

# NATIONAL SPRINT CAR HALL of FAME & MUSEUM

## BRUCE BROMME (SR.)

Bruce Bromme was born on October 9, 1917, the son of Louis and Louise Bromme. He had one sister, Beverly. Bruce attended his first race at the Fresno (Calif.) board track on April 26, 1923, where his father was wrenching for Duesenberg team driver Joe Thomas. The Bromme family moved to Los Angeles in 1924 and started going to the Art Pillsbury-designed Los Angeles (Beverly Hills) and Culver City board tracks the following year. Also, the Legion Ascot Speedway was a regular destination for the family in the Twenties and Thirties. According to Bruce, "My dad was a racer the first time I saw him. He was a race car mechanic and had a few drivers like Rex Mays, Floyd Davis and Wilbur Shaw."

Bruce bought his first dual overhead cam (DOHC) Ford Frontenac Model 'T' machine in 1936 and he ran Ascot with drivers such as Travis "Spider" Webb, Al Putnam and Johnny Holmes. In the early 1940's, Bruce put an Offenhauser in the car and won the Western Racing Association (WRA) title. Another one of his early pilots at El Centro (Calif.) in the late Thirties and early Forties was Harry Eisele, a.k.a. "Bud" Rose, who doubled for Clark Gable in the movie "To Please A Lady". Says Bromme, "Rose was my driver and he took me on the old El Centro mile track and that was it. I haven't been in a race car since."

In 1939, Bruce went to Indianapolis (Ind.) and worked as a fabricator on Harry A. Miller's Gulf Oil-sponsored cars. He was a master craftsman making race car bodies, but when he went to buy one after it was finished, he discovered it was too expensive. After that, he built all his own racing cars.

During World War II, Bruce worked at Douglas Aircraft as a flight engineer on B-24's, C-54's and FDR's "Sacred Cow". He also built a new race car during that time and ran it at El Centro for the first time in October of 1945 with George Connor doing the driving. They also ran with the International Motor Contest Association (IMCA) in the midwest and at tracks like Charlie Curryer's Oakland Speedway, Carrell Speedway and Phoenix (Ariz.) in the mid-to late Forties.

In 1947, Bruce married Marjorie (or "Marge") and worked with his father Lou on several Bromme-built Indianapolis cars. Bayard T. "Bill" Sheffler, Jack McGrath, Travis "Spider" Webb, Manny Ayulo, Rodger Ward, and Bob Scott all raced Bromme creations in the late Forties and early Fifties at Indy, with Andy Linden, Webb, Ward and Scott driving the low-budget Bromme "house car".

The Bromme's continued racing championship cars with the American Automobile Association (AAA) and then the United States Auto Club (USAC) until 1965, with drivers such as Johnny Parsons (Sr.), Lee Wallard, Troy Ruttman and Pat Flaherty. Other drivers included Jimmy Reese, Danny Oakes, George Connor and Bill Schindler. They even competed in 1956 and '57 against the Unser family at Pike's Peak.

Beginning in 1951, Bromme went to work full-time for Hughes Aircraft on the flight line, and he stayed there for the next quarter-century. He has built quarter-midgets for his son Bruce (Junior) and others, including family friend Dean Thompson, to drive. However, Senior soon decided that he had better build a sprint car that father and son could mechanic together with the California Racing Association (CRA). While work kept him busy and sometimes on the road, the red and black car that he started in 1959 in his backyard Gardena (Calif.) garage was finally ready to race in 1962 at Clovis Speedway, just south of Fresno.

"I designed the chassis after a (A.J.) Watson roadster. I built it right here in this garage and used the floor for a jig. Would you believe it? This started out to be my Dirt Champ car. But when I cut and bent the tubing, it came out too short. Yes, sir! This was going to be my Dirt Champ car."

Eddie Kuzma's Pacific Northwest midget driver Allen Heath was the car's first driver and he raced with a hook on his one arm, a result of his 1953 sprint car crash at Illiana Speedway. He stayed in it, originally numbered 22, until an awful crash at Ascot Park in September of 1964. The following year, Parnelli's younger brother, Paul Jones, got in the car and pow-

ered it to the Bromme's first CRA car owner's title. Paul stayed in it nearly a decade, winning many CRA feature races. Over twenty drivers have wheeled the famous Bromme car, but most well-known was ex-quarter and three-quarter midget racer Dean Thompson, son of Bromme mechanic "Bud" Thompson. The 1972 CRA "Rookie of the Year" took the ride for good in 1974 and stayed with the Bromme's until his first retirement. The car was known as "Andy Gump" because Jimmy Oskie claimed it looked like a cartoon character with its unique nose piece and oval-shaped front bumper. Besides Heath, Jones, Oskie and "Deano", other notable drivers of "Andy Gump" were Don Hawley, Dick Fries, Billy Wilkerson, Al "Cotton" Farmer, Gordon Woolley, Bob East, Hank Butcher and Bob Hogle.

The car was known as the first four-bar torsion-suspended racer on the West Coast. Bromme was also among the last owners to abandon the Offenhauser in favor of the Chevy V-8, with his Offy's last finish being a second on May 5, 1973, with Paul Jones behind the wheel. Said Bromme in the late Seventies, "I miss the Offenhausers. I guess if you could get crankshafts I'd still be trying to run one."

"Andy Gump", whose number would change each year according to the previous year's owners points, was retired in 1977 and is now fully restored. Bruce built a similar car in 1978-79 and he began building cars for others in 1980. He made fifteen of those cars in four years. Only towards the tail end of his long and illustrious career did Bruce Bromme (Sr.) buy factory-built chassis, first from Gambler then from LaVern Nance. Mike Sweeney, Norman "Bubby" Jones, Stan Atherton, John Redican, Billy Boat and Jerry Meyer were several of Bruce's last drivers, with Meyer picking up a win at the Knoxville Racway on May 6, 1989, in front of a red-iron structure which would soon-to-be the National Sprint Car Hall of Fame & Museum. Proudly, Bruce's last car owns the all-time Ascot Park record at 17.958 seconds, with Billy Boat as its driver. Bruce "officially" retired in 1992 and moved north with Marge to Paso Robles shortly thereafter. Son Bruce (Jr.) resides in Templeton and has kept up the family tradition, wrenching for Bob Walker, Gene Manhire, and 1995 and '96 Sprint Car Racing Association (SCRA) car owner champion Ron Chaffin (with drivers Lealand McSpadden and Richard Griffin).

Bruce Bromme has collected five California Racing Association (CRA) owner titles in 1965, '80, '81, '82 and '85. The first one was with Paul Jones and the final four were with Ascot 'back-it-in' master Dean Thompson. Bruce and his drivers have collected nearly 150 feature wins, over 100 with "Deano" alone. Once, when asked how does he stay enthused after so many years in the sport, Bromme replied, "Oh, I'm not enthused! I'm ready to quit every five minutes. When I quit I go into the house. I look at that box (television) and come right back out...You've got to have something to do."



Bruce Bromme Sr.

(Mike Arthur Photos)