

LEALAND McSPADDEN

Lealand McSpadden is being inducted into the National Sprint Car Hall of Fame & Museum in 1999 in honor of his outstanding contributions as a driver, including his having won the 1992 California Racing Association (CRA) and 1995 Sprint Car Racing Association (SCRA) point championships.

Lealand McSpadden was born July 16, 1946, in Gallup (N.M.). When Lealand was eight, the family returned to the Phoenix area, settling in Tempe. In high school, Lealand enjoyed athletics, especially track and field (pole-vaulting), weightlifting and football. However, it didn't take long for his interests to turn to racing drag cars, motorcycles and even hydroplane boats. After graduation, Lealand began working for Zircon Precision Products, a machine shop in which he has worked for over thirty-five years.

Throughout this time in McSpadden's life, he was friends with two brothers, Billy and Ron Shuman. "Billy the Kid" bought a super-modified in 1967 and Lealand helped mechanic it. Said he, "Either at the end of that first year or the beginning of the second season, Billy got a sprint car ride. As soon as he was sure of keeping the seat, he sold the super to me and I was on my way."

In mid-1970, Lealand, who was racing that used super-modified at the fast Manzanita Speedway in Phoenix, got his big break. Jerry McClung, who had just vacated Cecil Coddle's winning sprint car, convinced the owner to put McSpadden behind the wheel. According to Lealand, "I'll always be grateful to Cecil, McClung and Jim Williams for the opportunity to start out with a quality ride."

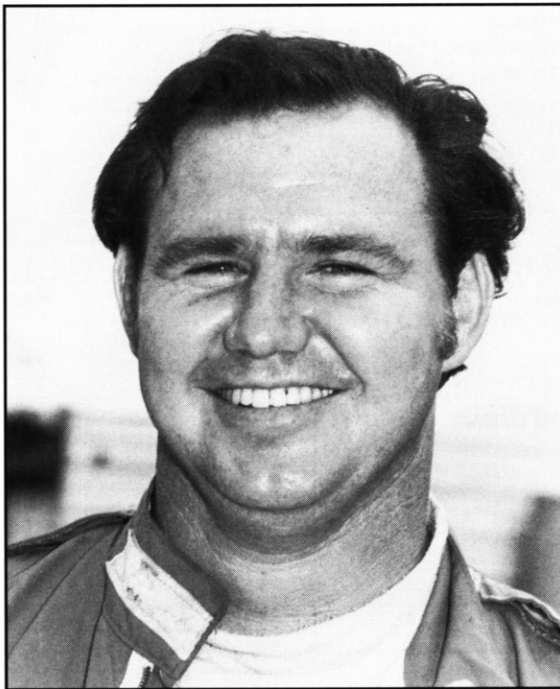
Lealand's run with Coddle started the young man on a life of being a 'professional weekend racer'. Says Lealand, "If at any time in my career I'd have been told that I either had to quit my job or go racing, I would've probably become a full-time racer."

Instead, with the flexibility that his employer offered him, Lealand chose to remain close to home throughout his racing career, spending a quantity of quality time with his wife Janet and his two children, Jeff and Michelle.

It didn't take long for the "Tempe Tornado" to impress the fans and etch his name in the record books at Manzy in the Seventies with his high-wide-and-handsome driving style. He won his first sprint feature there in 1972. He won his first CRA feature there one year later, which was a joint show with the Arizona Racing Association (ARA). Lealand claimed the 1975 ARA title. Two years later he recorded 25 feature wins in 5 Manzanita divisions: sprints, midgets, super-modifieds, sprint buggies, and modified stocks.

Later in 1977, McSpadden was the runner-up to

friend Doug Wolfgang in the Knoxville (Iowa) National Sprint Car Championships while racing for Gary Stanton. McSpadden always loved rim-riding the big half-miles like Knoxville, Manzy, Eldora and Calistoga.



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John Mahoney Photo

In 1978, friend Ron Shuman went to drive for Stanton, then just as quickly surrendered his spot in Stanton's house car to gain employment upon the United States Auto Club (USAC) sprint circuit with Don Siebert's team. McSpadden became Stanton's pilot again. According to McSpadden, "Gary, of course, was and is a car builder. He did some traveling to give exposure to his product. We went a lot of places and were always fast. One year we should've won USAC's Hulman Classic at Terre Haute (Ind.). We lost our brakes and still finished third (behind Dick "Toby" Tobias and Duke Cook). That got me some real national attention. Although Gary and I quarreled at the 1978 Knoxville Nationals and split, his role in my career was very valuable. We're still good friends and I've driven his cars at lots of special shows since then."

One of the USAC car owners that McSpadden impressed with his go-for-broke style was Don Siebert, who had Jim McQueen-prepared cars under Shuman and Eddie Leavitt at the time. Don offered McSpadden a ride, and Lealand responded with a USAC win on the mile at the Indianapolis (Ind.) State Fairgrounds. Said Lealand, "In the late '70s and early '80s when I was running Siebert's sprint car we were putting some deals together to go to the (Indianapolis Motor) Speedway. But then Don passed away and the buy-a-ride all happened about the same time, so that pretty well ended any chances I had of goin' there."

1978 was also the year that McSpadden won his first World of Outlaws (WoO) main event aboard Stanton's non-winged sprinter at J.C. Agajanian's Ascot Park in Gardena (Calif.). Naturally, he used the high groove to motor past Gary Patterson and Steve Kinser for the win.

In late 1978, McSpadden took over the Bailey brothers' potent black number 01 car, recently vacated by LeRoy Van Conett. Lealand won the 1978 WoO-sanctioned Western World Championship event at Keith Hall's Manzanita Speedway.

McSpadden's success in Fred and Sam Bailey's cars lasted through 1985, winning many CRA and Northern Auto Racing Club (NARC) events, and the 1981 and '84 open competition Skagit (Wash.) Dirt Cup.

The mid-1980's brought many wins aboard both the Krug and the Reid's Diesel sprinters, including a joint USAC/CRA affair at Manzanita. In 1986, Lealand tied Jeff Gordon in the voting for the National Sprint Car Poll "Wild Card Award", which is presented annually for exciting performances. Lealand won for car owner Casey Luna at the Devil's Bowl Speedway in Mesquite (Tex.) in '87.

One year later, he won the sprint car portion of the Copper World Classic at the one-mile asphalt Phoenix Int'l. Raceway. He joined the Frank Lewis team in '88, an association which saw him enjoy much success through 1993. He captured nearly 50 CRA, joint CRA/National Championship Racing Association (NCRA), and United Sprint Association (USA) wins during that period for Lewis. His CRA wins aboard the Danny Pivovarov sprinter in 1990, especially the one at the Knoxville, will always be remembered. A CRA win at Chico in '91, after receiving help from a lot of friends (including J.W. Hunt) to successfully recover from a heatrace flip, is one of Lealand's personal highlights. He proudly claimed the CRA title in 1992, driving for owner/friend Frank Lewis.

During that time he continued to pick up major wins in midgets and dirt championship cars. He won the 1991 Chili Bowl Midget Nationals at Tulsa (Okla.), the 1992 Hulman Hundred USAC champ race, and the 1992 Belleville (Ks.) Midget Nationals.

1994 saw McSpadden race with Andy Morales on the CRA sprint and USAC dirt champ circuits. However, McSpadden capped off his ultra-successful career in 1995 by piloting Ron Chaffin's Madera Produce-sponsored sprinter to ten wins and the '95 Sprint Car Racing Association (SCRA) point championship. Last year the "Tempe Tornado" was inducted into the Arizona Auto Racing Hall of Fame.