

# NATIONAL SPRINT CAR HALL of FAME & MUSEUM

## TRAVIS 'SPIDER' WEBB

Travis Leon Webb was born in Joplin (Mo.) on October 9, 1910, the son of a cabinetmaker. He and his parents moved to Los Angeles (Calif.) in 1923, and within five years, he was racing on the Muroc dry lakes. It was the time of Ford Model T's, Rajo heads and Frontenacs. And it was also when Webb got nicknamed "Spider" by a car owner who was looking for a cooler image for his driver than the name "Travis" provided.

It didn't take long for Webb to turn his attention from the long straightaways of the dry lakes to the rough-and-tumble dirt-track ovals of Southern California, including the famed Legion Ascot Speedway. Webb competed in the 'B' class there, along with a youthful Ted Horn. In the spring of 1936, Norm Witte of the Central States Racing Association (CSRA) wrote Spider with an offer of quality 'big car' rides for both Webb and Jimmy Wilburn. The cars were owned by Ralph "Speedy" Helm and Ralph Morgan, respectively. Both drivers accepted the offer and relocated to Indianapolis (Ind.). They also raced back on the West Coast, as they both finished behind winner George Robson at the inaugural race at the Southern Speedway in South Gate (Calif.) on June 7, 1936.

Everett Saylor was the '37 CSRA champion, and then Wilburn went on to win the association title in 1938, '39 and '40. Webb was 9th in '38 behind Wilburn, Joie Chitwood, Morris Musick, Everett Saylor, Duke Dinsmore, Bud Henderson, Buddy Rusch and John DeCamp. Webb won the South Gate, renamed to Southern Ascot Speedway, opener on January 16, 1938. Chitwood beat Webb on April 24th at CSRA Columbus (Ind.). Webb won Winchester's season finale.

In 1941, Winchester, Dayton and Fort Wayne, which had operated under the CSRA banner, switched allegiance to the American Automobile Association (AAA). Webb, who had developed a reputation as being a tough driver on the high banks, made the switch to AAA, although '41 wasn't a particularly successful year for him. He did wind up fourth in AAA Midwest points, following champion Dennis "Duke" Nalon, Tony Bettenhausen and Elbert "Pappy" Booker.

It was after the war, in late 1947, that Webb's domination in sprint car racing began. Driving Leach Cracraft's Offy, he won three in a row at Dayton, Salem and Winchester, finished second to invader Ted Horn at Dayton, and won again at Salem. However, he still finished second in points to friend

Johnny Shackelford.

During the off-season, Webb left Cracraft to drive for Johnny Vance (Sr.). The change in owners didn't slow him down, though, as Webb had seven wins and one second place finish in eight feature starts in the spring of 1948 on the 'hills'. At the same time, Clarence "Mutt" Anderson of Xenia (Ohio) convinced Webb to give the Indianapolis 500 a shot, even though Spider previously had preferred to spend the month of May racing every weekend, winning and padding his wallet. Although Webb wasn't able to qualify Mutt's car, he did jump into Louis and Bruce Bromme's dirt champ car at the last minute and place it in the '48 field. Webb fell out of the Indy 500 early that year, yet he kept on the champ car trail all season, while still winning in the Vance sprinter, too. And, despite missing several sprint events in order to race a champ car, Travis "Spider" Webb clinched the 1948 AAA Midwest sprint car point title before season's end in the Vance number two machine.

Webb stuck with the Bromme championship car for 1949, although he switched from Vance to a sprinter that he co-owned with Pete Wales. However, by mid-June, Webb was back with Vance and "Chick" Barbo was put into his own sprinter. A faulty transmission was the reason for Webb's 33rd place finish ("did not start") at Indy in the "Luke" Bromme ride. During the second half of the sprint season, Webb drove for Ralph Malamud on the Sam Nunis Eastern circuit. Webb also claimed a second at Detroit (Mich.) and a third at Syracuse (N.Y.) in championship car shows, filling in for Mel Hansen in the Boves Seal Fast Special. Spider wound up the year third in AAA Midwest points, behind champion Jackie Holmes and runner-up Troy Ruttman.

1950 was not Webb's greatest season, yet he did finish 20th in the rain-shortened '500' for R.A. Cott and he did finish the Midwest sprint season fifth in points (behind champion Duane Carter, Bill Mackey, Ruttman and Jimmy Daywalt). Later that year, during the off-season, Travis suffered a severe thumb injury at a friend's tool-and-die shop in Pasadena (Calif.). It kept him out of racing for all of 1951. In 1952 at Indy, Webb drove on of Lou Moore's Blue Crown Specials, but it was bumped from the field. Again, he got together with the father-son Bromme team and made the field at the last moment, eventually finishing 22nd. The following season, Webb put the Lubri-Loy Special into the '500', although he again registered a 'did not finish'. He spent the rest of the year living and working in Florida.

In 1954, Bruce Bromme (Sr.) called Webb with

another last minute deal, and unbelievably, Spider once again came through with a starting spot with a 137.979 miles per hour average qualifying speed. The cinderella story ended there, though, as he didn't finish the race and he wasn't able to qualify the Ed Walsh roadster in '55.

Travis "Spider" Webb retired from the sport and, for the most part, left it very much behind him while living in Norwalk (Calif.). He used his race-winnings to buy earthmoving equipment and was involved in massive construction projects, including the building of the Los Angeles Zoo. And, on one occasion when he was reunited with the Johnny Vance (Jr.)-owned, "Mutt" Anderson-restored 1948 title-winning car, Webb said, "Yep, I've had a good life. I don't regret none of it. If I had it all to do over again, I'd go right back."

Webb was living in retirement in McMinnville (Ore.) when he passed away on January 27, 1990.



Travis "Spider" Webb (Bruce Craig Photo)