

NATIONAL SPRINT CAR HALL of FAME & MUSEUM

MARION ROBINSON

By Bob Wilson

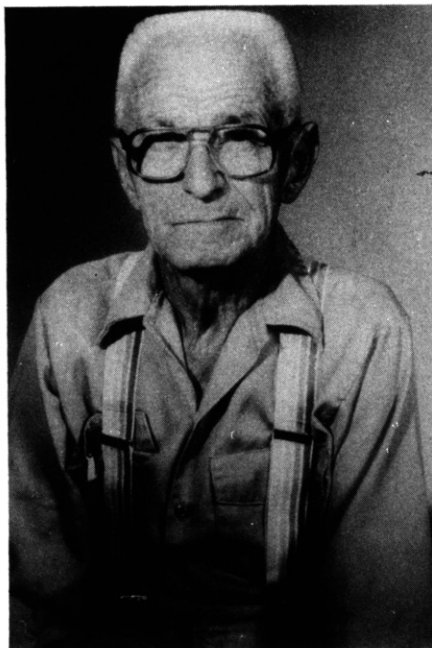
Marion F. Robinson was born in St. Joseph, Missouri on March 15, 1907. During his boyhood years in St. Joe, he often earned ten cents an hour working at a race shop next door to where he lived. There, he also learned about Model T race cars and engines. During the first World War, the Robinsons moved to Des Moines where he continued to live for nearly 70 years.

Throughout the 1930's and 1940's, Marion owned two midgets which he campaigned with various drivers. The early fifties saw him campaign a Ford flathead Jalopy with Al DeCarlo as the driver. That potent combination produced a State of Iowa Championship at the 1955 Iowa State Fair.

Marion first began his promotional activities at the Kessell Speedway (which he later renamed Pioneer Raceway) on S.E. 14th Street in Des Moines in the early 1950s. Over the years, these activities led him to race tracks located in Newton, Stuart, Chariton, Bloomfield, Mason City, Mount Ayr and Dayton.

In 1956 he was hired by the Marion County Fair Association to promote the Knoxville Raceway and by 1959 he held the Midwest Invitational for super-modifieds. The evolution of this concept was to take another form, and it was not until 1961 that he was able to convince the Fair Association

to put up \$5000 for an event he conceived of and named the First Annual Super-Modified Nationals. Successful from it's initial running, by 1968 the Knoxville Nationals had become a premier sprint car event.



Marion Robinson
Bob Wilson Collection

During his tenure as a promoter, he handled stocks, modifieds, super-modifieds, late models, sportsman and sprint cars. He additionally brought divisions of IMCA and USAC to the Marion County oval. A dispute with a member of the fairboard led to his resignation in May of 1974.

Called "Father of the Knoxville Nationals", Marion Robinson did not have what might be considered the

image of a promoter. Because he operated a machine shop and repair garage, his clothing was often soiled and his demeanor was not finely polished. Yet, he frequently lured top national drivers to compete at the fairgrounds in Knoxville. "OFTEN COPIED BUT NEVER DUPLICATED" or "ALWAYS A RACE NEVER AN ENDURANCE CONTEST" are Nationals slogans which illustrate Marion's style at publicity. And he often sent out 150 press releases in a week. He was known for his hard work and determination.

Marion was inducted into the Knoxville Raceway Hall of Fame in 1979. Nadine, his wife of thirty years and his right hand promotions manager, was inducted posthumously in 1989 having passed away in 1985. Marion died on December 14, 1990 leaving six children and his lifelong friend George "Bones" Henderson. Survivors include three sons: Jerry, Howard, Earl and three daughters: Marion, Nancy and Leota.

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