

# NATIONAL SPRINT CAR HALL of FAME & MUSEUM

## FRED OFFENHAUSER

Fred Offenhauser was born in 1888 to parents Frederick and Martha Offenhauser. He was one of nine children: Fred, Charles, Frank, Paul ("Mike"), Otto, Laura, Margaret ("Grady"), Martha, and Agnes ("Debbie").

Fred was a young toolmaker at the Pacific Electric Railway shops when he was hired by Harry A. Miller toward the end of 1913. The practical and conservative young man was put in charge of Miller's Engine Department the following year.

Just twenty-eight years old, in 1915, Offenhauser was named shop superintendent at Harry A. Miller Manufacturing Company in Los Angeles, which meant he had control over 50 employees.

During World War I, he moved to New York City with Miller to form the Miller Products Company, building carburetors and fuel pumps for the aircraft industry. They returned to L.A. in February, 1919.

On July 8, 1933, Miller's race car and engine empire collapsed with involuntary bankruptcy, leaving unpaid debts to his many workers, including chief designer Leo Goossen and shop foreman Offenhauser. Fred had been in the habit of taking assignments of various machine tools in lieu of wages when Miller failed to meet payroll. He presented these chits to the trustee in bankruptcy and

after some wrangling, he was able to get a number of these machines in a settlement.

After Offenhauser acquired most of Miller's equipment he founded Offenhauser Engineering Company, with Goossen doing much of his drafting work on a free-lance basis. According to Fred, starting his own company "was the most desperate thing I ever did, but I

equipment most of their lives. He didn't have much money until the war came along, but he managed to keep the doors open and pay everybody's wages, which was more than Miller had been able to do."

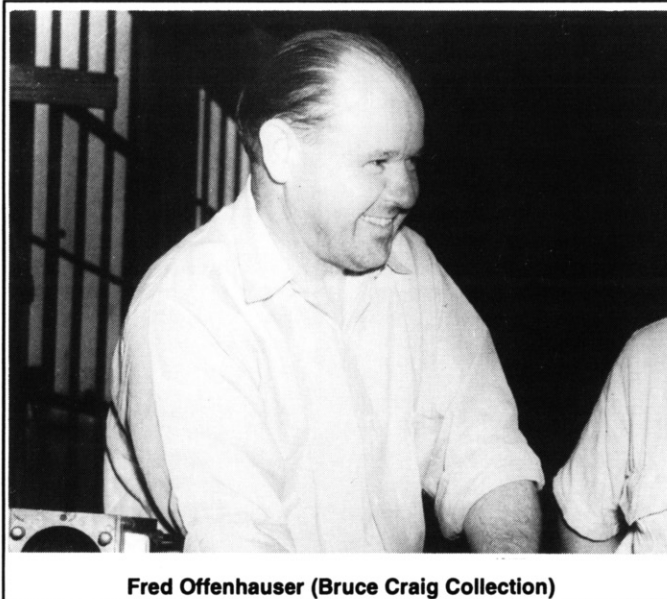
Offenhauser motors (or "Offies") continued the Miller dynasty by powering midgets, big cars and championship cars to untold victories across the country during the Thirties and Forties.

The three basic Offy series engines had the following cubic-inch displacements: 85-120, 200/220, and 255/270. However, Gus Schrader and Emory Collins also won on the "outlaw" dirt tracks with very potent 318 Offies.

Fred's precision machine shop turned to military subcontract work for the local aircraft industry (Lockheed) during World War II. Following the war, business was booming with the production of Offy motors.

Yet, in 1946, at age 68, a financially-comfortable Offenhauser sold the business to two individuals who he knew would carry on the tradition and care in a responsible manner for its clientele. Their names were Louis Meyer and Dale Drake, yet they retained the "Offenhauser" moniker on the engine nameplates for years to come.

Fred died in 1973. He and his wife Ethel had no children.



Fred Offenhauser (Bruce Craig Collection)

owed everything I had or was to the racing fraternity. And if I didn't look after their needs, who would?"

Ed Winfield said, "Fred kept the old organization together, and he had the advantage of having men who had worked on the same