

BILL SCHINDLER

William Lawrence Schindler was born on March 6, 1909, in the Catskill Mountains region of New York. Bill's father Fred ran a garage in Summitville, while his mother Maureen was highly educated in languages, art and music.

In his youth, Bill tinkered with engines in his dad's shop and raced motorcycles at a 'track' in a farmer's field. Unfortunately, Bill and his younger sister Louise lost their frail mother at an early age due to ill health. Their father passed away shortly thereafter, while Bill was only a teen, leaving an uncle to care for the orphaned children.

Schindler began four-wheel competition at outlaw dirt track events in a stock-engined big car in 1931. In what would be his first stint with big cars from 1931 through '34, Schindler experienced only fair success. However, he did win events at Watertown (N.Y.) in 1931 and at Deer Park (N.Y.) in 1932, driving a home-built car for Bill Lawrence.

In 1933, the always-smiling 'happy-go-lucky' Schindler met and married Rose Schmitt. They soon had two children of their own, daughter Doris and son Bobby.

Bill competed in the East Coast's inaugural midget car meet at the Olympic Park in Irvington (N.J.) in 1934. And it is fair to say that Schindler's career advanced as quickly as the rise in popularity of midget race cars, or "doodlebugs" as they were known.

Bill successfully raced midgets all over the East and Northeast in the mid- to late-1930's, including at the famed Nutley (N.J.) Velodrome. He continued to drive big cars in American Automobile Association (AAA) events against the likes of Bob Sall, Buster Warke, and Lee Wallard, and he was no more popular than at the Orange County Fairgrounds in Middletown (N.Y.). In March of 1936, he also drove a stock car in a 250-mile AAA event on the Daytona Beach (Fla.) road course.

1936 was an eventful season for Schindler, twice rolling his big car and receiving minor injuries. He also flipped his midget, was treated in the ambulance, returned to competition and won the main event on his way to clinching the Eastern Midget Racing Alliance title. And he scored twelve sprint car wins that year, including eight in a row, driving for such owners as Carl "Pop" Green, Jimmy Nichols and Leo Krasek.

Then, on September 26, 1936, disaster struck as the 27-year-old was preparing to race a big car in the afternoon at the Mineola (N.Y.) Fairgrounds and a midget in the evening at West Haven (Conn.). At Mineola, while battling for the lead, Schindler

clipped and smashed the outside fence before striking a tree. His racer flipped and rebounded back onto the track, where it was struck by two more racers. The impact threw Bill clear, but several large splinters from the wooden guard rail pierced his left leg. Three days later, at the Nassau Hospital, gangrene set in and the leg had to be amputated at mid-thigh.

The ever-popular Schindler was fitted with an artificial leg, although he never wore it while racing,



Bill Schindler

(Bruce Craig Photos)

and he triumphantly returned in the winter of 1936-37 by claiming an indoor midget title in New England. However, he vowed never to attempt racing in two shows again in the same day. It was also during '37 that Bill took over the wheel of the potent Mike Caruso Offy midget.

Then Bill lost his sister to tuberculosis, and, as a result of caring for her, Rose Schindler contracted the disease and she remained hospitalized between 1938 and 1942. At that point, with Rose ill and their marriage over, Bill took custody of their two children and moved to Freeport, Long Island.

In 1938 and '39, Schindler battled the AAA midget contingent of Dennis "Duke" Nalon, Duane Carter (Sr.), Henry Banks and Paul Russo on a regular basis. Not happy with the AAA rules, though, Bill became the first president of the rival American Racing Drivers Club (ARDC). He was crowned ARDC's first champion in 1940, and was runner-up to Henry Banks the following season.

During World War II, Schindler found himself working as a machinist in a Brooklyn war plant and using his "free time" helping counsel fellow amputees. Over the years, their stone-faced home at 221 Grand Avenue hosted soldiers and racers in need of a friendly face.

After the war, the "Freeport Flyer" was the ARDC champion in 1945 and '46. In '47, he was second in points to George Rice, yet he won a record 53 feature. He then took the title back in '48 with another 53 midget wins, racing as a teammate to Mike Nazaruk in Mike Caruso's famed "black deuce."

Following Ted Horn's death at DuQuoin in 1948, "Bronco Bill" Schindler rejoined AAA and drove

the Horn sprinter for Ted's former mechanic Dick Simonek in 1949. Bill had been out of big car racing for 13 years.

The next April at Arlington (Tex.), Schindler played a part in the filming of the movie "To Please a Lady" while placing second to Duane Carter in the non-point champ car event of the day. Thus, Schindler was lured to Indy in May of 1950 and, through the influence of East Coast speed shop owner Frankie DeRoy, he found a seat in the Automobile Shippers Special. He netted a 26th place finish in his debut at the Brickyard. In 1951, Bill drove the Alan Chapman Special to a 13th place result, while he finished all 200 laps in it the following May for a fine 14th place run.

During the early 1950's, Schindler found some success in the championship cars, too, winning at the Springfield (Ill.) mile on August 16, 1952. He also scored many top five finishes against the likes of "Duke" Dinsmore, Tony Bettenhausen, Sam Hanks, Johnnie Parsons, Jack McGrath, Walt Faulkner, Mike Nazaruk

and Paul Russo at tracks across the country.

Back on the AAA Eastern big car circuit, a balding Bill scored a ninth in points in 1950, behind such veterans as champion Tommy Hinnershitz, Otis Stine, Mark Light, Nazaruk and Wallard. The following season, he wheeled Ralph Malamud's and Earl Beal's sprinters to a fine runner-up finish behind arch-rival Hinnershitz, 678 points to 600 points. And in '52, he was again running in the top ten in Eastern big car points.

But, on September 12, 1952, for some reason, Schindler had plans to break his vow and compete in a big car race in the afternoon at Sam Nunis' Allentown (Penna.) Fairgrounds and in a midget race in the evening at Hatfield (Penna.) On the first lap of the race at Allentown, a rear wheel and axle assembly came loose from Carl Becker's car and it was impacted by Bill's machine. The impact was so great that he and his car were sent wildly out of the track, down an embankment into a ticket/concession stand. Bill Schindler was fatally injured.

The man who loved to race wearing black, red or white western-style satin shirts is survived by his widow Rose and his daughter Doris of Irving (Tex.). Son Robert, who also suffered tuberculosis of the spine, died in March of 1989 and is buried alongside his famous father in Greenfield Cemetery on Long Island. In 1985, Bill was posthumously inducted into the AAA/USAC Midget Auto Racing Hall of Fame. Much of Bill Schindler's memorabilia is today housed in the Marty Himes Museum in Bayshore (N.Y.)