

NATIONAL SPRINT CAR HALL of FAME & MUSEUM

DON BASILE

Don Basile is being inducted into the National Sprint Car Hall of Fame in 1999 in honor of his outstanding achievements as a promoter.

Dominic Earl Basile was born in Detroit (Mich.) on June 16, 1916, to Gus and Lena Basile. Dom later moved to Torrance (Calif.) with his family as a young boy, and raced the streets of southern California as soon as he could drive. In the late 1930's, he was introduced to the Agajanian family and he started running errands for "Pappy" J.T. Agajanian, the father of J.C. Agajanian. "Aggie" took Don, as he was now known, to a "Turkey Night" midget race at Gilmore Stadium in 1937 and Don was 'hooked' on racing for life.

Don worked for the Ford Motor Company until World War II, when he went to work at the Wilmington (Calif.) Ship Yards. Towards the end of the war, he opened a Flying A service station and then the Gardena Used Cars business. Don proudly believed in the adage "race on Sunday, sell on Monday".

All of this came about at the same time as the end of WW II, and the re-opening of Carrell Speedway by Emmett Malloy. By 1946, Don had jumped into racing with both feet, working for Malloy, Agajanian and Bill White in the racing promotion business. At Carrell, Basile got his start selling programs. With Aggie and Bob Estes, Don formed the Western States Stock Car Racing Association in 1947. Additionally, Don drove stock cars and was the inaugural WSSCRA champion. He also owned cars for such able pilots as Walt James, Andy Linden, Jack McGrath and Troy Ruttman.

By the early '50's, Don was general manager of Carrell Speedway. With his checkered Nash pace car, flamboyant attire and unbridled enthusiasm, Don was a hit with fans, drivers, and celebrities. The boys with the California Roadster Association (CRA) nicknamed him 'beachball' because of his colorful attire and the way he bounced around the track, seeming to be everywhere at once. Don brought "crash derbies", motorcycle racing and the newly-formed National Association for Stock Car Auto Racing (NASCAR) to Carrell, before the city closed the track and put Artesia Boulevard through turns three and four.

In 1955, after a short stint as owner of Clovis Speedway (Fresno, Calif.), Aggie asked Don to join him full-time in the Agajanian Enterprises business. This partnership lasted until 1972 as together they promoted a wide variety of motorsports events in the western United States. The venues at which they performed their magic together included such famed facilities as Sacramento, San Jose, Del Mar, Arizona State Fairgrounds, Riverside, and Phoenix International.

However, Ascot Park was the crown jewel of Agajanian Enterprises, with its weekly California Racing Association sprint car action. One of Basile's specialties throughout his career was in dirt track preparation. He was a master, which is just one of the reasons he remained Aggie's "right-hand man" throughout all their years together. He was so well-rounded that he even served as team manager for their Indy 500-winning effort with Parnelli Jones in 1963.

Following a disagreement with the Ascot Park ownership in 1972, Agajanian and Basile left the Gardena oval and continued promoting their special events at county and state fairgrounds. However, due to rapid urban development and the dwindling number of auto racing facilities, Basile followed publicist Ronnie Allyn's advice and moved to the San Diego area, where Don purchased the South Bay Speedway in Chula Vista. Renaming it Speedway 117 and working day and night for ten years, he made it into one of the most versatile tracks in the country. It is not surprising, though, that visits by the CRA sprint car racers were featured attractions on the annual season schedule. The charter member of the United States Auto Club (USAC) lost the lease on Speedway 117 in 1983 due to proposed development, and like Ascot Park today, it still sits vacant.

As for Don's years with Aggie, he had nothing but positive things to say about his mentor, "He was a hard worker, fair, honest and expected the same from his employees. He was always in a hurry.



Don Basile

Bob Basile Collection

Aggie got more speeding tickets than Carter had liver pills."

After Speedway 117 closed, Don went to work for central Northern California promoter John Soares, managing the Petaluma Speedway for years. Late in life, Don returned to San Diego, selling used cars and promoting demolition derbies at southern California county fairs. The man who proudly proclaimed, "I'm the luckiest guy in the world, being able to make a living doing what I loved", passed away on October 21, 1998. He is survived by daughter Betty Osborn of Bakersfield (Calif.) and son Don Robert Basile of Imperial Beach (Calif.). Bob continues the motorsports promotion tradition with his company Sunnyside Promotions.

Two awards on the west coast have been initiated in Don's memory in the last year. Kasey Kahne of Enumclaw (Wash.) was the recipient of the Turkey Night Midget Grand Prix "Don Basile Rookie of the Race" award, while sprint car racing ambassadors Walt and Dottie James were named the inaugural recipients of the "Don 'Beachball' Basile Lifetime Achievement Award".