

NATIONAL SPRINT CAR HALL of FAME & MUSEUM

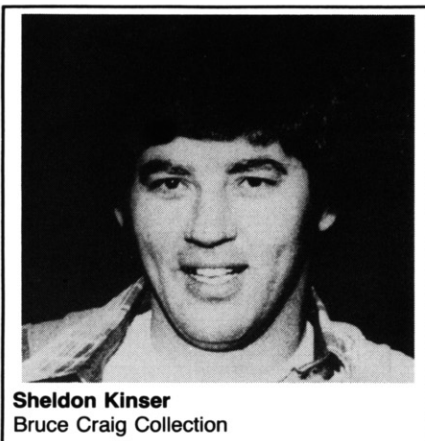
SHELDON KINSER

by Denny Goad

Sheldon Ray Kinser was born on December 9, 1942, the first son (but 7th child) born to Eathel and Jean Kinser of Bloomington, Indiana. He grew up helping his father in the family logging business. This may have had some bearing on his career path. Perhaps he felt that wrestling a sprint car on a rough and rutted Terre Haute track was better than wrestling a log. Sheldon spent a hitch in the navy in the late 50's and early 60's. Upon his return Sheldon teamed up with his brother-in-law Paul Barrow and started racing stock cars around the southern Indiana area. During the next three years he "musta won 40 or 50 races down at Bloomington", including 13 in a row during one stretch.

In 1965, at the urging of Bobby Kinser, Pete Brewer offered Sheldon his first ride in a sprint car. Over the next six years, Sheldon drove and won for car owners Brewer, Barrow and Karl Kinser. In 1971-72, Sheldon teamed with long-time friend/mechanic (and former hobby stock competitor) Galen Fox and car builder/owner Grant King to dominate the midwest 'outlaw' sprint car circuit, collecting over fifty feature victories. Sheldon was working as a heavy equipment operator and was free to go racing whenever he wanted. And Sheldon wanted to go racing with the United States Auto Club (USAC). In

1973 Sheldon entered his first USAC race, the "Hulman Classic" in Terre Haute. He drove the Richard Bowen sprinter to a seventh place finish in his debut. Sheldon followed that up by running second and third in twin 50's at Eldora. After that, according to Sheldon, "USAC sorta accepted



Sheldon Kinser
Bruce Craig Collection

me and gave me a permanent license."

During the years between 1973 and 1985, Sheldon finished in the top three in one-third of all USAC sprint races he contested, a truly remarkable accomplishment in any form of racing. In that span of time Sheldon also won the USAC sprint car season championship in 1977, 1981 and 1982. He was second in points in 1984 and third in 1983, 1985 & 1986. Sheldon once admitted that winning the 1977 USAC sprint car championship aboard the Dick Hammond "Genesee Beer Wagon" (pavement 'roadster' and dirt 'up-right') sprinters was "one of the

toughest things I've ever done." His 1981 & 1982 championships came with the potent Ben Leyba/Jack Steck team.

Besides winning 37 USAC sprint races in his career, including the 1981 "Hulman Classic", Sheldon made six starts in the Indy 500, with a sixth place finish his best effort. Add to these already impressive statistics the five Dirt Champ wins, including the 1975 triumph at the 100-miler in Syracuse and the 1985 wins in the Hoosier Hundred, and you have an outstanding career by an outstanding racer.

On August 1, 1988, Sheldon Ray Kinser died of throat cancer. Often times the obituary writers describe death by cancer as "succumbing" to the disease. However, Sheldon Ray Kinser did not give in to anything. He fought cancer with the same ferocity with which he fought the ruts and roughness at Terre Haute. After undergoing surgery in October, 1986, for removal of a tumor from his larynx, Sheldon's 'voice box' was removed. He was not expected to ever race again, yet he made a heroic and courageous comeback on March 28, 1987 by being back in the seat for USAC's season opener at Eldora.

Sheldon is survived by his widow, Suzie Hodges (nee Grim) of Indianapolis, and by their son Justin and daughter Shelley. He also has a son, Sheldon (Jr.), and a daughter, Marqueta.