

THE HARBINGER



PG 12-13 ► AN ANALYSIS OF POLITICAL TRENDS AT EAST

DRIFTING HIS WAY TO GLORY
SENIOR ROLANDO ALFARO DRIVES IN PROFESSIONAL DRIFTING EVENTS



►written by Andrew McKittrick

Senior Rolando Alfaro sits on the metal stool, resting his feet on the rail.

His heather grey Polo sweatshirt zipped up.

Hair down to his eyebrows.

The air smells of a mixture of exhaust and motor oil.

And then he begins to talk.

There's a hesitation between words, a repetition of syllables. A stutter. A stutter that he's gradually overcoming.

"Uhm...so in a tandem battle there's um there's two runs," Alfaro says. "You um lead one and then follow one. There's four categories which you're judged on which are line, angle, um speed and then um its... sty.. style."

Alfaro doesn't stutter when he's racing. On the track, he's calm. On the track, he feels comfortable.

* * *

His Nissan 240sx sits idling on the track.

Alfaro takes deep breaths and taps his fingers on the Grip Royal wheel. He begins to slowly relax.

Then he drops the clutch, shifting from first to second gear. Then second to third.

His car springs forward, smoke pouring from the rear tires as he starts to throw his car into a drift. His rear wheels lose traction and spin freely while he turns the wheel. He maintains control and points his wheels at an obtuse angle to his car, a technique called counterlocking.

►continued on pg 10

►photos by Jake Crandall



For a video and photo gallery of Alfaro, scan this code

“The seat holds you in place. It let's you focus on driving instead of trying to get back in your seat.”

“The exhaust made the car a bit louder but I wish it was a little louder still.”



SHIFTING GEARS

SENIOR ROLANDO ALFARO DRIVES IN PROFESSIONAL DRIFTING EVENTS

continued from cover

Tension slowly leaves his body, his mind focused on the feel of the car, balancing between throttle and brake. He counterlocks his wheels, drifting around the track, trying to keep up with the car ahead of him.

Around him, other drivers are tense. Their hands tightly grip the wheel, sweat dripping down their foreheads. Their toes tapping floor panels as they wait to start. Their muscles tighten.

For Alfaro, relaxing is one of the keys to his success on the race course.

“I’m usually more relaxed when I’m drifting than in person just conversation wise. [Being calm] allows you to think on your feet,” Alfaro said. “If you’re tense on your movements, they are a little slower and if you’re relaxed you’re just having fun with it.”

* * *

The love of drifting started with a video of Keiichi Tsuchiya, the Japanese creator of drift racing.

Alfaro sits on his couch with his laptop open. His sister’s friend who manufactured drift racing parts sits next to him. They watch Tsuchiya drifting around Willow Spring International Speedway in California.

And then he was hooked. He started searching for a 240sx.

Once he found one, he decided to buy it and then watch more instructional videos online. And then he drifted for the first time.

He drops the emergency brake in his Miata, flooring the throttle into a turn. He’s feeling the connection between tires and pavement. He can feel the comfort.

And from that point on, he works on his car, changing the stock motor for a Japan SR20 motor, rebuilding the suspension with parts from PBM among other companies and painting the car jet black.

And his favorite part of owning a shop and working on his own car? The ability to create parts no one else has.

“I’ve always had my own shop location,” Alfaro said. “I work on my cars and lately since I’m tied in with the [drifting] community so much I’ve just opened up to help people out and just have a place where you can hang out. A place to work on drift cars under no pressure.”

At his shop, Alfaro does more than just basic oil and tire changes, he does everything from wiring relocations to bolt-ons to a complete car builds.

Something that East Auto Tech teacher Brian Gay has never seen before.

“He’s running his own shop and doing great in school. I’ve never had anyone pull this off like he’s doing,” Gay said.

But for Alfaro, the main draw of owning a shop is the skills of working on cars.

“What I like is that if I ever have a problem with my car, I have a place to go for free,” Alfaro said. “I don’t have to worry about paying someone to fix it for me. I also like that people rely on me to fix their cars. They ask me what I would do and that’s one of the things I like.”

For Alfaro, owning a shop and drift racing in

Kansas City are more than just hobbies, they are practice for a future in drift racing and mechanical engineering.

* * *

He’s building his 240sx when he designs a part to move the rack over to avoid over cantering while drifting.

He designs another to allow the wheels to achieve more angle - a notch in the front bumper.

According to Alfaro, both could be simple bolt on kits available for most cars.

“In the long run I want to design parts for drift cars,” Rolando said. “Because when I was building my car I saw these opportunities for advancements in parts that no one has really played with and it’s just a matter of designing and then [research and designing] them. Plus I just need the means to do it, and mechanical engineering [degree] would do it.”

But Alfaro’s ultimate goal is to go pro in racing.

The first step to going pro is competing in Pro Am events.

As of now, Alfaro only participates in practice events, but he plans on attending at least one Pro Am event next season - where the cars are better, the competition is tougher and the prizes are bigger.

To receive his Pro Am license, Alfaro must place in the top four at a Pro Am event.

And Alfaro knows to go pro he’ll need more sponsors along with his current one, Achilles Tires.

Going pro costs thousands of dollars from the entry fees to car upgrades.

So Alfaro decided to email Achilles Tires. He sent videos and pictures of his drifting, letters about his car, future plans. All helping to explain his commitment.

* * *

Alfaro begins to check his email. He sees spam. And more spam.

And then he sees it.

From: Achilles Tires

Subject: Sponsorship

He knows that he’s just taken a giant step towards the future he’s dreamed of.

“I got the news [that I was accepted] a month ago,” Alfaro said. “I applied for their support program and they hit me back up. They were impressed by my build, commitment and age and that’s what got me the sponsorship.”

With the sponsorship, Alfaro is on his way to doing what he loves.

He’s working to get on the track as a pro.

The track where he’s calm.

The track where he doesn’t stutter.

|275|
current horsepower

10 hours
to Colorado

distance
to events

30 hours
across the
Country

—|400|
max horsepower

AMATEUR

PROFESSIONAL