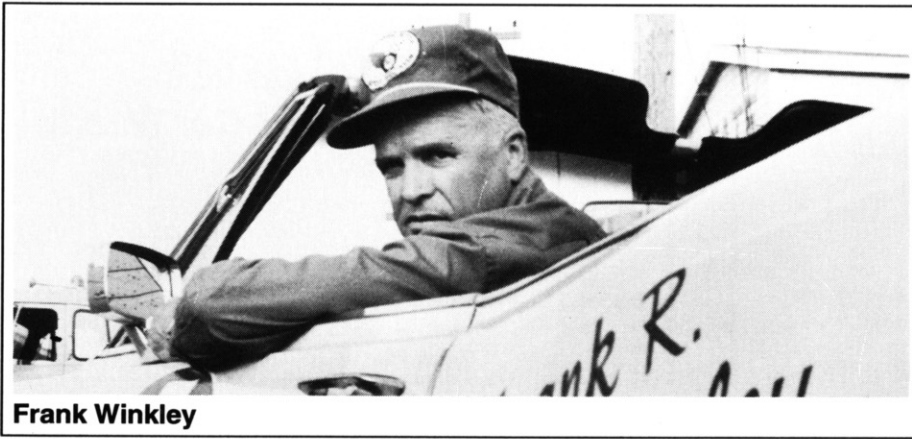


# NATIONAL SPRINT CAR HALL OF FAME & MUSEUM



Frank Winkley

## FRANK WINKLEY

Frank R. Winkley promoted International Motor Contest Association (IMCA) 'big car', stock car and midget races through his Auto Racing, Inc., organization out of St. Paul (Minn.). Born in 1907, he had learned the promoting game in 1925 from driver-turned-thrillcader-operator Aut Swenson, who like Al Sweeney was a protege of legendary promoter J. Alex Sloan. Winkley, or 'Wink' as he was known, promoted 50-75 events annually for IMCA.

He was a complex man; he enjoyed reading and quoting the classics, yet he was also an explosive, hell-bent-for-leather, wild charger. His own highway driving antics from one racing show to another were notorious. Don Riley once said of Wink, "He was completely honest, completely honorable, (and) completely without fear."

Despite being called a 'rugged individualist', Winkley's race promotion organization was very much a 'team', with his wife Verna in charge of scoring and administrative operations beginning in 1937. She also

managed a number of race dates herself, usually when Frank was off promoting another event. Other key players over the years were race starter Milan "Jake" Bozony, announcer/publicity director Nick Nachicas, p.r. assistant Tom McGeehan and announcer G.J. "Moke" Cosby.

Winkley summarized why he felt his crew of top officials were so efficient and well-respected, "To be good at anything you have to enjoy doing it ... most of the boys on my staff are devoted to racing ... if they weren't I wouldn't have them working for me ... as dedicated officials they are interested in getting a pleasing program off for the customers and in doing all they can to protect the drivers and make the race meets as safe as possible ... I'm proud of all of them."

Many of Winkley's annual 'big car' championship fair dates were at Hawkeye Downs in Cedar Rapids (Iowa), Grand Forks (N.D.) State Fair, North Dakota State Fair in Minot, Interstate Fair in LaCrosse (Wisc.), Steele County Fair in Owatonna (Minn.), South Dakota State Fair in Huron, Kansas State Fair in Hutchinson, Oklahoma State Fair in Oklahoma City (prior to Bud Carson's Mar-Car group) and, of course, the Minnesota State Fair in St. Paul.

Frank Winkley's rival, National Speedways, Inc., was run by Al Sweeney and it also promoted IMCA events at such dirt tracks as the Florida State Fair in Tampa, Iowa State Fairgrounds in Des Moines, Missouri State Fair in Sedalia, Nebraska State Fair in Lincoln and the Kansas Free Fair in Topeka. Winkley and Sweeney were constantly warring, each guarding their contract drivers jealously. Immediately prior to the Second World War, Emory Collins ran for Al Sweeney and Gaylord

cont'd

White under the NSI banner. However, after the war, Emory signed with Winkley because, as Collins put it, "part of the agreement included a percentage of the front gate receipts." Another example of the rivalry appeared in 1958 when Bobby Grim was headed to a Winkley-promoted event. In order to stop him, Sweeney actually paid 'his driver' first place money.

Starting in 1967, Frank Winkley also began promoting weekly shows at the Twin City Speedway and Hawkeye Downs as a "feeder circuit" to IMCA. But that was not his 'cup of tea'. He enjoyed the open road and the gypsy life of the fair circuit too much to ever settle down in one location.

Winkley once said, "I have only one prayer: That when I go, I don't go in bed. I want to be behind the wheel of a fast-moving car. That's how I've lived." Wink lost his life in late July, 1968, when his souped-up convertible went out of control on a highway enroute to one of his far-flung races.

Verna M. Winkley continued the business for one more year under the name International Racing, Inc.

