

NATIONAL SPRINT CAR HALL of FAME & MUSEUM

FRANK LUPTOW

Frank Luptow was born in Markesan (Wisc.) to parents Frank and Ida Lueptow (he later dropped the 'e' from the original Dutch spelling of the last name) in 1914. He moved to Detroit (Mich.), where he ran his first race in Jackson before World War II. In fact, Frank won the event! He later appeared at several Central States Racing Association (CSRA) sanctioned races prior to the war, racing against headliner Emory Collins.

During the Second World War, Luptow test drove army tanks at the Aberdeen (Md.) Proving Grounds. He was later employed by a tank manufacturer back in the Detroit area after his discharge from the service. He also returned to racing, piloting the Ioviti D.O. Hal number 3 machine and capturing his first International Motor Contest Association (IMCA) 'big car' victory on August 18, 1946, at the Davenport Speedway at the Mississippi Valley Fairgrounds.

Late in the Forties, Frank moved to Tampa and married trophy girl Betty Drake. At the time, his two brothers Alvin and Ora remained in Wisconsin, while his sisters Irma and Mabel stayed in Michigan.

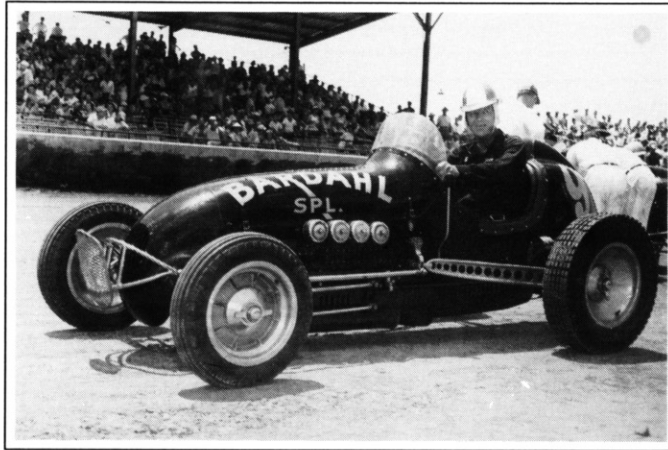
In 1947, Frank managed to record two 'top ten' finishes at the Iowa State Fair races. He also finished 20th in the IMCA 'big car' final point standings, against the likes to champion Emory Collins, runner-up Jimmy Wilburn and third-place finisher Deb Snyder.

The next year, Luptow carried the number 9 on the Jewel Hal and claimed two third place finishes in Des Moines, both behind the Offenhausers of Wally Stokes and Deb Snyder. He raced in seventeen states in 1948 and garnered IMCA wins at Lebanon (Ohio), Eldon (Iowa), Danville (Ill.), Nashville, Tampa (both Plant Field and Speedway Park), and Birmingham. Luptow finished third in IMCA points behind Collins and Snyder. He ran the Tampa area circuit from mid-October through March.

Frank Luptow purchased a 220-cubic-inch Offy engine to replace the Hal power plant in his 'big car' for the '49 season. It was this car that was to become nationally known as the "Black Panther". He won 33 of 40 feature events entered and claimed the prestigious 1949 IMCA point championship. His new IMCA win sites included Macon

(Ga.), Austin (Minn.), Topeka (Ks.), Lincoln (Nebr.), Aurora Downs (Ill.), Cresco (Iowa), Vinton (Iowa), Wausau (Wisc.), Rock Rapids (Iowa), Sedalia (Mo.), Des Moines, Mason City (Iowa), Bethany (Mo.), Huron (S.D.) and Shreveport.

Luptow's title would mark the end of an era as the decade of the Forties came to a close; he dethroned Collins who had held the IMCA driving crown from 1946-48. As the decade came to a close,



Frank Luptow (Bruce Craig Collection)

Luptow, Deb Snyder and Bobby Grim were becoming the dominant forces on the IMCA circuit as the heroes from before the war were beginning to fade.

The 1950 season had to rank as Luptow's most successful season, winning 35 of the 48 feature events in which he competed. In addition, he placed second in 11 of the other events. He won the IMCA point title, outpointing Collins and Snyder. Tracks in Harrisburg (Ill.), Memphis (Mo.), Fond du Lac (Wisc.), Springfield (Mo.), DePere (Wisc.) and Jacksonville (Ill.) all provided new IMCA win sites. Since he had won five of the last six races at the State Fairgrounds in Tampa on the winter circuit, all 1950 races there were declared 'reverse-start' in order to handicap him. He also won a 'strictly stock' car race aboard an Olds '88' on November 6, 1950, at Plant Field.

In 1951, Luptow scored a 'three-peat' of the prestigious IMCA title, besting Snyder and Bert Hellmueller. He claimed 33 wins that year and visited IMCA victory lanes at Peoria (Ill.) Expo Gardens, Kansas City (Mo.) Riverside Stadium, Webster City (Iowa), Belleville (Ks.), Jackson (Minn.), Spencer (Iowa) and Oklahoma City for

the first time in his career. He also scored a hat trick having claimed the National Speedways, Inc., point title in 1949-50-51. The Bardahl-sponsored driver/owner was a great ambassador for the sport of auto racing during this time, too, often appearing at YMCA's to speak positively to the youth about the sport.

Frank Luptow decided to move on to the American Automobile Association (AAA) circuit in 1952 at the age of thirty-eight, driving in both the open wheel and stock car divisions. Both were tough and competitive circuits, with the likes of Tommy Hinnershitz, Jimmy Bryan, Joe James, Troy Ruttman, Pat O'Connor and Dennis "Duke" Nalon running the 'big cars' and Marshall Teague, Sam Hanks, "Red" Hamilton, '51 AAA Stock Car champion Rodger Ward and Jack McGrath running the stock cars. He also attempted to qualify at several championship car events in 1952, with his eye on the Indy 500 in '53.

Following wins with his '52 Hudson in August shows at Milwaukee and Terre Haute (Ind.), the Tampa resident was moving in on AAA points leader Teague of Daytona Beach (Fla.) entering the September 21, 1952, stock car show at the Lakewood Speedway on the Southeastern Fairgrounds in Atlanta. The classic battle between Luptow's black number 9 Hudson Hornet and the number 6 Hornet of Teague ended on the 44th go-round when Frank's front axle broke sending him into a series of flips. He apparently was not using his seat belt and was thrown partially out of his stock car. He died moments later from major head injuries.

Frank was survived by his wife Betty and their two-year-old daughter Susan. Betty is now married to Bobby Grim, while Suzie is married to sprint car racer Rocky Hodges. Frank's sister Irma still lives in Florida, while his nephews Herb and Frank, avid race fans, live in Wisconsin.

In 1988, Frank Luptow was inducted into the Michigan Motorsports Hall of Fame.

