

National Sprint Car Hall of Fame & Museum

PAUL WEIRICK

by Bill Baxter

Paul Weirick was born on May 19, 1910, to parents Ira and Dora Weirick in Los Angeles (CA). He had one brother, Bob. Paul, who first constructed a winning Model 'T' Ford racer in 1930 with driver "Stubby" Stubblefield, went on to help build a sprint car that became legendary for its many victories, championships and speed records (including Muroc Dry Lakes land speed records) at the hands of some of the country's top drivers. The quiet and talented Weirick also built race cars that competed nine times at Indianapolis, including two that started from the pole position in the 500.

In 1931, Weirick teamed with motor man Art Sparks and together they forged a six-year partnership. Bill Cummings drove for them in 1931 during the American Automobile Association (AAA) Pacific Southwest point season, and Jimmy Sharp in '32 until he met his death in the car at Oakland (CA).

Meanwhile, Weirick designed and Clyde Adams built a potent Harry A. Miller-powered sprint car in 1932. Al Gordon drove the Earl Gilmore Oil Special car to a new one-mile world speed record (106 miles per hour average speed) at Oakland and to the AAA Pacific Coast dirt track championship in 1933. The car dominated action at Legion Ascot, El Centro (Imperial, CA) and other West Coast tracks during those years with drivers Gordon and Indy stars Bill Cummings, Kelly Pettilo and Rex Mays. The dreaded sprinter was nicknamed "Poison Lil" by opposing drivers. The car's dazzling performances helped earn the Sparks-Weirick team five owner's titles (1931-33, 1935-36). Mays won the '35 AAA Pacific Southwest title in it after winning twelve straight main events at Legion Ascot. Ed Winfield, known for his cam and carb development, was very helpful to the Rex Mays-Art Sparks/Paul Weirick team during the mid-1930s.

With Legion Ascot's closing, Weirick and Sparks took 'Lil' to the Midwest at that time to challenge that region's best teams and the car, then powered by a Sparks-designed engine built by Fred Offenhauser, carried the popular Mays to the AAA Midwest dirt track crowns in 1936-37-38. 'Lil' was the star of Midwestern and Eastern half-mile and mile racing for many years and even captured the AAA Eastern dirt track title in 1941 with its regular driver Dennis "Duke" Nalon. Earlier, the car had carried Nalon to the world half-mile speed record (21 seconds) at Winchester (IN).

During World War II, Art kept the car stored in Indianapolis while he went off to Greenland and Europe as a technical representative of the Allison aircraft engine company with the 8th division Air Force.

The famous sprinter continued its domination at tracks across the country for several seasons after

World War II with a variety of drivers. In 1948, Mel Hansen drove the Offy-powered Weirick Special to a sixth place finish in AAA Pacific



Paul Weirick (Bruce Craig Collection)

Coast 'big car' points behind Rex Mays in the Leech Cracraft Offy, Johnny McDowell in the Henry Meyer machine, Chick Barbo in the Hal Cole sprinter, Johnny Mantz in the J.C. Agajanian Special, and Frank McGurk in the Vince Conze-owned car. Additional competition came from Clarence "Tex" Petersen in the Morales Brothers Offy and Roy Prosser in the Emil Dietrich Special.

When the car was sold in 1949, it had recorded nearly 200 victories, two world records and ten driver/owner titles.

Cars built and owned by Sparks and Weirick competed at Indy nine times between 1932 and '48. Even though their racers led the 500 several times, their best finish was tenth in 1938 with Frank Wearne at the wheel. Mays took the pole in 1935 with the duo's Earl Gilmore-sponsored Miller and again in '36 with their car powered by a Sparks engine. Their drivers over those years at the Brickyard included "Stubby" Stubblefield (in the Clyde Adams-built 'Catfish'), Gordon, Mays, midget ace Bob Swanson, Wearne, Al Miller, rookie Joie Chitwood (Sr.) and Hansen. Art later built the engine that powered George Robson to victory in the first post-World War II race at Indy in 1946.

"We had a good time in racing," Weirick said recently from his home in San Clemente (CA). "We won races all over the country with the sprint car and sat on the pole and led at Indianapolis with our speedway car. Even though a win at Indy always eluded us, our years in racing were satisfying and memorable."

Shortly after he left racing, Weirick and his brother Bob went into the plastic injection molding business in Pasadena (CA). He spent 35 years in that enterprise. Paul and his wife Dorothy have resided in San Clemente since 1971. Sparks died in 1984 and 'Poison Lil' was last known to be owned by Joe Gemsa, who just passed away with in the last year.