

SPARTAN SPOTLIGHT

One Driven Doctor

Jay Patel '92

Jay Patel '92 craves work that's "fast, smooth and efficient," which explains why he ended up with a double career as an endovascular surgeon and race car driver.

His path toward medicine began during college, when a summer job as a hospital technician in his home state of Indiana inspired him to switch his major from music to biology — a decision that led him to Chicago Medical School and a fellowship in interventional radiology at Harvard Medical School. Today, at his practice in the Greater Atlanta area, Patel Imaging, he does minimally invasive procedures that treat problems such as blocked arteries, uterine fibroids, tumors and spinal fractures.

Although he began going to the Indy 500 with his father in high school, the possibility of a racing career didn't seem realistic. Then in 2003, during his residency, a BMW executive noticed Patel putting groceries into his souped-up BMW and invited him to drive around a local race-track. Patel was hooked enough to sign up for a coaching session with Porsche champion driver Wolf Henzler, who said he was a natural. With encouragement from his wife, Nancy, Patel began a part-time career as an amateur driver and then became semi-pro.

Patel later earned a spot on the team headed by *Grey's Anatomy* actor-turned-driver Patrick Dempsey. (Drivers once asked Dempsey what he thought about the skiing injury suffered by a famous Formula 1 racer. "I'm not the real doctor," Patel recalls Dempsey responding. "Jay is. Ask him.") The following year Patel joined the Kelly-Moss Motorsports team and placed second in his class in the Porsche GT3 Cup Challenge. He's taken a break to focus on his day job and hopes to compete again soon. His goal: to win the GT3 Cup someday.

Does this doc worry about crashes? "There's always a risk," he says. "But the riskiest place is the bathroom in your home. When I worked in the ER, most of the injuries I saw were people falling in the bathtub and breaking a hip."

One thing Patel has learned is that there are many similarities between medicine and racing. "There's an adrenaline rush that you have to control. In medicine your goal is to save that person, and in racing your goal is to get to that checkered flag first," he says. "But in between you have a lot of chaos. You have to navigate whatever's coming at you."

When he's not zooming around a track or treating patients, he's chauffeuring his two kids (Cain, 12 and Lexa, 11) in a four-door Porsche Panamera — which can go as fast as 150 mph (though he's never tested it).

—LINDSY VAN GELDER

