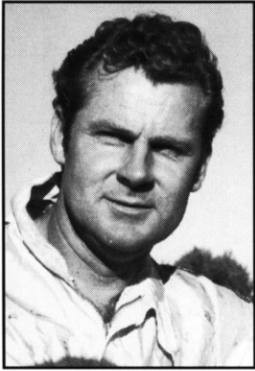


LeROY VAN CONETT



LeRoy Van Conett
Johnny Anderson Collection

LeRoy Van Conett is being inducted into the National Sprint Car Hall of Fame in 1999 in honor of his outstanding achievements as a driver, including his having won eight Northern Auto Racing Club (NARC) point championships.

LeRoy Van Conett was born in Stockton (Calif.) on April 15, 1935,

to parents Leland and Ceal Van Conett. He also had a sister Virginia. LeRoy began his racing career running jalopies in 1955 at the Stockton 99 Speedway. During the late Fifties, Van Conett graduated to the modifieds and super-modifieds at asphalt and dirt tracks of northern California. He built and maintained many of his own cars in those days.

In the mid-Sixties, Van Conett raced open-competition sprint cars at the West Capital Speedway in Sacramento, and various other tracks in the region. Many of the races were 'run-whatcha-brung' affairs. He is credited with wins in 1966 at Roseville, Dixon and West Capital.

As he was building cars and then selling them to owner Lyle McCray, it made sense for LeRoy to eventually drive for Lyle in the late '60s. In 1969, Van Conett drove one of Lyle's cars, which had been originally built in 1964 by Walt Reiff, in NARC competition. LeRoy showed his tremendous capabilities by winning his first NARC point title that year over Billy Anderson. He also won races at the beautiful Napa County Fairgrounds in Calistoga, a fast half-mile track at which he would find much success over the years.

Having put the number one on the tail tank in '70, Van Conett successfully defended his NARC crown utilizing McCray's sprinter. In those days, the fastest qualifier started the feature in the back of the pack, and passing points were earned in addition to finish position points.

LeRoy sat out most of the 1971 NARC season due to an injured kneecap, but he returned in '72 driving the same Reiff-built machine, which was now owned by Ted Hunting. They recorded five wins that year and Van Conett placed fifth in NARC points.

In 1973, Van Conett placed eighth in points, and the following year he moved up to second place behind champion Billy Anderson.

Van Conett continued wheeling the same trusty four-bar car for Hunting in 1975, with Sam Bailey-built motors, and they again won five times and claimed the NARC point title. Dick Guthrie was the mechanic on the car which was sold to an Australian in late '75 for racing "Down Under".

The "Dragon from Galt" teamed with brothers Fred and Sam Bailey in 1976 driving a brand-new Roger Beck-built chassis. The Bailey brothers number 01 sprinter captured three shows, all at West Capital that year, on Van Conett's way to a third place standing in NARC points. LeRoy Van

Conett also captured the prestigious and rich Gold Cup Race of Champions, an annual open competition event in the fall of the year at West Capital. In 1977, Van Conett claimed seven NARC wins, his fourth NARC championship, and was runner-up in the Gold Cup, all aboard the Bailey brothers black car. LeRoy had now won more NARC titles than anyone else in its rich history.

Another record point title was headed Van Conett's way in '78 following two NARC wins with the Bailey brothers and their Gary Stanton-built sprinter. Shortly after clinching the title, the driver and owners split. Van Conett finished the season driving for a variety of owners, including Jim Rodolph, Bob Morrow, and "Duke" McMillen. Driving for both DuWayne Starr and Joel McCray in 1979, Van Conett finished sixth in points, despite having collected five wins. Two of those wins came at the Ascot Park in Gardena (Calif.), one in California Racing Association (CRA) competition and the other at a joint NARC/CRA Civil War Series event. Van Conett's career NARC win total reached 46 with those sanctioned wins.

Three more wins at Calistoga in 1980 propelled Van Conett to a record sixth NARC point championship, running for both Chris Zootis and the Bailey brothers. He was again runner-up at the Gold Cup, too.

LeRoy successfully defended his title in 1981, picking up a win at Chico for Fred and Sam Bailey, and then winning six times for Chris Zootis. Calistoga was the site for five of those victory celebrations.

In 1982, McCray bought an ex-Josele Garza Indy car through Bobby Unser. The car was in much need of repair and his efforts with it kept LeRoy off the NARC circuit. He did run the car at the Indianapolis (Ind.) Motor Speedway that year, although with no ground effects, he was not able to put it in the '500'.

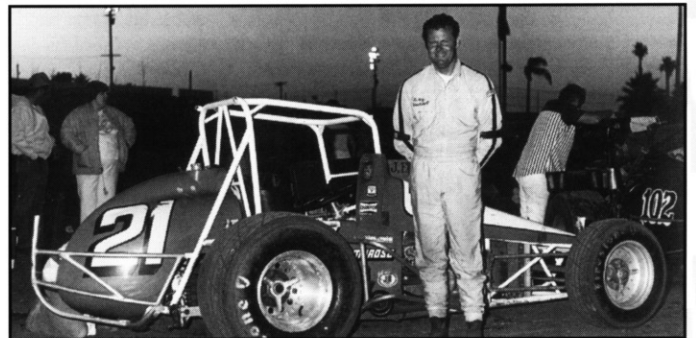
Van Conett teamed with car owner Bob Neilson in 1983, and they placed second to Chuck Gurney in the season-ending point standings.

In '84, the owner of River City Forklift, who was extremely popular with fans and fellow competitors, won seven times for Neilson and clinched his eighth and final NARC title. Van Conett's NARC win total peaked at an

amazing 65 career feature wins. And that doesn't include his many wins in unsanctioned events.

One of the reasons LeRoy was so well liked throughout his career was his willingness to share his knowledge with fellow racers. LeRoy Van Conett's NARC championship record of eight titles was finally broken by Brent Kaeding in 1996. Kaeding now has eleven NARC titles to his credit.

LeRoy Van Conett, who resides in Galt and has a son Roy, has raced in the Goodyear Masters Classic at Knoxville Raceway in 1993, '94, '95, and '96, and has finished in the top five on two occasions. He also competed in the United States Auto Club (USAC) Silver Crown (dirt championship) Division's return to the CalExpo State Fairgrounds in late 1993.



LeRoy Van Conett

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