

SUCCESS

Driven To Succeed

OLIVIER RAOUST WANTS TO WIN—AT RACING AND IN BUSINESS | By Barrett Baker

There is a piece of art on the wall in Olivier Raoust's office that was commissioned by his wife and business partner, Donna Raoust. It was painted by local chef and restaurant owner Sydney Meers, and it depicts Olivier driving his "stretch racin' BMW" during a club car event where his hood blew open during the race. Olivier's love of racing and the hood incident are probably the only two factual parts about the humorous and folksy depiction. But the painting tells us two very important things—Meers is as creative outside the kitchen as he is in, and Olivier Raoust is a man who is driven to succeed.

A native of France, Olivier's professional background includes several stints as an art director for various regional and national advertising/marketing agencies before creating Raoust+Partners in 1989. Today the full-contact marketing firm based in Hampton works primarily with credit unions from all over the United States, defining the significance and value of each, then finding the right blend of touch points to the public that expressly convey and reinforce the brand experience. In other words, he gets businesses noticed. And noticed well.

Hampton Roads Magazine: How does an art director get into racing cars?

Olivier Raoust: Racing was a happy accident, literally. In 1998 when Donna and I were on a weekend getaway in the Blue Ridge Mountains, we were driving back to Hampton from Skyline Drive when I attempted to pass another car in a curve. I lost control of the vehicle, started spinning and ended up sliding into a guardrail. Luckily we weren't hurt, but sometime later Donna thought it would be a great Christmas gift to send me to a high-performance driving school. So she bought me a gift certificate for a three-day Skip Barber Racing School experience. I was hooked from there.

HRM: That was more than a decade ago. Do you still have the passion for racing?

OR: It's had its highs and

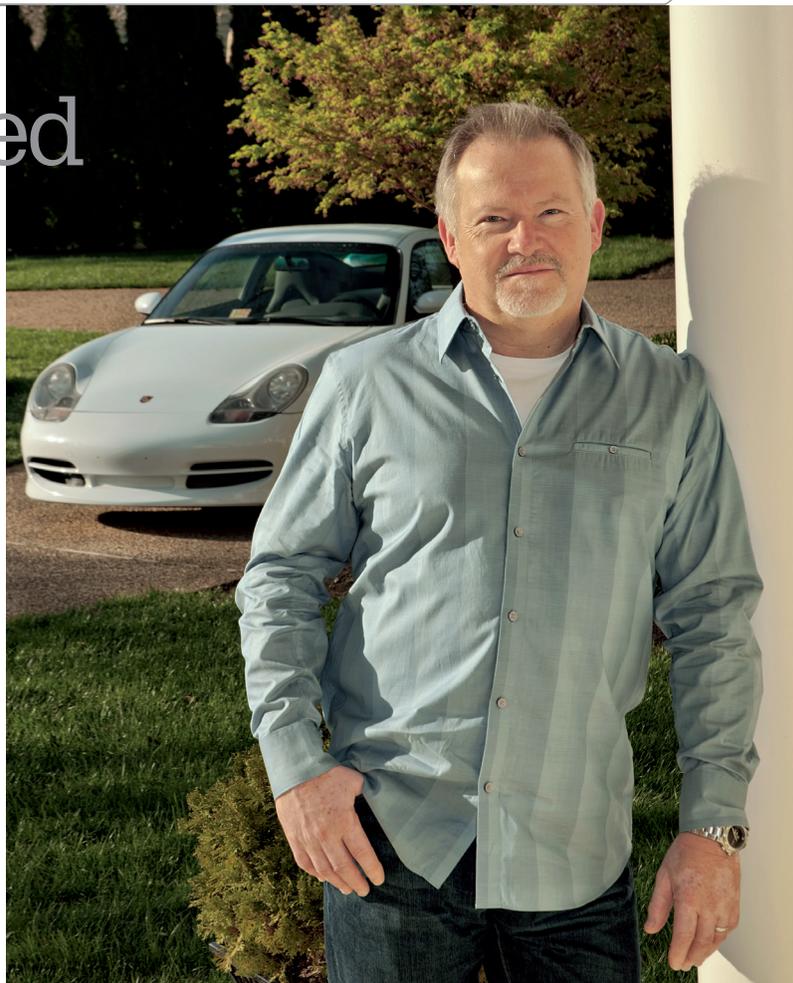
lows, but the passion hasn't waned. I don't club race anymore—I'm a driving instructor, and I still do time trials where I'm racing against the clock. But I don't participate now just to participate. I'm still there to win.

HRM: Any advice for people wanting to get into racing?

OR: Yes, be passionate, be dedicated, focus, focus, focus. Be there to win even if it's just a win against the clock.

HRM: I imagine you could give that same advice to people who want to be successful in business.

OR: Absolutely. If you're going to do something, do it right. Otherwise, don't bother. Be different, go out and be uniquely who you are. I think that's a big part of what has formed Raoust+Partners. Why do we do what we do? A big



part of our work is to not be like our competitors. We take the time to really find out what makes our clients different and special, then create a solution for them that is equally different and special, as opposed to pulling something off the shelf and saying, 'This will work great for them.' There's no passion in that. There's no fun in that.

HRM: Who has influenced you the most?

OR: Two people. The first was a woman at my first job named Elawna Sisley. She was tough and she cut me no quarter. I struggled with that for the first few months I worked under her, but I grew to love and respect her because she's the one who really whipped

me into shape. The second is my wife, Donna. Donna is the most focused person I've ever met, and she has definitely had a huge influence on making me the person I am today. As the chief financial officer and client services director of Raoust+Partners, she has also had a huge impact on the firm and the success we've been able to achieve.

HRM: With clients all over the country and with all the travelling you do to different racetrack venues, what keeps you here?

OR: First and foremost, Hampton Roads is my home—I've lived here longer than I've lived anywhere else ever in my life. So this is where my heart is. **HRM**