

NATIONAL SPRINT CAR HALL of FAME & MUSEUM

J.C. "AGGIE" AGAJANIAN

by Ben Foote

During mid-1990, there's been a revival of recognition of J.C. Agajanian, whose name and white Stetson were familiar symbols to most motor racing fans for almost 50 years. People saw that hat worn in three distinct roles: car owner, race organizer (he disliked the word "promoter"), and United States Auto Club (USAC) official.

The car owner role began shortly after his 20th birthday when he bought a mid-1930's version of a sprint car. He campaigned others like it for a decade until he began taking his drivers from the dirt he liked best to Indianapolis.

Those sprint car graduates he gave Indy rookie rides to included Johnny Mantz, Walt Faulkner, Chuck Daigh, Lloyd Ruby, Parnelli Jones, Dick Atkins, Bill Vukovich and Gary Bettenhausen, among others. Troy Ruttman, who won the 500-mile Hoosier classic in 1952 for "Aggie" (as



J.C. "AGGIE" Agajanian

Ben Foote Collection

he was known in the trade), was also a California sprint car product of 22 years. Parnelli got J.C.'s second 500 triumph in 1963.

As race organizer, Agajanian staged events from Sacramento, California to Daytona Beach, Florida. Most were oval Indy car, sprint or midget events. He was also involved in motorcycle promotions at the famed Ascot Park in Gardena, California, along with his favorite sprint cars and midgets.

He signed the last lease at Ascot eight

years before his death in 1984. His son Cary, will finish that obligation as president of Agajanian Enterprises this year.

As one of the founders of USAC, when the American Automobile Association (AAA) left the field, Agajanian helped save the sport of racing and had great influence on racing safety the rest of his life. He was on the board of directors of USAC from 1956 until 1980.

To show their appreciation of his stature in racing, the Indianapolis Motor Speedway inducted him into its Hall of Fame on May 11 of this year. At Ascot the next night, the Gardena Valley Chamber of Commerce and the city fathers retired the Gardena Gold Cup, an American Motorcyclist Association (AMA) award usually reserved for the winner of the Camel Pro series spring classic, in his honor as a "lifetime achievement award" in motorsports.

Aggie's widow, Faye (his wife of 50 years) lives in Beverly Hills. His daughter Joanee, and three sons Cary, Chris and J.C., Jr., also survive him.