LLOYD BECKMAN

by Bob Mays

Lloyd Beckman was born on May 6, 1927, in rural Lancaster County, Nebraska. Lloyd's family moved to Lincoln when he was a youngster. He started his racing career with motorcycles in 1948, but quickly progressed to four wheels by driving some track roadster races for Gene Young of Hastings, Nebraska.

It was Woodrow "Woody" Brinkman who recommended Lloyd to Bill Smith of Speedway Motors. Brinkman had been driving for "Speedy" Bill, but he had an opportunity to work for National Speedways, Inc. Smith was skeptical of hiring a motorcycle racer with very little experience, but decided to give Beckman a tryout. It was to be the beginning of a fiery relationship that would turn both men into national stars.

By 1953, Lloyd was tearing things up in Smith's 4x coupe, winning at Capitol Beach Speedway in Lincoln, Playland Park in Council Bluffs, Iowa, and several county fairs including a pair of big money wins at Ord, Nebraska. Lloyd was gaining the reputation of a hard-nosed racer who could not be intimidated.

Beckman and Smith had one of many "disagreements" in 1957 and Lloyd chose to jump into Pete Leikam's coupe. The winning ways did not stop, with Beckman claiming nineteen in a row at Hastings Raceway at one point.

For the 1960 season, Bill Smith built a new sedan and Lloyd Beckman agreed to sit in the seat. Immediately, Beckman became unbeatable. They won so much, that Smith's Speedway Motor business was being hurt because the other racers were becoming suspicious of Smith. He had chief mechanic John Larson replace the 350 cubic inch engine with a 292 c.i. unit in hopes that it would bring the field closer to Lloyd. It didn't work, in part because it served to motivate Lloyd that much more to win. Finally, while going for their seventeenth win in a row, the little motor blew, and the crowd gave Beckman a standing ovation because they were so happy to see someone else win. Beckman and Smith also ventured to Spencer, Iowa, and won the Tri-State Championship which was run during the 1961 Clay County Fair.

Lloyd made his debut in sprint cars in 1961, driving for Fred Bowers of Fairbury, Nebraska. Beckman scored a surprising victory at Belleville, Kansas, when leader Ralph Donaldson flipped end-over-end.

After winning track championships at Capitol Beach in 1960 and 1961, and clinching a third straight in 1962, the Beckman/Smith combo decided to try all-out supermodified racing at Knoxville, Iowa. Armed with a CAE copy built by Smith, Lloyd was starting to get the measure of the big half-mile when he tangled with Earl Wagner in turn three on August 28, 1962. A badly broken arm and a destroyed race car was the result.

In 1964 the Nebraska Modified Racing Association had converted to supermodifieds and Lloyd won the first supermod championship for the club, driving Bill Smith's roadster.
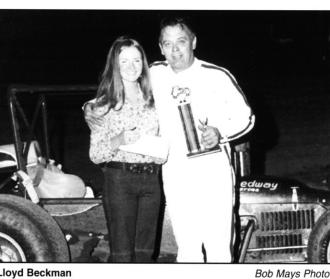
By the end of 1965, however, Beckman and Smith split again, so Lloyd hopped into the seat of the Charlie Williams and Gary Swenson Culbert Automotive Engineering (CAE) super-modified. Lloyd completely dominated the 1966 NMRA season, winning 11 main events, including ten in a row, and finishing with over twice as many points as second place Frank Brennfoerder. He also won the big Iowa State Fair supermodified race at Des Moines. His one disappointment, however, came at the 1966 Knoxville Nationals, where he led with just four laps to go before being passed by eventual winner Jay Woodside. Lloyd Beckman placed second.

Williams and Swenson had Ted Hall build a four-bar sprinter for 1967, and things were looking good for Lloyd as he won the Big Car Racing Association (BCRA) sprint car race on Memorial Day at Belleville in his new mount.

Lloyd Beckman   Bob Mays Photo

Six wins came at Midwest Speedway in Lincoln during the season, as Lloyd fought with Joe Saldana for supremacy at the north Lincoln oval. A crash at Des Moines, which resulted in a broken leg, cut Beckman's season short however.

For 1968, Lloyd went with owner Larry Swanson and mechanic Wayne House. The team hung close to point leader Harold Leep all season at Eagle Raceway, and just nipped the Wichita, Kansas, Hall of Famer for the title. Lloyd also snared his first two feature wins at Knoxville in weekly competition. Perhaps Lloyd's biggest accomplishment, however, was a single lap at Belleville. That 19.94 second lap, the first one under 20 seconds in the long history of the track, created bigger headlines than most feature wins. For his part, Lloyd attributed it to a light mist which fell a few minutes before he went out to qualify. Long-time Belleville rail-birds will tell you that it was the closest to a perfect lap that has ever been run at the big half-mile.

If the championship at Eagle in 1968 was a squeaker, then 1969 was a blow-out. Lloyd dominated the season in his Swanson Chevy, beginning to end, winning ten features in route to his second consecutive championship. Lloyd and the Swanson team also took on the California Racing Association (CRA) in an early season test at El Centro, California, easily winning the feature. A protest for passing prior to the green coming out on a restart

subsequently set him back to fourth place.

Lloyd took most of the 1970 season off, then returned in 1971 in the cockpit of Bill Smith's sprinter once again. Racing primarily at Eagle and Beatrice, Nebraska, Beckman once again took on all comers, winning six times at Beatrice, five times at Eagle and claiming two more at Sunset Speedway in Omaha, as well as one BCRA win at Erie, Colorado. The competition at Eagle was particularly impressive, with such names as Dick Sutcliffe, Thad Dosher, Eddie Leavitt, Ray Lee Goodwin and Lonnie Jensen showing up on a weekly basis.

In 1972, Lloyd set another record with four wins in a row at Eagle Raceway. He also won a BCRA sprint main at Belleville, but finished second to Lonnie Jensen in the final points at Eagle and in BCRA. This was the start of the first real slump of Lloyd's career, and it would last almost three years.

Late 1975 found Lloyd in the Grant King built sprinter of Bruce Edwards, which was being wrenched by Jim Gessford. The team put together a good year in 1976, nailing another big BCRA win at Belleville during the fair. He also won a feature at Hartford, South Dakota, in a substitute role for the injured Dick Morris.

Max Rogers hired Lloyd for the 1977 racing season, and they won their first race together on July 4th at Midwest Speedway in Lincoln, Nebraska. Five days later it was Lloyd's turn to stop a winning streak when he ended Doug Wolfgang's record streak of nine at Knoxville. Then, for good measure, Lloyd won again the next week.

A track record at another legendary speedway was added to the Beckman resume in 1979 when Lloyd piloted the Gil Sonner Chevy to a 21.29 second clocking at Hawkeye Downs in Cedar Rapids, Iowa. This record stood until the track was paved several years later.

Infrequent rides in 1980 and '81 had left some people with the impression that Lloyd Beckman had hung up the goggles. But 1982 changed their attitudes as the 55-year veteran reunited with Bill Smith's famous number 4x and routed the kids at Midwest Speedway, winning seven features on his way to the championship. Inconsistency hampered his effort in 1983, but he still won three times at Midwest and once at David City, Nebraska.

At the end of the 1983 season, Lloyd again announced his retirement from competitive driving. This time, it seemed, he really meant it.

He did stay away from the tracks for several years, but in 1993, Knoxville announced plans for a Hall of Fame Classic for the Legends of Sprint Car Racing to be held at the Marion County Fairgrounds oval on June 11, 1993. Lloyd timed his Gary Swenson Chevy fifth-fastest against such great veterans as Rick Ferkel, Larry Dickson, Leroy Van Conett, Billy Engelhart, Bill Utz, Earl Wagner, Jim McElreath, Lonnie Jensen, Jon Backlund, Frank Riddle, Benny Rapp, Darl Harrison, Ray Lee Goodwin and many others. After having to run the B-Main to get a transfer spot, Lloyd put on a show, coming through the field for a tenth

LLOYD BECKMAN, cont.

place finish.

Two years later, Lloyd made arrangements with "Butch" Young to drive his son Danny Young's car at the National Sprint Car Hall of Fame Legends event. For a warm-up, they traveled to Webster City, Iowa, for a 360-cubic-inch sprint car race. Beckman hadn't seen this track since 1948, when he ran a motorcycle race there. The 68-year-old veteran of almost 50 years on the dirt tracks made a shambles of the field, easily winning both his heat and the main event. The next week at Knoxville, Lloyd set a one-lap record for the Masters Classic event at Knoxville, but engine

problems kept him from one more win on the black gumbo.

In talking to Bill Smith, it becomes obvious why Lloyd had so much success. Said Smith, "He had a way of tuning everything else out when it came time to climb in the race car. Lloyd could focus better than anyone I've ever seen drive; he was one of the best short track racers to ever sit in one of my cars."

Some of the other car owners Lloyd drove for include Max Schiegel, Carl Mismach, Fred Garbers, Bryce Hansen, Ed Smith and Bob Richardson. Among his favorite mechanics, in addition to those already mentioned, were Marty Bassett, Charlie Martin and John Leverenz.

Lloyd was inducted

into the Knoxville Raceway Hall of Fame in 1984 and Nebraska Auto Racing Hall of Fame in 1999. In January, 2000, just days after being elected into the High Banks Hall of Fame in Belleville, Kansas, he suffered a fatal heart attack. Although he is gone now, he still has a legion of fans and Lloyd Beckman's exploits are usually a prominent part of any bench racing session held throughout the Midwest.

Story courtesy of FlatOut
(Mind Over Media Publishing).

Lloyd Beckman & Bill Smith   Bob Mays Photo