

National Sprint Car Hall of Fame & Museum

J.W. HUNT

J.W. Hunt was born on November 8, 1919, to parents James and Ollie Mae Hunt. J.W. was an avid auto racing fan during most of his life, although he didn't actively participate in it until 1961 when he took up drag racing as a driver. He continued his involvement in drags through the decade of the Sixties, at which time his interest went more towards oval track racing.

Hunt owned stock cars which won the National Association of Stock Car Auto Racing (NASCAR) Late Model Sportsman division races at Daytona Beach (Fla.) on three occasions, Charlotte (N.C.) twice, and Darlington (S.C.) twice in the 1960s and '70s. Jack Ingram won four national championships in cars owned by Hunt. Donnie Allison, David Pearson and dirt late model driver Charlie Swartz also raced for J.W. His son Jimmy raced dirt late models in the early 1980s, which is when J.W. became a more regular visitor at dirt tracks.

And when J.W. Hunt became hooked on sprint car racing in the mid-1980s, he made a huge contribution. While financially assisting the racing efforts of Jack Hewitt, Brent Kaeding and Jac Haudenschild through the years, Hunt's favorite pastime was showing up at a race unexpectedly and rewarding the winner with a sizeable bonus.

Whenever Hunt went to the races, the drivers there knew there would be a bonus for being 'hard on the gas'. Fast time could get \$1,000 from Hunt -- in cash. Heat winners might get that, too. If Hunt was there, usually the feature winner was the beneficiary of his generosity.

A large jovial man who had been involved in the produce industry since the 1950s, J.W. made his fortune in strawberry processing at J.W. Hunt Produce in Plant City (Fla.). Hunt, "the Strawberry King" as he was affectionately known, would have been liked even without his philanthropy. His ever-present smile and easy-going way made him an easy man to call 'friend'. And he had a heart as big as his wallet. Injured drivers, including favorite Brad Doty, received generous contributions through various J.W. Hunt-supported fundraisers. He also helped sponsor the annual "Copper World Classic" golf tourney in Phoenix (Ariz.) and the "Hunt Chili Feed" at the Chico (Calif.) Gold Cup sprint car championship.

According to Hunt, "I just come here and sit in the shade and enjoy the races. I'm not looking for any publicity."

Former United States Auto Club (USAC) champion Ken Schrader once said, "J.W. was about the best supporter there has ever been as far as grass-roots, open-wheel racing is concerned. I say a supporter, but he did help a lot of guys financially, but the main thing was he was just the best fan. He went to all the races, mostly as a race fan."

In 1986, the National Sprint Car Poll bestowed its "Outstanding Contribution to Sprint Car Racing

Award" on J.W. Hunt. The following year he received the Hoosier Auto Racing Fans (HARF) "Gene Powlen Fan Appreciation Award". And he received Copenhagen-Skoal's "Award of Excellence" at the 1992 World of Outlaws (WoO) banquet. He also received the "Tony Foyt Sportsmanship Award" at the USAC Hulman Hundred at the Indiana State Fairgrounds in Indianapolis. J.W. Hunt passed away on January 6, 1994, leaving his wife Marcelle and son Jimmy. According to WoO founder and president Ted Johnson, upon the news of Hunt's passing. "We're really going to miss J.W. He was a great supporter of sprint car racing and all motorsports."

Ron Shuman was quoted as saying, "I'm sad. I don't think people realize how much he did for us, the little dirt track guys. J.W. even paid the guys he didn't like."

And from Steve Kinser, 'King of the Outlaws', "J.W. was good to all racing people. He was well known throughout all types of racing and he will be a great loss for all of us. He was just a super friend to everyone of us and we hate to lose him."