



national sprint car hall of fame



george Nesler

by Bob Mays

George W. Nesler was born in Plainfield, New Jersey, on August 29, 1909, to parents Joseph and Bertha Nesler. Joseph was a painter/polisher in the appliance manufacturing industry. The family lived in Plainfield, Fanwood and Piscataway as George grew up, alongside his siblings Bertha, Myrtle, Joseph and John.

George Nesler began his racing career in the 1930's by building race cars and competing on tracks in New Jersey, New York and Pennsylvania. This early involvement included driving open-cockpit cars which started a love affair that would cover more than a half-century. During his career, Nesler would own race cars with the Atlantic Coast Racing Association (ACRA), American Racing Drivers Club (ARDC), International Motor Contest Association (IMCA), United Racing Club (URC) and the United States Auto Club (USAC), as well as modified stocks at various tracks. It was ultimately with the URC that George would make his mark.

Nesler came to the United Racing Club as a car owner from Piscataway, New Jersey, in the late 1950's. Nesler tabbed Earl Halaquist for the seat of his beautiful sprint car in 1959 and the team really took off. At the time, Nesler was a bus driver in the Piscataway area. He hired Frank Jennings and Wally Dow as mechanics, with crewmen consisting of Joe Nesler and George Nesler, Jr. Jennings won "Mechanic of the Year," in URC three times (1962, '66, and '68), with Dow getting the award in 1967.

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Halaquist finished fourth in the 1959 URC standings and Nesler was sixth in the owner tally. They won two races during the year, won two more the next year, and won another one in 1961. In 1962, Halaquist nailed five feature wins and tied Bobby Courtwright for the URC title. George finished second in the owners standings. During the 1963 season Earl won three more main events in Nesler's Chevy.

Earl Halaquist and George Nesler were a great pair and, in 1964, their teamwork really paid off in typical fashion. They only won two events on the

URC trail, but were consistent enough to win their first outright championship by just two points over William "Red" Riegel.

Nesler decided to purchase a brand new Ronnie Ward-built car for the 1965 season and enlisted Larry Dickson to drive as a teammate to Halaquist in Earl's old car. Dickson had primarily been driving super-modifieds and quickly found out that George would not put up with any shenanigans. When Dickson knocked himself and Halaquist out of a heat race at Winchester, Virginia, Nesler spent ten minutes chewing the young driver out about "you're not in super-modifieds anymore and sprint car drivers don't bang wheels," while Halaquist stood off to the side, chuckling. Actually they were very good teammates as Earl would school Larry on the in's and out's of the eastern URC tracks, many of which the Marietta, Ohio, native Dickson was seeing for the first time. By the end of the season, Dickson and Halaquist had finished first and second in the standings, respectively, with Larry winning five mains and Earl scoring four wins.

Nesler commissioned Floyd Trevis to build an all-new sprint car for Dickson to run in the United States Auto Club (USAC) in 1966. Larry had a great rookie season in USAC, winning races at Tulsa, Oklahoma, and Reading, Pennsylvania. He finished fifth in the points, while Nesler tallied sixth in owner points. In 1967, Dickson won the opening USAC event at Reading but destroyed the car in July when he crashed at Eldora Speedway in Rossburg, Ohio.

Earl Halaquist scored yet another URC title in 1966 aboard Nesler's car winning a career-high seven races. As good as 1966 was, '67 was even better with Earl and George dominating URC with 14 feature wins and a romp to the championship. They won five times on the way to their fifth URC title in 1968 after a season-long duel with Fred "Jiggs" Peters.

For 1969, Nesler announced he was going to run the tough Central Pennsylvania circuit, but he still ran a few URC meets and won a season-opening double-header with driver Wayne Woodward (a.k.a. Billy Hughes).

Drivers that drove for George Nesler in American Racing Drivers Club (ARDC) midjet car competition were Leigh Earnshaw, Nick Fornoro, Mike Grbac, Dale Thompson and Steve Yodock.

Drivers that drove for George Nesler in modified stock car competition were Walt Bettler and Harold "Sonny" Strupp (in a Dick "Toby" Tobias-chassis #2-X).

Drivers that drove for George Nesler, besides



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himself, in Atlantic Coast Racing Association (ACRA) competition were Denny "D.J." Comiskey and Joe Verbile.

Drivers that drove for George Nesler in International Motor Contest Association (IMCA) competition were Larry Dickson, Earl Halaquist, Bill Brown, Ronnie Dunstan, Bill Roynon, Gino Swarthout, Dick "Toby" Tobias and Bruce Walkup.

Drivers that drove for George Nesler in United Racing Club (URC) competition were Earl Halaquist, Larry Dickson, Paul Barnes, Rick Bonnell, Tom Price and Wayne Woodward (a.k.a. Billy Hughes).

Drivers that drove for George Nesler in United States Auto Club (USAC) competition were Larry Dickson, Earl Halaquist, Tom Bigelow, Chuck Booth, Bill Brown, Bob Courtwright, Wally Dallenbach, Ron Lux and Jim Maguire.

George Nesler passed away on February 22, 1993, in Piscataway, New Jersey. His wife, Anna Lena Knemoller, had passed away on March 2, 1976. George Nesler, Jr., continues to live today in Piscataway with his wife Sheila. Three half-siblings (Frank, Myrtle and Florence), from his mother's first marriage to Andrew Jennings, are all deceased.

George W. Nesler, with his 56 wins and five consecutive point championships, was inducted into the URC Hall of Fame in 2012. He was inducted into the Eastern Motorsport Press Association (EMPA) Hall of Fame in 1999.

