

Taylor "Pappy" Weld

by Bob Mays

Taylor Weld was born on March 1, 1898, and grew up on the plains of Oklahoma. The racing bug bit young Taylor early as he started racing motorcycles in 1915. By 1920, he had found his way to Kansas City and before long he started a motorcycle and auto repair shop.

The midget car racing rage hit Kansas City in the mid-1930s and Weld quickly climbed aboard, fielding a car for Chester White. As was to become a Weld trademark, the car was not a run-of-the-mill variety. Weld built a four-wheel drive midget, which he and White raced at Olympic Field (later known as Olympic Stadium) until the start of World War II. It was during this time that Taylor and his wife, Ella, started a family which eventually grew to six children, Jerry, Dee, Mary Jo, Greg, Kenny and Rick.

After the war, Weld concentrated on the family business until one day in 1955 when his oldest son, Jerry, having just turned 16 years of age, came to him wanting to build a race car. Ella didn't think much of the idea, since, in the 1950s, auto racing was remarkable for many things, but one of them wasn't its safety record. Soon, Ella relented.

In the 1950s, the sport of jalopy racing was all the rage, just as the midgets had been two decades before. Jerry had an idea for a better kind of jalopy and it was quickly dubbed the "flying suitcase," because of its cut down body and the fact that it had the roll bars outside, kind of like the handles of a suitcase. With that car, the era of the supermodified was born in Kansas City. Jerry proceeded to dominate the young supermodified class for several years.

In 1960, it was Greg's turn to get behind the wheel, however Taylor, or "Pappy" as many of the KC racers called him, fired Greg after just one year behind the wheel. "I tore up too much of his stuff," Greg would say years later. For 1961, Pappy went outside the family for a driver and hired "Tiger" Bob Williams. With Greg running his own equipment (and doing much better), the juggernaut known as Weld, Inc., was born. On Saturday nights, Jerry was found sweeping the show at Riverside Stadium in North Kansas City; at the same time Greg would be winning everything at Lakeside Speedway in Kansas City, Kansas; Pappy and Bob, meanwhile would head up the road to Knoxville, Iowa, and a clean sweep.

But wait, it would get even worse for the competition, soon, number three son, Kenny, was piloting Pappy's number 94... and dominating. Well, at least dominating whenever he didn't have to race against one of his brothers. Through the mid-1960s, there

was hardly a race in the Midwest that didn't feature at least one Weld. With Kenny at the wheel, Pappy won the Knoxville Nationals in 1964 and 1965. Together, they dominated everywhere they went,

from Pennsylvania to Texas. Of course, the Kansas City area was easy pickin's. The uniquely designed car, the Tank, took some getting used to. "I only drove it one time, after I blew the engine in my car, and I found it to be a nice handling car," Greg says, "but I really didn't think about it too much after that. Then when we decided to restore it, I got to looking at it and it really had some interesting design features."

It wasn't long before Kenny got the yearning to head east, to Pennsylvania, on a permanent basis. When he did, Pappy simply put in the call to the "Tiger." In 1967 and '68, Bob Williams and Pappy Weld continued stomping on the competition, winning at Knoxville; Olympic Stadium in Kansas City;

Marshall, Missouri; Jefferson City, Missouri; Topeka, Kansas; Eagle, Nebraska; Amarillo, Texas; Sedalia, Missouri and countless other places. There were a few times, when Pappy and the Tiger didn't see eye-to-eye. On those occasions, there was usually a line of fellows with helmets in hand, waiting to climb into the 94 car. Among the talent pool that Pappy employed were Ray Lee Goodwin, Eddie Leavitt, Roger Rager, Stan Borofsky, Dale McCarty, Jon Backlund, Jay Woodside and several others.

In 1971, it was time for one more Weld to don a driving suit as Rick climbed into the Tank. In his first two years driving for Pappy, Rick won 29 feature events! In the ten years he drove for his father, Rick amassed more feature wins than any other driver that Pappy employed.

Crunching the numbers, Taylor "Pappy" Weld won two Knoxville Nationals; nineteen point titles and over 200 features. He earned the "Man Behind the Scenes" award from the Central Auto Racing Boosters (CARB) in 1962. Pappy was inducted into the National Association of Auto Racing Fan Clubs (NAARFC) in 1979, and the Knoxville Raceway Hall of Fame the same year. Even with all that, his most memorable racing moment came in 1970 when his son, Greg, competed in the Indianapolis 500. Taylor passed away on December 26, 1983, after a short illness.

Pappy Weld's racing legacy is a simple one from which we can all learn. Hard work equals results. Off the track, Pappy was always willing to help out a racer with whatever they needed, he would then work his tail off to beat them on the track. Even if that racer was one of his own children. In the 1960s and '70s, Weld, Inc. was at the top of the racing world, and Taylor "Pappy" Weld was the Chairman of the Board.



Weld Family Collection

