

NATIONAL SPRINT CAR HALL of FAME & MUSEUM

JIMMY WILBURN

Jimmy Wilburn was born in Los Angeles (Calif.) and raced up and down the West Coast during his early career. Based in Portland (Ore.), Jimmy was a champion in the Pacific Northwest in the early 1930s, competing with the likes of E. C. "Woody" Woodford, Frank Wearne, Mel Kenealy, Johnny McDowell, Jimmy Miller, Tommy Legge, and Bayliss Levrett. He was so dominant that he was nicknamed "Ho Hum" by racing writer Walt Woestman.

From there Wilburn moved down to compete with Charlie Curryer's Oakland-based American Racing Association (ARA), the forerunner to Louis Vermeil's Northern Auto Racing Club (NARC). He then moved to Los Angeles to compete in the

Western Racing Association (WRA) before making his final move to Indianapolis in 1936 (with Travis "Spider" Webb).

At that time, there were three main sanctioning bodies: the International Motor Contest Association (IMCA) in the midwest, the Central States Racing Association (CSRA) in the midwest, and the American Automobile

Association (AAA) in the east, west and Indy.

CSRA raced mainly in five states (Indiana, Ohio, Illinois, Michigan and Pennsylvania) and its point champions in 1936 and 1937 were Sherman "Red" Campbell and Everett Saylor, respectively. When Wilburn and Webb made the move to CSRA in '36, at the urging of Norm Witte, they drove for Ralph "Speedy" Helm and Ralph Morgan, respectively.



Jimmy Wilburn (Bruce Craig Collection)

In 1938, back aboard the Morgan Miller number 34, Jimmy Wilburn was the new CSRA Champion. His competition included Joie Chitwood (Sr.) in the Johnny Vance car, Morris Musick, Everett Saylor, J. Carlyle "Duke" Dinsmore, "Bud" Henderson, Henry "Buddy" Rusch; John DeCamp, Webb and Johnny McDowell in Augie Kent's Winfield Rocker Arm car.

Wilburn defended his title in 1939, the year AAA and CSRA began a three-year feud.

Wilburn claimed a third consecutive CSRA title in 1940, the same year that he, Emory Collins and Gus Schrader were hailed as 'big car' racing's "big three."

In 1941, aboard the Ward's Riverside Tires Offy #39, he won Ralph "Pappy" Hankinson's

IMCA show at Reading (Penna.), while AAA stalwarts Ted Horn, Chitwood and Mark Light sat in the stands with 26,732 other fans. Wilburn also beat Gus Schrader (and Ben Musick, Ben Shaw and Deb Snyder) twice at Des Moines that summer. Tragically, during IMCA's finale on October 21, 1941, at Shreveport (La.), Schrader lost his life in a crash while battling Wilburn.

Following World War II, Wilburn regained his stranglehold over CSRA competitors by claiming the point championship again in 1946. In IMCA racing, the engineer for General Motors swept all four meets at the Iowa State Fairgrounds. And, the same year, he made his only appearance at Indy in Bill White's Mobil Gas Special, finishing 19th.

It was during this time, after the war, that Jimmy Wilburn teamed up with mechanic Harry "Barney" Wimmer and the pair became unbeatable. "Who is going to finish second today?" was a common utterance coming from their competitors.

The following season, Wilburn successfully defended his CSRA championship and placed second to IMCA champion Emory Collins. In 1948, Wilburn flipped his Offy at Oskaloosa (Iowa) in early July; he was unconscious for many weeks and "lucky to be alive."

He made a comeback a year later, finishing third in IMCA points to champion Frank Lueptow and runner-up Emory Collins. In 1950, Wilburn claimed his final CSRA crown over Sid Bufkin and Bobby Grim. He retired after the '50 season and he and Mary (whom he married in 1939) moved to Florida. Wilburn died on August 26, 1984.

According to Pete Folse (Sr.), "Frank Lueptow was awfully good, but Jimmy Wilburn was the best driver I have ever seen or run against."