

NATIONAL SPRINT CAR HALL of FAME & MUSEUM

RUSS GARNANT

Russ Garnant is being inducted into the National Sprint Car Hall of Fame in 1999 in honor of his outstanding achievements as a car owner and mechanic, including his having won the 1930 American Automobile Association (AAA) Pacific Southwest championship with driver Francis Quinn.

Russell Garnant of Glendale (Calif.) and his brother, "Red", began owning and maintaining 'big cars' at the Ascot Speedway in the late 1920's. Due to Ascot's year-round schedule and the fact that many drivers switched rides before/after the Indianapolis 500, and many drivers were killed in AAA Pacific Coast racing, ride-switching at the 5/8-mile oiled dirt track was a common occurrence.

In 1929, a number of drivers, including W.H. "Stubby" Stubblefield, Mel McKee and eventual AAA Pacific Coast Southwest champion Mel Kenealy drove the Russ Garnant Simplex Piston Ring Special.

Jimmy Sharp drove Russ' Gabhart Special to three consecutive wins at Ascot at the start of the 1930 season, however he injured his arm at Bakersfield (Calif.) and temporarily was replaced by Stubblefield and B.W. "Speed" Hinkley. Shortly thereafter, Francis Quinn switched from his Dayton Thoroughbred Special to Garnant's Lou Moore-built Dual Overhead Cragar Gabhart Special. Sadly, Sharp returned too soon to the Sparks & Weirick Special, before his arm had full strength, and he was killed in his next race at the Oakland (Calif.) mile track. Quinn was then assigned the Gabhart ride permanently. Together they won the AAA Pacific Southwest title over Mel Kenealy, Walt May, Ernie Triplett, Wilbur Shaw, Stubblefield, Swede Smith, Arvol Brunmier, Herman Schurch, and William "Shorty" Cantlon. By this time at Ascot, most Fronty's had been replaced by the more expensive and powerful Miller's. Russ was one of the last owners to make the change. Instead, he thought the trick with

the D.O. Miller-Ford, better known as the D.O. Cragar, was to make use of its power while never turning it too high in revolutions. However, he did wind up replacing the crank and rods after nearly every race.

In 1931, Quinn drove Garnant's Gabhart Special Cragar, which had been Johnny Vance's Red Pete Special, until his own new Miller, the Francis Quinn Special number one, was ready. The 28-year old "Bald Eagle" had a poor season, winding up fourth in points behind Triplett, Chet Gardner and Stubblefield. Sadly, Quinn perished in a high-way accident near Fresno, returning from a rained-out event at the new Oakland oval in mid-December. 'Musical chairs' continued in 1933 for Russ Garnant, as Herb Balmer, Carl Ryder and Rex Mays all took turns piloting the Gabhart Special 'big car'.

In 1934, Balmer and Floyd Roberts wheeled the Cragar-powered car, which now was known as the Red Lion Special, thanks to sponsorship from Earl B. Gilmore. Late in the season, Garnant finally gave up on his Fronty Ford Cragar and acquired a Miller from Bill White. He also named easterner Harris Insinger as driver of it. Rex Mays won the AAA point title over Roberts, Gordon, Petillo and Insinger.

Insinger remained in Garnant's Miller Special in 1935. On March 12, he won Ascot's helmet dash and 100-lapper, receiving a victory kiss from Swedish racing driver Greta Mollander as one of his rewards. Later that year, in September, Insinger was killed in a 100-miler at Oakland after tangling with Al Gordon. Insinger went over the fence and was instantly killed in Garnant's car.



Russ Garnant

Bruce Craig Photos