



national sprint car hall of fame

KNOXVILLE, IOWA

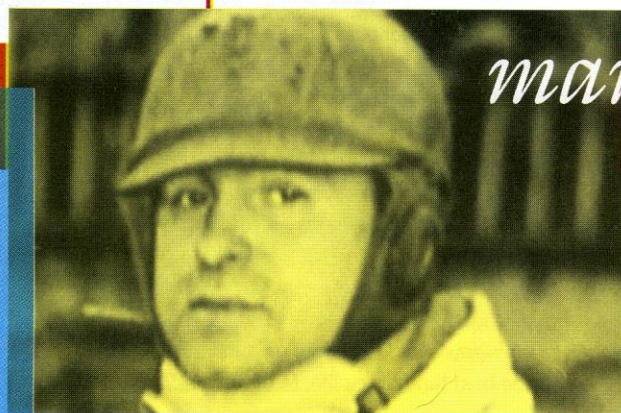
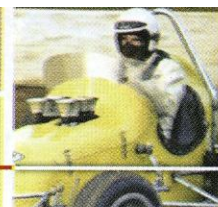


PHOTO CREDIT: FRANK SMITH

mark Light

Sherman "Red" Campbell, Jimmy Zohner (a.k.a. "Jimmy Border"), Bill Schindler, Len Duncan, Buford "Doc" Shanebrook, Joie Chitwood, Granville "Buster" Warke, Tommy Hinnershitz (a.k.a. "Tommy Milton") and George Herman amongst others. The nicknames were to fool the officials of the ultra-strict American Automobile Association (AAA) sanctioning body. At that time, auto mechanic, sprint car owner, driver and race track promoter Mark was still a lodger at the home of Elmer and Mayme Boger in Lebanon.

points, over Ammon Kelchner (234 points), three-time Lebanon winner Paul Young (235.5), Dave Wilt (189), Jerry Donmoyer (136) and Bill Gable (109), respectively.

However, on Wednesday, June 23, at Landisville, Mark Light's driving season ended as he was severely burned (face, chest and arms) in a fiery on-track accident. He spent twelve weeks in the Lancaster General Hospital. While he was recuperating, his assistant Jim Lengle, starter J. Austin Shay and publicity agent Ted Gress kept the races at the Lebanon fairgrounds going.

Mark Miller Light was born in Annville, Pennsylvania, on October 27, 1910, to parents Ellsworth Boger Light and the former Mammie A. Miller. Mark had three siblings. Grace Elizabeth, Clarence and David Paul Light. Mark's mother, Mammie, passed away on September 12, 1914, when Mark was just three years old. Mark's father, Ellsworth, was killed when he was gored by a bull on the family farm on December 13, 1921, when Mark was just 11 years old.

Being underage, Mark was sent to the Milton S. Hershey School for orphans, instead of inheriting the Lebanon County family farm. He later went to live with his father's mother's youngest brother, Elmer Boger. In 1930, Mark was a lathe operator at a nut & bolt works.

The first record of Mark Light driving race cars was in 1932, at age twenty-one. However, on July 30, 1933, his 'pepped up' two-man Ford roadster flipped while hot-lapping on a Sunday afternoon on the half-mile Pottsville fairgrounds dirt track. Light suffered back, arm and rib injuries, while his fellow racer Paul Stager suffered other serious injuries and succumbed to pneumonia on September 6.

Mark M. Light married Marguerite Irene Snyder of Avon on September 19, 1933. They had one daughter, Joanne, born in 1934. At the time, Mark was running a Sunoco gas station at Eighth and Weimer Streets in Lebanon.

On Sunday afternoon, August 19, 1934, Mark suffered head injuries and right-side rib fractures at the Landisville half-mile dirt track when his jalopy flipped and he was thrown out of the car. Others involved in the accident were Ottis Stine and Bill Yergy, Jr.

In early 1935, Mark started promoting races at the half-mile Lebanon fairgrounds dirt track. The track ran until 1940 and featured such talent as Light himself, Ted Nyquist (a.k.a. "Ted Miller"), Ottis Stine, "Tex" Artz, George "Dutch" Culp, Ted Kline, Billy Winn, Ray "Dutch" Shollenberger (a.k.a. "Don Raye"), Bill Holland,

During the '35 season, running the independent (non-AAA) circuit, Mark won at George Dietrich's Central Speedway in Bird-In-Hand, his own Lebanon track, the Kutztown fairgrounds and the Alcyon Speedway in Pitman, New Jersey. He also competed at O'Hara's Anthracite Speedway in Brandonville, the Landisville track and at the Hatfield Speedway in Pennsylvania. And he promoted the 1935 Eastern Independent Dirt Track Championship race at the Reading fairgrounds, in addition to his bi-monthly events at the Lebanon fairgrounds.

For the 1936 season, Light raced with the independent and newly-established Central Pennsylvania Racing Association (CPRA), with himself as sanctioning body president, J. Earl Way as secretary, and George Dietrich as treasurer. He won six races at his Lebanon oval, including the 1936 Eastern States Independent Dirt Track Championship race, and another three times at the Bird-In-Hand track. He won the 1936 CPRA title, despite suffering minor injuries at Kutztown in August and Pitman, N.J., in September. Mark Light also branched out and promoted races at the Landisville and Kutztown tracks, in addition to his bi-monthly shows at the Lebanon fairgrounds.

In 1937, Mark Light again promoted bi-monthly Sunday afternoon races at the Lebanon fairgrounds, owned a Miller Special 'big car' for AAA racing with driver Ted Nyquist and raced the independent Central Pennsylvania circuit in Herm Kauffman's D.O. Hal. He also raced a midget car in a pair of Tuesday night races at Lauer's Park in Reading.

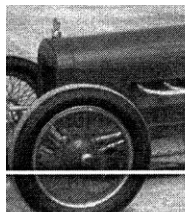
In May and early June of 1937, Light claimed seven 'big car' victories at Bird-In-Hand (four) and Lebanon (three). On June 21, he was leading the CPRA point standings with 369

On September 19, Mark returned to his Lebanon track, but only as a spectator. He tried to return to the cockpit in the season finale on October 31, but he was still too weak and he withdrew his entry during the program. Ammon Kelchner, the 1937 Eastern States Independent Dirt Track Championship race winner at Lebanon on October 10, triumphed again on the final afternoon.

In 1938, Mark continued promoting the Lebanon track, as well as some other special promotions at Mount Holly, New Jersey, and the Schuylkill County Fairgrounds in Cressona, Pennsylvania. He also owned the Miller Special driven by Tommy Hinnershitz and Buford "Doc" Shanebrook.

He continued competing on the independent (non-AAA) circuit from April through July, winning once at Cross Bay Speedway in Ozone Park, New York, and twice at his own Lebanon track. But, on July 31, at the tough Langhorne, Pennsylvania, track, Mark Light made his AAA debut as a driver. And, on August 14, he promoted his first of many AAA races at Lebanon. He continued winning at tracks like Ozone Park, Lebanon, and Afton, New York.

On Friday, September 2, he was injured again in a highway accident on the way home from competing in midget car races in Lancaster. He broke his left arm and had internal injuries, which kept him on the sidelines for a couple of weeks. But, he finished his season as a driver with a couple more wins, including at Cressona and Lewistown. Mark Light was named the 1938 AAA Eastern Circuit Class B 'big car' champion. In addition to his CPRA appearances, he also spent more time racing with the Central States Racing Association (CSRA), such as at Savannah, Georgia, during the winter racing season.



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MARK LIGHT

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1938 was definitely Mark Light's breakout season, as he began racing, and occasionally winning, against such nationally-known AAA and CSRA drivers as friend Tommy Hinnershitz, Dennis "Duke" Nalon, Tony Willman, Jimmy Wilburn and Joie Chitwood, amongst many others.

Mark Light continued to excel in 1939, racing regularly with the AAA down south in the winter and up north in the summer. He again won at Lebanon and Lewistown. On Sunday, April 23, he won at the legendary Reading Fairgrounds, beating Tommy Hinnershitz and Hank Rogers, respectively. On Sunday, July 2, he won at the fabled Williams Grove Speedway in Mechanicsburg over Len Duncan and Mike Little, respectively. And two days later, on July 4, 1939, the driver who routinely lost his Pennsylvania driver's license due to run-in's with the law, won at the dangerous Langhorne track in a 200-lap AAA-sanctioned strictly-stock car race aboard a Buick.

Mark Light had officially arrived on the AAA scene, finishing second to champion Joie Chitwood in the AAA Eastern Circuit 'big car' points. Completing the top ten that year were Tony Willman, Tommy Hinnershitz, Walt Brown, Bill Holland, Vic Nauman, Mike Little, Lee Wallard and Granville "Buster" Warke, respectively. Light also promoted the Lebanon oval, although less shows than he had previously, and he continued racing his own midget cars when convenient.

The next year, 1940, was an 'off year' for Mark Light. He won early in the season at Reading and Williams Grove, but suffered through the year with engine issues. He closed out the season with wins at Reading and Bloomsburg in September. This was also his last year promoting races at the Lebanon fairgrounds, a track at which he had won features on fourteen (14) occasions.

Joie Chitwood was again the AAA Eastern Circuit 'big car' point champion in 1940, over Bill Holland, Ted Horn, Tony Willman, Dennis "Duke" Nalon, Mark Light, Everett Saylor, Vic Nauman, Bob Sall, and Buddy Rusch.

1941 was another interesting year for the 5'8" 182-pound Mark Light, as he underwent an appendectomy in early March, raced in May and June, and enlisted in the U.S. Army on June 23. He won at Williams Grove Speedway on June 15 and was leading the AAA Eastern Circuit points on June 21 over Vic Nauman, Ted Horn, Bill Holland, Everett Saylor, Dee Toran, Bob Sall, Hank Rogers, Joe Sanco, and Joe Sostilio, respectively.

Mark served in the Army, starting at the New Cumberland, Pennsylvania, reception center and then being transferred to Camp Wheeler near Macon, Georgia, and finally Camp Croft in Spartanburg, South Carolina, where he was postmaster. While he was away from racing, his Miller 'big car' was still campaigned by other drivers. At the end of the 1941 season, Mark was still tenth in the final AAA points behind champion Bill Holland, runner-up Henry "Hank" Rogers, Walt Ader, Vic Nauman, Dave Randolph, Dennis "Duke" Nalon, Frank McGurk, Joe Sanco, and Ed Casterline, respectively.

Mark M. Light married June Nora Plantz in 1942. They had one daughter, born in March of 1948, named Marklene or "Markey."

The AAA suspended racing in early 1942 and the CSRA followed suit in late June. Mark Light raced a handful of shows, but his cars continued to struggle mechanically. On July 30, 1942, all auto races in the United States were suspended by the government. In December of 1942, the Lebanon newspaper reported that Mark Light had made sergeant status at Camp Forrest in Tullahoma, Tennessee, serving as a mechanic on army trucks and jeeps.

'Big car' racing resumed in late August of 1945 at Essex Junction, Vermont. Mark Light ran some of these late season shows, but disaster struck on October 7 at the Williams Grove Speedway when his crankshaft snapped as he went into the turn on his time-trial lap. His car climbed the embankment, flipped end-for-end and crashed into the crowd of spectators, bursting into flames. One man was killed and twelve others were severely injured, including Mark. Light suffered a punctured left lung, fractured ribs, a broken left arm, a fracture of the neck and burns on his arms and chest. Mark was discharged on November 2 from the Carlisle Hospital.

1946 was another 'off year' for the driver known as "Lighty." He came back to AAA 'big car' racing in May at Trenton, New Jersey, but he suffered through another season of poor finishes.

The next year, 1947, was much better for the Pennsylvania Dutchman as he won at Reading, Nazareth, and Williams Grove (twice). He also won at Reedsville, Pennsylvania, in a midget. And he continued racing in the South in the spring and winter.

In '48, he won at Langhorne, and at Charlotte, North Carolina. He had a good year racing AAA 'big cars,' but he also did his fair share of midget car racing at places like Williams Grove, Reedsville and Hollidaysburg.

In 1949, Mark won a fir show at Cumberland, Maryland, in September. He also had some 'top five' finishes throughout the year, both up north and down south. In September, he failed to qualify the Fred Johnstone Offy at Syracuse, N.Y., in the AAA championship Car race. In October, Mark ran the Langhorne AAA championship car race for Lee Glessner, finishing twelfth.

In 1950, he had a fair year, finishing fourth in the six-race Williams Grove Speedway point standings, behind Tommy Hinnershitz, Ottis Stine and Mike Nazaruk, respectively. And he again had 'top five' finishes in eastern AAA races. Mark Light only made one attempt to qualify for the Indianapolis 500 and that was in '50. He tried with a Stevens-Offy and a Meyer-Offy, but failed to make the grid with either car.

In 1951, Light won the AAA race at the Erie County Fair in Hamburg, New York. He wound down his driving career in the early and mid-1950's, which was marked by another accident and injuries (broken ribs, lacerations and brush burns) at Reading's opener in 1952. His results were not what they were earlier in his career, but he was still listed as an entrant in the June 9, 1957, National Auto Racing Association (NARA) sprint car race at the Hilltop Speedway in Myerstown, just outside of Lebanon. It seems his driving career went full circle, from 'outlaw' to AAA to 'outlaw' driver again.

Mark Light is credited with five (5) wins at Williams Grove Speedway and twenty-four (24) AAA-sanctioned wins in his career. He also earned thirty-four (34) wins in 'big cars,' stock cars and midget cars at the following Pennsylvania tracks: Reading, Langhorne, Nazareth, Lebanon Fair, Central (Bird-In-Hand), Lewistown Fair, Maple Grove, Williams Grove, Schuylkill Fair, and Kutztown Fair.

Mark Light was a mentor to Tommy Hinnershitz and Harold "Lucky" Lux. In fact, back in the day, June Plantz and Mark Light introduced Tommy to his future wife, the former Betty Selman of Lebanon.

Mark ran an Esso station, then a Tydol station with a speed parts shop, and finally an auto repair and muffler shop in Lebanon, prior to his wife June's passing in 1973. Afterwards, he moved to Manheim, Pennsylvania, to be close to his daughter Markey. It is there where he passed on April 1, 1975. Mark Miller Light is buried in the Mount Lebanon Cemetery in Lebanon.