

# Army Maj. Anthony Thornton Finds Competition and Enjoyment in His Car

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Army Maj. Anthony Thornton works for the Defense Contract Management Agency at the Joint Land Systems Production Facility in Lima, Ohio, better known as the “Lima Tank Plant.” His car — which he doesn’t drive to work or even run on a routine basis — is black and looks a little sinister. Most important to him, however, is that it is very, very fast.

Thornton is neither a superhero nor an arch-criminal, but his hobby does involve an element of danger — he’s a drag racer. “That’s drag racer, not street racer,” he emphasized. “There’s a difference: street racing isn’t legal or particularly safe.”

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His interest in drag racing dates back to 1993, when he was attending Jackson State University in Mississippi. At the time, while he was driving a Ford Mustang, he and his friends were challenged by a group in a Buick Grand National. From the moment Thornton saw the Grand National, he said it was love at first sight.

The Buick Grand National is a limited edition car, first built in 1982. From 1986 to 1987, Buick added an air-to-air intercooler, adjusted the turbo, modified the upper and lower intake manifolds and redesigned the exhaust system to increase overall horsepower and torque. It was built on a Buick Regal Coupe chassis, but most models came with a turbocharged engine and other



The Buick Grand National is DCMA employee Maj. Anthony Thornton’s racecar.



Thornton gives us an inside look at his car.



Thornton shows off as the winner of the Cinco De Mayo 8-Ball Tournament.

performance enhancements Variants, including the Turbo Regal, T-Type, Turbo-T, Grand National and the GNX. All are built for speed.

While Thornton didn't describe that first race in great detail, a clear inference can be made based on his decision to buy a Grand National as his first racecar. "Since then, I've owned eight Grand Nationals," he confessed. Despite their age, the cars aren't cheap. "I bought my current car for \$15,000, and that's not counting what I put into customizing it," he said. However, Thornton has made a profit selling his previous cars. He buys the cars stock — unmodified — and performs the nuts and bolts work himself. On race days, Thornton has a crew of three or four "with one main guy"

to assist him when racing. His current car is an award winner. While the automobile has attained a speed of 157 miles an hour in an elapsed time of just 8.92 seconds, it has also won awards in two recent car shows, including first place in the racecar class of the Columbus Buick Performance Group Car Show in Ohio and first place in the Midwest Buick Challenge Car Show in Osceola, Ind.

As member number 2016 of the Buick Performance Group Club and a member of the Buick Grand National Racing Association, Thornton said that he's expected to run in Buick events. He has raced in Ohio, Indiana, Oklahoma, New Jersey, Maryland, Missouri, Texas, South Carolina, North Carolina and New York. Since returning from his third deployment to Iraq

earlier this year, Thornton has participated in three races. And, perhaps most surprisingly, Thornton doesn't drive his Grand National to races or shows; rather, he tows it via the same Ford Excursion that he drives to work every day. "For one thing, the Grand National uses only racing fuel, which runs about \$6 a gallon," he said.

Another hobby Thornton enjoys is playing pool. In fact, he plays well enough to have won an 8-ball tournament in Iraq. In his last tournament in Ohio, he was eliminated in the semifinals after having won five earlier rounds. While he loves to play pool, "after work, drag racing takes precedence," Thornton affirmed. Admitting that drag racing and playing pool is an unusual pair of activities, he said with a smile, "I'm very competitive by nature." **C**

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