

Marv Spector MEMORIAL (1949-2014)

by Paul M. Williamsen

When a tightening noose of fuel economy standards, emission regulations and safety policies in the early 1980's squeezed Toyota Motor Sales out of continuing to import the 40 series into the U.S., many in the Land Cruiser community felt abandoned by the company. Thereafter the Land Cruiser nameplate was available in the U.S. only as the increasingly deluxe long-wheelbase 60, 62 and 80 series family wagons, not the rugged right-sized package that off-roaders had come to cherish.

An official photo album can be viewed at <http://www.SOR.com/Marv/MarvSlideShow/index.html>.



Lunch is served at Spector Off-Road.

Into that gulf stepped Marv Spector. Marv had grown up wheeling in the low mountain scrub and open beaches far west of Los Angeles around Chatsworth and like others in California, had come to know and rely on Land Cruisers. In 1981, with his wife Kay, also a congenial Cruiserhead, Marv formed Spector Off-Road, retail and mail order sellers of all things Land Cruiser.

The vacuum created by the end of new sales of the FJ40 opened the door for Marv and Kay to expand Spector Off-Road and rather than competing with Toyota Motors USA and their dealers, Spector Off-Road became an important support tool for the growing Cruiser communities in the U.S. and eventually around the world. The stories are legendary of the field trips that Marv and Kay took to visit any piece of rock, dirt or sand in the world where they could find Land Cruisers. Marv called them vacations but Kay always knew to bring the company checkbook along with her work gloves and steel-toed shoes.

Spector Off-Road grew into a product development and import/export business, designing and producing new Land Cruiser parts when none were available and moving global-spec Land Cruisers and Land Cruiser parts around the world. In the 1990's, they adapted to the web world with an online store, www.SOR.com, making it even easier for Cruiserheads to get their fix.

Marv became an anchor point for Land Cruiser knowledge; his advice was sought by other parts importers, developers and retailers, restorers and builders of custom trucks, product planners and designers of Toyota Motors USA, and even Land Cruiser engineers from Toyota Motor Japan.

Sadly, Marv was taken from us in January 2014 after a battle with cancer at the young age of 65. Others have written from their hearts about the hole left by Marv's loss and for west coast Cruiserheads, it was personal. Anyone who ever met Marv at the store or on the trail counted him as a friend and knew that Marv felt the same way. Those of us close enough to visit the store in



Chatsworth, now a suburb of LA, would always consider making the pilgrimage across the heart of LA in our non-air conditioned Land Cruisers to pick up a part and see his newest acquisition of a fire truck or military vehicle, rather than letting the UPS guy deliver the part to us.

On Sunday, May 4, the street behind the Specter Off-Road retail store was closed for the day and an impromptu museum popped up as nearly a hundred Cruisers of every variety rolled in beginning at dawn to pay tribute to Marv. Land Cruisers from California, Oregon, Nevada, Utah, Colorado, Arizona and points east lined up in tight formation with model codes starting with B, F, H, and G and chassis codes in the 20s, 30s, 40s, 50s, 60s, 70s, 80s and beyond, showing steering wheels on either side, with more diesel Cruisers and well-worn PTO winches than you've ever dreamed of seeing in one place. We even had Nissan Patrols and a couple of 4Runners.

Drivers included do-it-yourselfers, famous restorers and builders, respected collectors of significant Land Cruisers, well-tanned offroaders, veterans of Baja 500 and Baja 1000 races, and survivors of the FJ Trail Teams. A daylong party ensued, as we all knew Marv would have wanted. SOR staff and friends played hosts, serving lunch and cold drinks while a photo album looped on the flat-screens under the big tent and a live band kicked out near the loading dock. The store was open for tours of a few of Marv's Land Cruiser collection but no sales were made that day. A twenty-foot banner was tacked to the wall near stacks of colorful pens for everyone to use to write one last message to Marv.

After celebrating a life well lived but far too short, Cruisers began to quietly slide out of formation to get back home before nightfall challenged their aging electrics. The sun had truly set on a Land Cruiser icon.

PHOTOS BY PAUL M. WILLIAMSEN

TOP ROW, L-R: Marv Specter's collection of Land Cruiser fire trucks, including the 40, 60 and 55 series; Specter Off-Road's Land Cruiser sheet metal inventory aging in the California sun; an FJ45 pickup outfitted with a PTO winch.

BOTTOM ROW, L-R: A 2012 HJ76 from the United Arab Emirates—running on biodiesel; an FJ45 LV survivor, complete with a TLCA sticker; a picture-perfect 1964 FJ40 (foreground) flanked by Greg Miller's 1962 FJ40 from the Land Cruiser Heritage Museum.

Paul Willamsen received the following message from Sadayoshi Koyari, chief engineer for the entire Land Cruiser series.

Dear Paul san,

Thank you for sending information about the Marv Specter Tribute.

I never met Marv Specter, but when I watch many photos of the memorial on the Specter website, I understand immediately that he was a person loved by many people.

I was glad to see many Land Cruisers gathered together.

I regret that I lost a very great person for Land Cruiser. I pray his soul may rest in peace.

With warmest personal regards, sincerely yours,

Koyari