

NATIONAL SPRINT CAR HALL of FAME & MUSEUM

CHRIS ECONOMAKI

Chris Economaki is probably the world's best reporter of the auto racing scene. He doesn't consider himself controversial but he's usually around when a story breaks and he's ready, ready willing and able to tell the truth - whether in a private conversation or on the air in front of millions of viewers.

He joined ABC television as an expert commentator in 1961. In 1981 he received his fourth major award for contributions to the sport of auto racing, the Ray Marquette Memorial Award for the media member who has made the greatest contribution to the sport while typifying the late Indianapolis Star sportswriter and USAC official as a journalist and humanitarian.



Chris Economaki (Bruce Craig Photos)

Chris previously received the Tom Marchese Award in 1972 for dedication and support of motorsports; in 1973, he won the Henry McLemore Award for excellence in broadcast journalism; and in 1978 he was the recipient of the Ken Purdy Award from the International Motor Press Association "for his racing and automotive reportage in 1977 on the ABC television network with particular emphasis on his coverage of the Indianapolis 500." It was the first time the award had gone to a person for his work outside the print media, though Chris is editor and publisher emeritus of

the authoritative *National Speed Sport News*.

Economaki reported most of the ABC Sports' telecasts of motor sports events on "ABC's Wide World of Sports" and the special telecasts of the Indianapolis 500. In fact, he was one of the first expert commentators hired by ABC Sports. He made his debut at the July 4, 1961 running of the Firecracker 250 in Daytona Beach (Fla.). His coverage of the Firecracker 400 on July 4, 1981 marked the completion of his 20th season with ABC Sports.

Christopher Constantine Economaki has been deeply involved with auto racing most of his life. Born October 15, 1920, in Brooklyn and growing up in Ridgewood (N.J.), he saw his first race when he was nine years old at the Atlantic City board track and was hooked for life. He saw every race he could and by the time he was fourteen he was a fixture in the racing world. He knew all the cars and drivers by sight and wrote a byline column for the *National Auto Racing News*.

Though a near-fanatic fan, the desire to drive competitively was not very strong. He once drove a midget car on a dirt track in Pennsylvania. "It wasn't for me," says Economaki. "It was a really frightening experience. That was the first and last time I drove in competition."

The newspaper he took over in the 1950s, and later bought, *National Speed Sport News*, was dying of apathy when he assumed control. Before long, Economaki had raised its circulation to nearly 70,000 and today it is the most influential weekly motorsports publication in the country, largely due to the highly informative column Chris writes himself.

Economaki worked as an announc-

er at a majority of major races in the 1950s, and brought his own brand of infectious enthusiasm to the job. The fans loved his style. In fact, announcer-turned-promoter Jack Gunn has said, "To tell you the truth, I'd have to say if I fashioned my announcing after anybody it was after him."

During his tenure at ABC Sports, Economaki covered the world's major auto events, including Grand Prix races, the LeMans 24-hour Grand Prix of Endurance, the Indianapolis 500, the Daytona 500, and every kind of race, from the big Championship Indy-type events to the sprint cars, high speed NASCAR races, Can-Am competitions and drag races.

In 1984 he joined the CBS Sports staff and worked on live telecasts of the Daytona 500 and the Detroit Grand Prix, in addition to network's International Race of Champions (IROC) coverage. That same year he was a weekly contributor to ESPN's SpeedWeek show and did, from 1985 to 1988, a weekly piece on the WTBS Motorweek Illustrated cable program.

In 1987 Economaki worked again with ESPN providing live coverage to the U.S. from the Hungarian and Austrian Grands Prix and the following year covered the entire Formula One circuit for ESPN.

Economaki is the recipient of NASCAR's Award of Excellence, which was presented to him by NASCAR president Bill France (Jr.) in 1990 at the annual awards banquet at the Waldorf Astoria in New York City.

Economaki's father was Greek and his mother a great-niece of Robert E. Lee. Chris and his wife of over fifty years, Tommye, live in Ridgewood (N.J.). They have two daughters, Christine and current NSSN publisher Corinne, and two grandchildren.