

NATIONAL SPRINT CAR HALL of FAME & MUSEUM

Bob Carey

by Donald Davidson

Powerfully built Bob Carey burst onto the national scene in 1932 and won the American Automobile Association (AAA) National Championship in his first season.

Had there been an official Midwestern 'big car' championship that year (which there was not until the following year), he would have won that as well.

Robert Elwood "Bob" Carey was born on September 24, 1904, in Anderson, Indiana, to parents Clifford and Nannie (Busch) Carey. Bob had one brother, Fred, and two sisters, Rhea and Martha. He married Lennie Miller in 1922 and they had one child, Bob. Carey worked at the General Motors plant in Anderson until he began racing. He rarely traveled out of the immediate area until a 1928 'barnstorming' tour through the South with fellow future stars Bill Cummings and Howdy Wilcox II.

Enjoying excellent runs with owners Robert Roof and John Vance during the next few years and winning plenty of races, he still wasn't getting much attention nationally. Noting that more and more Midwestern drivers were migrating west for the winter in order to take advantage of the virtually year-round schedule at Legion Ascot Speedway, Carey decided to join them.

He arrived late in 1931 and had some decent runs for Leo Krasek, although nothing spectacular. He switched, for a few races, to a stagger-valve 'Fronty' owned by Louis Schneider and then received the break of a lifetime when Louis Meyer, already a two-time Indianapolis 500 winner, hired Bob to drive his Jadson Miller single-seater.

After finishing fourth at Ascot on January 24, Carey headed down to El Centro in mid-February for a two-day run. He won the 30-lap affair on Saturday and dropped out with overheating while leading the 60-lapper the following day. A week later they traveled all the way north to Oakland for a 100-miler, with Bob again the winner.

It got better still. While Meyer's stable also included an excellent Championship car, he had been driving at Indianapolis for Alden Sampson and hiring other people to drive his own. Carey was in the right place at the right time.

When Meyer began preparing for Indianapolis, Bob switched to Leslie Quinn's number 8 machine for a few races and won another pair of 100-milers at Oakland in April, just before heading back to the Midwest to rejoin Meyer.

Never before having driven a 'two-man' car, Carey qualified the Meyer number 61 in fourteenth and was up to third inside of 10 laps. He spent more than 30 laps running second to former winner Billy Arnold, and when Arnold crashed to avoid a spinning car, Carey became the leader. He remained in front until lap 95, when the strain of leaning on a right rear tire for almost 250 miles became too great.

It let go as he negotiated turn two, causing him to spin around three times.

He limped around to the pits, and finally got going after an interminable seven minutes and 30 seconds (not to mention the time lost getting there), now with the additional knowledge that the frame was bent.

After ducking in for a quick inspection at 108 laps, he had to make another stop, lasting over five minutes, at lap 126 to repair a damaged shock absorber. Down to twelfth now, and behind leader and eventual winner Fred Frame by 12 minutes, Carey began the overwhelming task of trying to catch back up. He succeeded in slicing four minutes from Frame's advantage and he arrived in an amazing fourth place, everyone discussing the fact that the newcomer could easily have won.

Carey pretty much had things his own way that summer, winning the 100-milers at Detroit (June 5) and Syracuse, New York (July 2), both of which happened to be shortened by rain just past the 80-lap mark. In addition, there were seven 'big car' wins, two of them coming at Winchester, two at Fort Wayne and three at the season's end, on consecutive weekends in October on the Detroit mile.

Still running second to Fred Frame in the AAA National championship standings, Carey headed west to try and land the title. The finale, as luck would have it, was at a track Bob liked a

lot: Oakland. Frame dropped out, Bob finished second, and the title was his.

And in spite of missing the entire summer on the West Coast, he still ended up sixth in points there.

It didn't take much imagination to see Carey repeating the championship in 1933 and winning the "500" as well. Louis Meyer sold his two-man car to Joe Marks, son-in-law of the famed Mary Falconi (otherwise known as Grandma Marks), and Bob went with the deal. He started off the season in fine style by taking a Marks single-seater to wins at Oakland and Legion Ascot in February.

Due to leave for the Midwest after an appearance at Ascot on April 16, Bob decided to leave them with a one-lap track record that would hold out until his return. He never finished the lap. The car got away from him on turn three and he did not survive the accident. Interestingly, Bob's wife Lennie, who regularly attended his races, was not at Ascot that day as she was having her hair done.

Bob Carey's son, Bob, lives today in Homer, Alaska, with his wife Jo.



I.M.S. Museum Photo