



Why Jamie Jackson of Stairway Partners can't drive 65

Jamie Jackson approaches financial services with the same mental focus he applies to racing cars.

"You're making quick decisions with limited information," says the managing principal at Chicago-based **Stairway Partners**. "You're trying to figure out how to get around a crowded racetrack. There's risk and it's calculated." In both cases "you're dealing with unpredictable behavior and other forces that you don't control."

It's similar for skiing and biking, his other pastimes, adds Jackson, who races a yellow 1964 Porsche SC at speeds up to 130 mph.



A few weeks ago, he finished fourth in his class and ninth overall among 63 cars in the Hawk International Challenge at the Road America track in Elkhart Lake, Wis.

His interest in cars began while growing up in west suburban Clarendon Hills. His stepfather rebuilt cars, "so it's something I picked up," Jackson says. The first car he rebuilt on his own was a Triumph TR6. "I got it for free because it was dilapidated in someone's backyard. The owner said, 'If you can get it out of here, it's yours.'"

After transforming the car, he was hooked and continued to find old cars—the more beat-up, the better—to refurbish and sell. He dropped the hobby once he headed to Marquette University in Wisconsin. It's a difficult pastime without a garage.

He earned a bachelor's degree in business and computer science before landing a job at Northwestern Mutual Life in Milwaukee. He stayed there a few years, then returned to Marquette for an MBA.



Jackson went on to work at Chicago-based Brinson Partners, which eventually **became part of UBS**. He then had a six-year stint as a mutual fund manager at American Express in Minneapolis before **joining Brinson colleagues** who had gone on to form Stairway Partners in 2009 in Chicago.

Today, Stairway, which has \$425 million in assets under management, is based in the Rookery Building, which was home to Brinson before it was acquired.



His other car goes 130 mph

Jackson, 50, and his wife, **Kelly**, have been married 25 years and have three children—a 20-year-old son and 17-year-old twins, a son and daughter. The family lives in Minneapolis, and Jackson also has a home in Clarendon Hills. He flies to Minnesota on the weekends and leaves Mondays at 5:30 a.m. to get to his Chicago office by 8 a.m.

After their children were born and his career was on track, Jackson returned to cars—this time racing them, first at the Skip Barber racing school in Milwaukee. His first racecar was an MGB GT.

WORST CRASH

His worst crash was in those early days in a formula car, an open-wheel vehicle where the tires—and the driver—are exposed. “I tangled wheels with another car, went end over end and ended up in the gravel with all four corners torn off the car,” he recalls. “It happened fast, and I got in a new car that same day and turned my fastest lap of the weekend.”



On the way home, though, “I thought, ‘I’ve got three kids. I should probably take it down a notch.’” So he moved away from formula cars. Now he drives amped-up street cars or sports cars.

The Wisconsin mechanic who cares for Jackson's Porsche appreciates the businessman's car expertise.

“I see the whole gamut of drivers. Some don't even know that lug nuts need to be tightened,” but “Jamie is interested and wants to know,” says **Mark Eskuche** of Ecurie Racing. He adds that Jackson has been known to diagnose a car problem before mechanics check under the hood.

Jackson says racecar driving gives him patience on the highway. “Someone gets in your way and you maneuver around them. It doesn't make you mad. It's a sport.”

Every few months he drives vintage sports cars in amateur races around the country and in Canada.

Jackson, who also owns a green MGB GT and a white Austin-Healey 3000, declines to put a price tag on his hobby. “I know a lot of people who spend way more money for the privilege of spraying cheap Champagne on strangers,” he says.