

## Ed Monroe

The sign at Ed Monroe's store beams from the highway. Automotive Engineering. Lights flash from the top down. Red. Yellow. Green.

The sign is shaped like a connecting rod, a part that links the piston to the crankshaft. It works harder the faster the car goes.

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When he could barely walk, Ed Monroe would sit in cars and say vrrrrooom!

His family owned the Sea Chest Motel on Treasure Island, and Ed grew up living there. As a teen, he'd race dragsters and motorcycles on the beach until the cops ran him off.

He was creative. He took private art classes. And after taking every art and shop class available, he transferred to a new high school to find more, his wife says.

At 16, he built his first car. He got frustrated when he couldn't find parts.

In 1965, he opened Southern Performance Warehouse, and Automotive Engineering, a high-performance auto parts store. It grew into a booming business, with one wholesale and five retail locations. Ed became famous for hosting swap meets, where motor heads could trade parts.

He raced cars and won awards. He bought and sold airplanes, and hosted an auto trade show.

Then, he put the brakes on.

In 1979, he met Barbie in Colorado. Her family were hoteliers. Like Ed, she grew up in a hotel.

They married and for two seasons a year lived in Colorado. Ed loved rafting, feeding chipmunks, painting and sculpting. But inevitably, before summer's end, he'd be back to Florida to check on the stores.

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He'd send funny e-mail to friends, time stamped at 4:30 a.m. They knew he was probably just getting to bed.

He worked 18-hour days and had a bed in his office. His employees stayed with him for decades.

He wasn't always easygoing, and he demanded greatness.

His garage was impeccably organized. The handles on his tool chests shone.

He had a favorite saying, friends recalled: **"In the search for perfection, the only thing lost is time."**

In 2001, Ed developed prostate cancer. He saw doctors in Sarasota, Houston, Germany and Mexico. He learned as much as he could about the disease so he could fight it.

On Monday, he died at home in Largo. He was 62.