

David Stuart Atlas
June 4, 1946–April 28, 2022

Ormond Beach, Florida, resident David Stuart Atlas died peacefully in the early morning hours of April 28, 2022, after the culmination of a heart and kidney condition. He was 75. News of his death was given by his children, who spent their father's last days caring for him by his bedside.

A loving father of three, and a managing member of AMA Pro Racing, David Atlas's professional accomplishments drew together a lifelong passion for racing with a successful legal practice as an attorney and advisor. In his personal life, he was a devoted parent with an eccentric sense of humor and a passion for knowledge and the laws of nature.

Born in Brooklyn, New York, at Beth Israel Hospital on June 4, 1946, David Atlas was raised in the Pelham Parkway neighborhood of Bronx, New York. His parents were Theodore and Lillian Atlas; his brother, Robert Henry Atlas, was born on April 27, 1948. The Atlas family was one of the many Jewish families newly settled in the area bordering the New York Botanical Garden, where the community often recreated.

David forged his passions early: at first disinterested in school, his love for racing was sparked by the discovery at the age of 11, while playing hooky, of a television broadcast of Juan Fangio test driving a 1957 Maserati F1 car. The on-car camera allowed viewers a perspective from the driver's point of view. David was enthralled. He pursued his new passion by collecting car magazines and at 14 acquired his first go-kart, a joint purchase with his brother. Nearby racetracks in Long Island offered the first thrill of racing, albeit a brief one as the engine often failed after several laps.

Graduating P.S. 96 in 1958 and Christopher Columbus Highschool in 1963, Atlas took the entrance exams for the Cooper Union School of Engineering and Science and was surprised to qualify for admission with strong tests results, after being briefly waitlisted. He enrolled as a major in Mechanical Engineering, a natural extension of his automotive interests. But despite this academic breakthrough, Atlas gave little time to his studies in his first year at Cooper Union, focusing instead on the Greenwich Village scene and a joyful drinking routine he developed with his college roommate. Academic warnings were followed by an official notice of expulsion, which David—shocked and distraught—was able to avoid through the compassionate guidance of the Dean of the college, a Mr. Ball, who allowed the student a second chance under the promise he would begin regular therapy sessions. Atlas obliged.

After the incident, Atlas committed himself to his studies and became a dedicated, competitive student, graduating in 1968 (along with his brother, also a classmate) with a Bachelor of Engineering degree. While a senior at Cooper Union, David met Brenda Milchman, a talented first-year art student from Bayside, Queens. Like David, Brenda was Jewish; her parents had survived internment at labor camps in Poland during World War Two and emigrated to the U.S. from Germany while Brenda was a young child. By the time she entered art school, Brenda was a beautiful, creative young artist. David's pursuit of a relationship with Brenda began while both were on a Cooper Union skiing trip for which Atlas had volunteered to be a ski instructor.

Upon graduating, and while U.S. war efforts escalated in Viet Nam, David and his brother Robert both took draft-deferring jobs at the Department of the Navy in Washington, D.C. At the Naval Ship Engineering Center (NAVSEC), Atlas applied his engineering skills to designing propulsion systems for PBR gunboats, minesweepers and other small craft. During his employment with the Navy, David corresponded with his bride-to-be via mail and Brenda often visited David on the weekends. The couple were married on August 31, 1969.

When Brenda transferred schools to join David in Washington, D.C., in 1970-'71, Atlas had lost interest in the Navy job and became fascinated by law, at first drawn to the specialized field of patent law, an extension of his interest in design and engineering. Studying to receive a J.D. from nearby George Washington University in 1972, Atlas then studied at Harvard Law University, receiving a Master of Law degree in 1973. In the mid-to-late 1970s, David was an indefatigable character, dividing his time between kart and motorcycle racing, competing in WKA and IKF racing competitions, and taking exams to practice law in Washington, D.C., New Jersey, New York, and California. In 1974, he was employed by the Wall Street law firm of Fried-Frank, a position he held until 1979.

In 1977, by then a resident of Red Bank, New Jersey, a karting accident at Willow Springs Speedway in California left David with a compound fracture in his lower leg, dealing a blow to his standing with the New York law firm. In 1979, healed from the injury, Atlas met entrepreneur and race-team owner Roger S. Penske at an IndyCar race at Trenton Speedway, an event that would be a turning point in Atlas's career. Atlas pursued a job with Penske, contacting him with a formal letter that led to a prolonged interview process. When Atlas received a pending offer of employment from the corporation of Bethlehem Steel, Penske Corporation hired David to be full time, in-house counsel to the organization, which also served Penske Racing and Mr. Penske.

Highlights of Atlas's work for Penske included some of the lawyer's proudest achievements: In 1981, he helped lead a successful eleven-month prosecution of Penske's appeal of the official results of the 1981 Indy 500, which had revoked the victory from Bobby Unser. With Atlas's efforts, Unser's victory was reinstated. Later for Penske, he negotiated deals with General Motors for Chevrolet's partial ownership of Ilmor and the licensing for Chevrolet branding on the Ilmor Indy engine. In 1985, he successfully defended Penske in the Mark Donaghue Wrongful Death lawsuit. Penske was a formative business mentor for Atlas, who in later life cited Penske's business adages in addition to his own generous professional advice.

At 40, Atlas began an independent legal practice in 1986 based in Red Bank, nearby the new Atlas family home in Rumson, New Jersey. He and Brenda raised three children in Red Bank and Rumson: Lauren, born 1980, and twins Anthony and Brian, born 1984. The Jersey Shore area provided an ideal setting for the new family, who enjoyed summers at nearby Chapel Beach Club in Sea Bright, where Atlas was notorious for setting up an outdoor command station of cell phones and work computers to conduct business calls with clients.

As an independent attorney with a focus in motorsports and contract law, Atlas's client list included an outstanding number of successful drivers, race teams, and organizations, including Chip Ganassi Racing Teams, IROC, Emerson Fittipaldi, Al Unser Jr., Jeff Ward, and numerous

others. All the while, in the 1990s, he maintained a dedicated passion for his own competitive racing, competing in CCS/AHRMA motorcycle races and stewarding an impressive collection of motorcycles. (His collecting tendencies also extended to films, which Atlas adored, maintaining a vast collection on VHS, laserdisc and DVD).

Beyond these ventures, Atlas enjoyed most of all his role as an eccentric but dedicated, loving parent, frequently driving his son Brian and his friends on skateboard missions in New York City and Anthony on weekend trips to gigs with his high school punk band. Later, Atlas would be proudly supportive of Lauren's doctoral studies in neuroscience and instrumental in advising Brian's earliest entrepreneurial ventures, as well as Anthony's research and consulting career in the art world.

Though a committed parent, Atlas regretted not treating his marriage with equal care, an admission he expressed later with full responsibility. Separated from his marriage to Brenda since 1995, and later divorced, David Atlas moved to California in 2002, living in Long Beach and working in the Los Angeles area before eventually moving to Daytona Beach, Florida, at the end of that decade. In Daytona, he met Danna Kent, a schoolteacher, who would be Atlas's loving companion and partner for 17 years. Around the same time, in 2006, he joined the France family of racing organizations, known best for its ownership and operation of NASCAR.

David often remarked on his good luck in life, citing numerous second and third chances he was given when he ran into major challenges. In the latter days of his illness, Atlas reflected on this pattern and would quote a favorite Bob Dylan lyric: "I can't help it if I'm lucky."

In recent years Atlas's pattern of good luck continued when he settled in Ormond Beach, Florida, beginning a chapter of his life he described as serene and happy. He was devoted to his work as a founding member of Daytona Motorsports Group and in leadership positions for AMA Pro Racing, serving as Chief Operating Officer and Chief Business Development Officer before his recent tenure as a Managing Member, a position in close consultation with Jim France. Atlas greatly admired France and was proud to call Jim a friend. AMA's statement on the news of Atlas's passing remembered him as playing an "instrumental role in overseeing the growth and development of motorcycle racing in the United States," adding that he was also a mentor to his friends and colleagues in the motorsports world. The statement concluded: "His steadfast leadership, along with his thoughtful and gracious nature, will be dearly missed."

In addition to his brother Robert, Atlas is survived by his three children and a son-in-law: Dr. Lauren Atlas (Ph.D.) and her husband Phil Browning (Kensington, Md.), Brian Atlas (Los Angeles), and Anthony Atlas (New York).