

NATIONAL SPRINT CAR HALL of FAME & MUSEUM

JUD LARSON

by Denny Goad

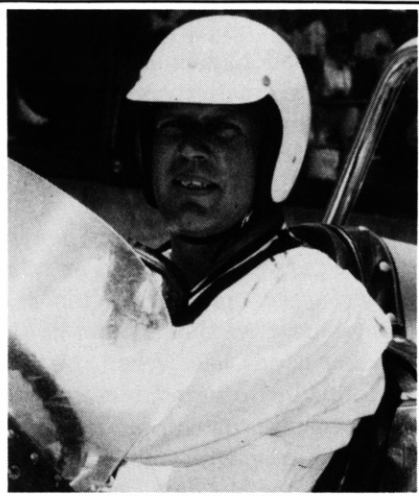
Eugene Wesley Larson was born in Grand Prairie, Texas, on January 21, 1923. "Jud", as he was known, was the third of five sons born to a transplanted Minnesotan father and a native Texan mother. The family led a bedouin-like existence over north Texas before finally settling in Austin.

Jud was primarily a race driver. Perhaps a quote from his first wife, now Mrs. Alvin Gaddy of Austin, says it best: "Actually he could have been anything. Everyone liked him. He was offered so many good jobs. Take his art, for instance. He had quite a future as a cartoonist; cartooning was his specialty. But the last thing on his mind was holding a steady job. After Beverly, our daughter, was born, I thought he might settle a bit. Jud had always loved kids and he loved her. But he never even slightly settled down."

Jud was a flashy and flamboyant person both in his driving style and his lifestyle. His rim-riding charges to the front, whether on a dusty bullring or a treacherous mile were consistent with the life he led off the track. He had a loyal legion of fans wherever he raced. They came to watch this mountain-of-a-man beat a race car or race track, or both if necessary, into submission. They knew that if he survived and if he won, there would be a party, and oh what a party!

Jud detested rules and organizations. The only reason that he was a member of any racing club or association was that if it was a requirement to race. His total disdain for organizations is evidenced by the absence of

any point titles in his resume. His career included many International Motor Contest Association (IMCA) and United States Auto Club (USAC) sprint victories, as well as Dirt Champ victories at Sacramento, DuQuoin, Atlanta, the 'Grove and the Hoosier 100.



Jud Larson
Bruce Craig Collection

If Jud disliked anything more than the above-mentioned "clubs", it could only be the hated pavement. In 1952, after passing his rookie test at Indy with ease and impressing many an Indy veteran in the process, he reportedly departed Indy with the following comment: "There ain't anything wrong with this joint that a little dirt wouldn't improve." His wanderlust had struck again. There were races to run in Kansas City, Lincoln or Spencer (Iowa) that held more allure to Jud Larson than the Brickyard possibly could. Jud did return to Indy in 1958, made the show, and finished a respectable seventh. He couldn't resist, however, making one final jab at the place when he told some cronies, "Wait'll I get those boys to a real race

track, one that's dirt and not tar, then ol' Eugene will show 'em how to drive. I want some holes; big ol' holes to bounce 'em through."

Jud suffered an apparent heart attack while driving in a Dirt Champ race in Springfield in 1959. He was out of auto racing for five years, but returned in the spring of 1964 and never looked better. Of the thirty-nine USAC races contested in 1964-65, Jud won 13 of them including two on the hated tarmac at St. Paul and Winchester. All but two of these wins came at the wheel of the A.J. Watson Offy, at a time when the Offenhauser was rushing towards its demise at the hands of the small-block Chevy. And when you consider that he was beating the likes of Don Branson, A.J. Foyt, Greg Weld, Johnny Rutherford and a host of others during this time, you have no doubt that Jud was back! In fact, Jud finished 1964 in second place in USAC points, behind Don Branson and ahead of Mario Andretti.

In 1966, Jud left the Watson ride after a few races. On June 11, 1966, while driving the Ward Dunseth sprinter at Reading (Penna.), Jud contacted the car of Red Riegel on the first lap of the feature and both men crashed to their death. Jud is survived by his widow Ruth Welch of Raytown (Mo.), his daughters Beverly Elliott of San Antonio, Pam Attaway of Okeechobee (Fla.) and Doris Thomas of Kansas City, and by Beverly's mother Lucille Gaddy. He is also survived by grandsons Daryn and Judson and by granddaughters Valerie and Amber.