

NATIONAL SPRINT CAR HALL of FAME & MUSEUM

AL SWEENEY

Al Sweeney was one of J. Alex Sloan's proteges (along with son John Sloan and Aut Swenson) and when Sloan passed away in 1937, Sweeney was there to carry on the tradition. Al Sweeney and Gaylord White formed the National Speedways, Inc. (NSI) promotional organization in December, 1940 in Chicago. Their first signed contract was for a Central States Racing Association (CSRA) event in Sioux Falls (S.D.) on June 7, 1941, where the John White family had been active in fair circuit promotions. Emory Collins was their first major contracted 'big car' driver. Al's wife Bernice, also known as "Brunch", served as timekeeper.

Following World War II, National Speedways allied themselves with the International Motor Contest Association (IMCA). For years Sweeney divided the IMCA county/state fair circuit with rival promoter Frank R. Winkley of Auto Racing, Inc. By 1950, though, Sweeney and White (and pit steward Gene Van Winkle) were promoting races at the Iowa, Missouri, Nebraska, Kansas, Florida and Louisiana state fairs. While most of these events were for 'big cars',

some were for late model stock cars and even motorcycles.

Besides being promoter, Sweeney was often the race starter in the early days. He was famous for standing down on the track and hiding the flags behind him, away from the drivers eyesight. At the last second possible, he would throw the green flag and run off the track.

After the death of Gaylord White in 1954, Van Winkle became second in command to Sweeney at NSI. It was said that, in 1958, Al Sweeney once paid driver Bobby Grim the equivalent first-place money to stay home when it was learned that Grim had intended to race a Winkley-promoted event.

By the 1960's National Speedways was promoting sprint cars, stock cars, modifieds and compact sprint cars (midgets).

Al Sweeney was proud to call "integrity, efficiency and dependability the cornerstone of our success". His organization was nationally-known for well-run safe racing programs. They were also known for innovations, such as the very successful Hawkeye & Missouri Futurity races. Al was one of the first promoters to utilize the inverted starts for "big car" racing. In honor of his many ac-



Al Sweeney
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complishments, Al Sweeney was inducted into the IMCA Hall of Fame in 1971.

Al and Bernice Sweeney wintered in Tampa (Fla.) each year, eventually moving to the Sunshine State. Both are deceased.