning Software, 60-pound Seimens injectors, 85mm Edelbrock throttle body, 95mm Edelbrock competition air kit, with HPX mass air meter.
Power-adder:	Edelbrock E-Force Supercharger, w/ Edelbrock air-to-water intercooler
Fuel pumps and fuel:	Fore Precision Works triple pump fuel system, Ford filter, Ford GT Supercar pumps, VP MS109
Transmission:	5R55S built by Circle D Transmissions
Torque converter:	PI 2200 stall, re-worked by Circle D Transmissions
Front Suspension:	BMR Fabrication K-member, stock everything else
Rear Suspension:	QA1 adjustable shocks, stock springs BMR Extreme Anti-rollbar kit, Metco lower control arms, stock upper third link
Rearend:	8.8 built at DynoJoe Performance; Moser 31-spline axles, 4.30 FRPP gears, Detroit Truetrac
Wheels and tires:	Bogart Drag-On Star II, Mickey Thompson 26/4.5/15 front-runners and 325/50/15 drag radials.
Brakes:	Strange front drag brakes, stock rear brakes
Safety equipment:	Simpson 5-point harness, driveshaft safety loop by Metco
Hood:	Saleen

Sponsors: Edelbrock, DynoJoe Performance, JDM Engineering, Manley, Kellogg, FORE PRECISION Works, Circle D Transmissions, Tommie Vaughn Ford, BMR Fabrication. "It's really good to have these people," said Cram. "They allow me to go racing and they're at the track for support, and they let you know that your input is valuable. They don't just say 'this is what you do,' they ask if it's working for you and tell you that they're there to help you in any way they can."

Crew: My wife, Kathy, and Lloyd Mikeska and Eric Garza