

CLASSIC RACING TIMES



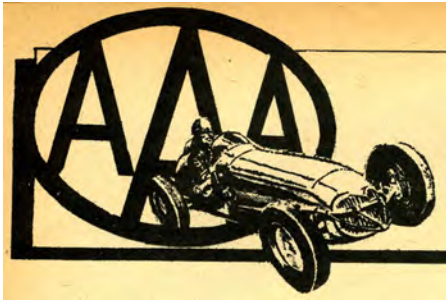
DEVOTED TO THE PRESERVATION OF MOTOR RACING HISTORY

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HISTORIC SEASON CHANGED RACING HISTORY

AAA/USAC-THE REAL STORY

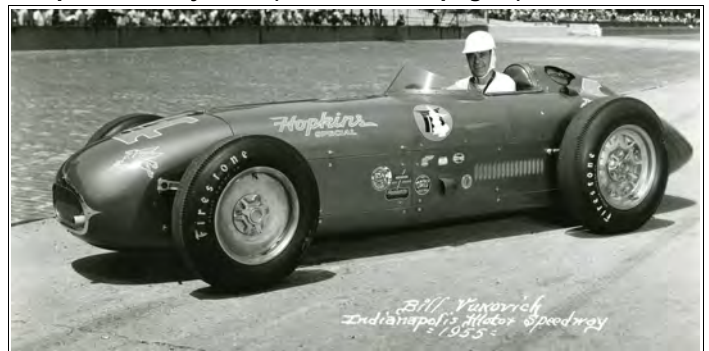


A story by Paul Weisel of the Eastern Auto Racing Historical Society

Sixty years ago (at the end of the 1955 season) AAA's grip on American racing came to an end and USAC was born to fill the void. March 20, 1955 was the beginning of the end. When the calendar flipped to begin 1955, the American Automobile Association began its 54th season as the major sanctioning body for auto racing in the United States. AAA ran racing with an iron hand and drivers with aspirations of competing at the Indianapolis '500' were forced to work their way up the AAA sanctioned ladder of midget and sprint car events before receiving authorization from AAA officials to compete in the most prestigious race in the country. After Danny Kladis copped the opening 100-lapper in the Allen County War Memorial Coliseum in Fort Wayne, IN and Chuck Rodee became the 1955 AAA Indoor Midget Champion, the 1955 season was off and running. As the outdoor season began, the '55 campaign turned dark when Larrett 'Larry' Crockett was fatally injured in a AAA sprint car event on the dirt mile at Langhorne on Sunday afternoon, March 20. During the Crockett Memorial at Langhorne on Sunday, May 1, 1955, veteran Mike Nazaruk had his Ted Nyquist Offy sprinter at the front of the feature field, but made contact with the outside rail and suffered fatal injuries during the vicious series of flips which ensued.

When the open wheel elite convened at Indianapolis, veteran driver, Manuel 'Manny' Ayulo, was fatally injured during a practice crash on May 16th. With many competitors believing bad things come in threes, there was hope to finally get some positive press for auto racing's jewel on the schedule, the Indy '500'. These hopes were dashed when two-time and defending Indianapolis champion, Bill Vukovich, was killed pursuing his third straight Indy win. Despite the tragedy, Bob Sweikert drove the John Zink Offy to victory in the '500' and parlayed his Indy success into the 1955 AAA National Championship. Sweikert added a third crown in 1955, also notching the AAA Midwest Sprint Car championship, the only man to ever claim three AAA titles in the same year. While the Vukovich fatal at Indy was big news in the United States, two events in Europe shocked the racing world. On May 26th, Alberto Ascari, the 1952 and 1953 World Champion as a Suderia Ferrari driver, crashed to his death in practice for the Monza, Italy Grand Prix. Ascari had qualified a Ferrari for Indy in 1952 and was well-liked in the states.

Following the loss of Ascari, the 23rd running of the French Grand Prix d'Endurance, known better in the states as the 24 Hours of LeMans, June 11-12, 1955, made world headlines, just 35 laps into the event. After race leader, Mike Hawthorn, received a late signal to pit, he made an adroit right to enter pit lane, assisted by the new disc brakes on his Jaguar D-type. Lance Macklin, driving a slower Austin-Healey 100 which Hawthorn had just passed, swerved to the left to avoid a collision because he couldn't match the braking power of the Jaguar. The maneuver put the Healey in the path of Pierre Levegh's #20 Mercedes-Benz 300 SLR, which made contact with Macklin's left rear and catapulted into the main grandstand at 150 mph. Front end suspension parts, sheet metal, and even the engine separated from the chassis and knifed through the crowd. The fuel cell burst into flames and ignited the remains of the car's magnesium alloy body causing a fire in the grandstand, which spread when firefighters attempted to use water to put out the flames. In the end, Levegh and 83 spectators were pronounced dead at the scene with upward of 120 spectators injured. (Continued on page 2)



DARK DAYS INDEED- The 1955 season proved to be one of racing's most trying times with the loss of so many lives including (top) Two time "500" winner Bill Vukovich and (bott.) perennial dirt track hero "Iron" Mike Nazaruk.



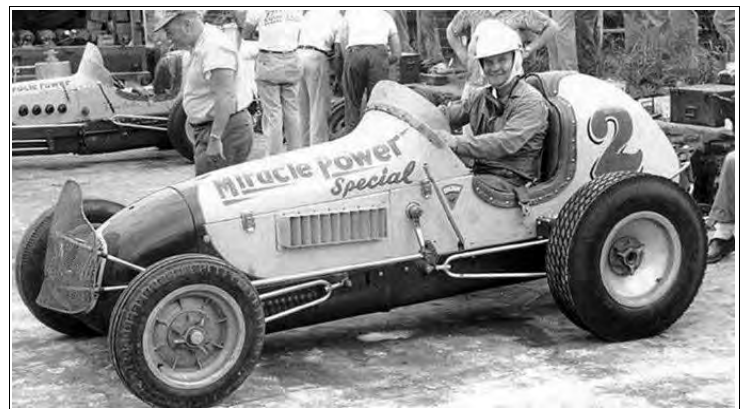
FERRARI AT THE SPEEDWAY- Two time Formula 1 World Champion Alberto Ascari qualified Enzo Ferrari's entry at Indianapolis in 1952 to the delight of his many followers in the states. Tragically, Ascari would lose his life in practice for the Italian Grand Prix at Monza. The loss of life at this time in racing history was not limited to the drivers as 83 spectators would perish during the 1955 24 Hours of LeMans.

Despite his successes in 1955, Bob Sweikert did not escape personal tragedy in 1955. He owned his own two-car AAA sprint car operation and his sprint car teammate, Jerry Hoyt, was fatally injured on the Oklahoma City half mile dirt on July 10th as he chased his boss in the opening heat race. Hoyt was the Indy pole winner in 1955 and had married only two weeks before his fatal crash.

After six months of horrific press for the sport of auto racing, U.S. Senator Richard Neuberger, Democrat, Oregon, rose before his colleagues on the floor of the Senate on July 12, 1955 and said, 'Mr. President, I think the time has come to forbid automobile racing and similar carnages in the United States. I doubt if there is as much bloodshed in Spanish bullrings as there is today occurring on automobile race tracks in this country. Now, even women racing drivers are getting killed in fiery and dreadful wrecks.....I believe the time has come for the United States to be a civilized nation and stop carnage on racetracks. The deaths on our highways are sad and tragic, but at least they are not purposely staged for profit and for the delight of thousands of screeching spectators.' As the national sanctioning body for professional racing the country, AAA was thrust into the middle of the controversy. On August 3, 1955 Andrew J. Sordoni, president of AAA, released this statement: 'Upon completion of the schedule of events already undertaken for the year 1955, the AAA will 'disassociate' itself completely from all types of automobile racing in the United States.' After the initial shock of the AAA decision, many in racing circles saw this development as an opportunity, rather than a dilemma. Indianapolis Motor Speedway owner, Anton 'Tony' Hulman called a meeting on August 10th at the Board of Health Auditorium in Indy for all racing personnel affected by the AAA withdrawal. 216 men from all corners of the country attended, realizing they were now responsible for their own destiny. Judge George Ober, of the Speedway, IN Magistrate's Court, presided over the meeting and presented a plan to form a new organization, with representation from drivers, owners, mechanics, and promoters, plus a representative from the Indianapolis Speedway, another party, vitally interested, but not directly involved in racing, and a member of the present AAA Contest Board to provide continuity. After a short recess for deliberation, the groups returned to the meeting with their representative choices. Drivers chose 20-year veteran Duane Carter (Sr.), owners tapped Bob Estes, owner of a Lincoln-Mercury dealership in Inglewood, CA and veteran sprint and championship owner, promoters nominated Tom Marchese, head of the Milwaukee, WI mile operation, and Herb Porter was voted to represent the mechanics. Not surprisingly, Tony Hulman was the Speedway representative, Col. Arthur Herrington, president of the current AAA Contest Board, was chosen, and Judge Ober became the 'interested party' on the new board.

All the men selected realized the responsibility they had accepted. Judge Ober was named the chairman of the committee and outlined their objectives as 1) raise the capital necessary to launch a nationwide sanctioning body, 2) develop competition by-laws for the conduct of midget, sprint, late model stock, championship, and sports car events which will be ratified by their membership of drivers, owners, mechanics, and promoters, 3) develop rules for all levels of competition, investigate an affiliation with the Federation Internationale de l'Automobile (FIA) in Europe, and examine criteria to improve track safety for sanctioned tracks, 4) develop an organization to enhance the future of American auto racing through a nationwide public relations program.

While the details of the new sanctioning body were being developed, America's professional racers completed the 1955 AAA schedule. Only the death of popular Jack McGrath during the running of the Bobby Ball Memorial championship car race at the Arizona State Fairgrounds in Phoenix on November 6th marred the rest of the season. When the dust settled, Tommy Hinnershitz had won his fifth career AAA Eastern Sprint Car championship, 'Cactus' Jack Turner from Spokane, WA repeated as AAA National Midget Champion, and Frank Mundy won the 1955 AAA Late Model Stock Car championship. Over the final four months of 1955 Judge Ober and his committee tackled each of their committee's assignments and their efforts were ratified by the men they represented. Bob Estes is credited with proposing the name of the new sanctioning body – the United States Auto Club, i.e. USAC, and when Gene Harley drove Ray Bolander's #8 Offy midget under the checkers at the Coliseum in Fort Wayne, IN on January 8, 1956, the event was USAC sanctioned. The new sanctioning body presented a full season of racing in 1956 and is still sanctioning races sixty seasons later.



THE BARNSTORMING DAYS- (Above) 1955 Indianapolis '500' victor Bob Sweikert survived the rough and tumble world of "Jalopy" racing in his native California before a brilliant career in Indy Cars on the national circuit. A wreck at the Salem Speedway in a Sprint Car would take the life of the popular driver. (Below) A true gentleman and fine racer considered by many to be the best sprint car driver in history was Oley, PA's Tommy Hinnershitz. Tommy, who lived to the ripe old age of 87 was considered a true survivor of an age where most drivers didn't reach 30 years of age. Hinnershitz would be counted as the last AAA Sprint car champion circa 1955.



MILLERS
AT MILWAUKEE
VINTAGE INDY CAR EVENT



WEST ALLIS, WI- The 21'st annual "Millers At Milwaukee" meet will be held once again at the famed Milwaukee Mile in conjunction with the Verizon Indycar series on July 10th and 11th, 2015. This years meet will once again showcase the brilliant front engine cars of yesteryear highlighted by the historic Harry Miller creations. The social activities will be plentiful starting with the Thursday evening buffet at the Crowne Plaza followed by the Friday evening banquet and silent auction. In addition, club members and fans alike will be treated to the Andretti Sports Marketing Indyfest on the grounds of the Wisconsin Fair State Park located at 7722, West Greenfield Ave, West Allis, Wi. The "Millers at Milwaukee" meet has become a national point of pride for the vintage cars and this years version will not disappoint with an expected 60 cars scheduled to appear. Track time will be plentiful including a "Miller Parade" before the start of the Indycar race on Sunday morning. In addition, entrants are encouraged to stay and display their cars for the fans in a special designated area during Sunday's race. All are looking forward to another exciting event and believe that the addition of a variety of vendors and displays on the infield will serve to make the meet a continued source of enjoyment for entrants and fans alike.



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A STRONG START- Art Pollard stood proudly with his Pure Firebird Special Gerhardt Offy which took him to several strong finishes on the 1966 National Championship circuit including a 4th and 7th at the Milwaukee mile. Art's career flourished until his demise while practicing for the 1973 Indy '500'. (Mike Pollard Photo)



FROSTIE ROOT BEER BARRAGE- AI Loquasto, formally of Easton, PA., succeeded in qualifying for the 1976 Indianapolis '500' in his McLaren Offy sponsored by the popular Frostie Co. AI, who's untimely death in a plane crash at just 51 years old, accumulated 61 career national starts spanning 1969 to 1983. (IMS Photo)

NEW MEMORIES.....



THE WAY IT WAS- Six time Indy '500' starter Bob Harkey shows former driver and now team owner Sarah Fisher the intricacies of driving a roadster. Both Bob and Sarah where special guests at the recent Indy Bench racers Weekend. (Mondschein photo)



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CARS



1970 EAGLE-Purchased for and driven by Bobby Unser at the 1970 Indy 500 Practice. Hoffman Racing Eagle/Larry "Boom Boom" Cannon. Ran 1974 Indy 500 and many other races. Older restoration. Car is complete. Turbo Offy, Aluminum monocoque, Hewland LG500. www.canamcarsltd.com 636.227.3959



1985 LOLA T-900 – AJ Foyt back up car for 85', Serial # HU11, Foyt ran car in Montreal, low time running DFX in car + A complete rebuilt DFX by Tom Hooker, Ground up resto, Road course and speedway wings+ Largest selection of new T-900 parts in the USA, High downforce car. 125K takes all. Doug Winslow, 440.333.0095 dpwinslow@sbcglobal.net



1985 March Indy Car 85C-10- Danny Ongais / Interscope Racing. Good, unrestored condition. Low time car. Less engine (available). Road course set up, instruments, Ongais custom seat. March 5-speed trans. \$32,900. www.canamcarsltd.com, 636.227.3959



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