

NATIONAL SPRINT CAR HALL of FAME & MUSEUM

ENNIS M. "DIZZ" WILSON

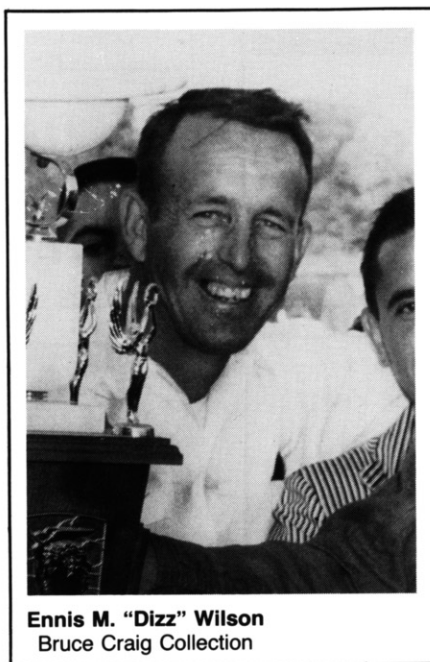
Ennis Merle Wilson was born the second of nine children in Abbey Dell (Indiana) in 1912. He attended school in West Baden until 1930 when he left high school during the Depression. It was at school that he picked up the nickname "Dizz" (after Dizzy Dean) when he and his brother took up baseball. It was also during his school boy days that Dizz worked at the local Ford garage near the French Lick Springs Hotel and he gained his mechanical expertise.

In 1937, Dizz married 15-year old Zelphia Walton, a country girl from Paoli, and they had a son, Merle, a year later. Dizz had a number of hobbies, including motorcycle hillclimbing and fur-trapping, but all that was forgotten when he saw his first auto race at the Washington County Fairgrounds in Salem. He soon borrowed \$25 from the bank and put a Model T race car together.

When World War II began, Wilson was a Ford mechanic in Paoli and he volunteered for the service. After the war, Wilson went back to southern Indiana and back to fielding race cars. In fact, influenced by aeronautics during the war, Wilson resourcefully invested in 440 cubic inch, air-cooled, 195-pound in-line six-cylinder Ranger aircraft trainer engines for his sprint cars. Says Wilson, "My greatest achievement was the Ranger engine. I took that S.O.B. and made a race engine out of it.

He also moved to Mitchell in 1945 and built a high-banked, half-mile dirt track called Mitchell Speedway, which was similar to the one in Paoli that he formed. Dizz ran the Mitchell track for nearly 15 years. In 1947, he, Jim Summers and Bill Cantrell carved the ultra-fast Salem track for its June 22nd American Automobile Association (AAA) big car opener. The next year he helped build another speed plant in Bloomington.

Wilson built racers and campaigned them from North Dakota to Florida on the tough International Motor Contest Association (IMCA) and Central States Racing Association (CSRA) circuits. He also ventured to Indy in the mid-1950's and early 1960's, capturing a seventh place finish and rookie honors with Al Herman in 1955. Dizz's pension for 'doing more with less' and for reusing old race parts was known all over, including at Indy. It was a lesson he no doubt learned from growing up during the Depression.



Ennis M. "Dizz" Wilson
Bruce Craig Collection

In 1961, E.M. "Dizz" Wilson and his driver Jim McElreath won the prestigious Little 500 at Anderson. Dizz also had the distinction of owning the last place finisher that year, too, as he often entered multiple cars. In IMCA competition, Wilson and his driver Johnny White edged out Hector Honore and Pete Folse (Sr.) for the title in 1962. Those two achievements remain among the greatest of his long career.

During the Sixties and Seventies, Dizz was known by the company he kept. Among the National Sprint Car Hall of Famers who have driven for Dizz during his career are A.J. Foyt, Dick

Gaines, Bobby Grim, Sheldon Kinser and Jerry Richert (Sr.). Other superstars of the sport who have had seat time in a Wilson #70 or #71 are E.M. "Buzz" Barton, Don Branson, Pete Folse (Sr.), Norman "Bubby" Jones, Bobby Kinser, Harold Leep, Jim McElreath, Johnny Rutherford, Eddie Sachs and Gordon Woolley.

Don Shepherd described Wilson's contribution to American auto racing, "I say he was responsible - and I mean responsible - for racing among the Kinser clan today. Everyone down in southern Indiana looked up to this guy because he had a couple of big monster race cars. Dizz was a catalyst."

Wilson and Butch Wilkerson won the South Central Indiana Racing Association (SCIRA) championship in 1975. In 1982, Dizz, at age 71, and Mike Johnson won the Bloomington track title. He has since gotten out of the racing business to spend more time with his wife Zel, but Ennis M. "Dizz" Wilson certainly hasn't gotten out of the business of tinkering with automobiles in his shop behind their home in Mitchell, Indiana.

