

NATIONAL SPRINT CAR HALL of FAME & MUSEUM

JAN OPPERMAN

Born to parents Jim and June Opperman on February 9, 1939 in Los Angeles, California, Jan knew the traveling lifestyle of an outlaw racer from an early age. His family, including younger brother Jay who was born in 1942, moved from Southern California to Idaho to Washington to Northern California all within Jan's first sixteen years. During his early twenties, Jan quit racing motorcycles to drive midget race cars with the Bay Cities Racing Association. It didn't take Jan long to discover sprint cars after that. In the fall of 1967, the son of Jim (or "Grizz") and June (or "Mops") won a feature event at Vallejo driving for Hank Hanestad in a sprint car powered by an old Ranger motor. Early the next year, Jan was racing sprint cars throughout the state of California when a friend from Nebraska asked Jan to follow him back to the midwest. Jan 'hooked up' with car builder Bob Trostle of Des Moines, Iowa and they proceeded to do their share of winning on the International Motor Contest Association (IMCA) circuit.

In 1969, Jan signed with Bill Smith and his Speedway Motors #4x sprint car out of Lincoln, Nebraska. Jan and his wife Mary Lou established a home in Beaver Crossing (NE), while he continued winning on the IMCA fair and exposition circuit. The following year 'Opp' moved to Beaver Springs, Pennsylvania with the help of promoter Jack Gunn. Although the Central Pennsylvania circuit was one

of the toughest in the nation, if not the toughest, Opperman was second his first night out at Selinsgrove Speedway and he won the following afternoon at Williams Grove Speedway. Although 1970 was a good year in Jan's professional career, it was a bad year personally as his younger brother was killed in a sprint car racing accident at Knoxville, Iowa. The following season was another outstanding year on the dirt tracks as Jan copped two of the sport's mythical triple crown events...the Knoxville Nationals and the Western World Championships at Manzanita Speedway in Phoenix, Arizona.



Jan Opperman
Ken Coles Collection

In 1972, the long-haired "hippie" named Jan again competed in Central Pennsylvania for car owner Dick Bogar and chief mechanic Ralph Heintzelman. The Bogar Speed & Show Equipment-sponsored #99 team won 44 main events that season, again including Manzanita's Western World race. In 1974, the Bogar/Opperman team won 26 feature events and clinched Jan's only track championship of his career at Selinsgrove. One of his most-remembered wins that year was at Williams Grove when he and arch-rival Kenny Weld (in the Floyd Trevis-built Weikert Livestock #29) finished 1-2 in a

United States Auto Club (USAC) event, while both were using Temporary Permits. Jan won the IMCA Winternationals championship in Florida in 1974, prior to joining USAC full-time. Opperman wasted little time in making the conservative sanctioning body take notice of him by winning early at Eldora Speedway and almost upsetting the troops at the prestigious Hulman Classic at the Terre Haute (IN) Action Track on ABC's "Wide World of Sports". However, Jan Opperman and USAC officials disagreed on the sanctioning group's rules regarding participation in mid-week "outlaw" racing, and as a result Jan returned his USAC license. He continued running open competition events through 1975, capturing that season's Northwest Dirt Cup and Big Car Racing Association titles.

By 1976, Jan called Noxon, Montana home. He went back to USAC racing with Bill Smith's black Speedway Motors Special #64 and won the 1976 Hulman Classic at Terre Haute. It truly was a "special event" for Jan. In early June, Jan moved into the Bobby Hillin (Sr.) Longhorn racers. He continued racing USAC's sprint car and championship dirt divisions until he was seriously hurt in that September's Hoosier Hundred race. Jan eventually recovered and resumed his career in the late seventies and early eighties...racing and winning aboard a variety of sprint cars. A June, 1981 accident in United Racing Club (URC) competition at Jennerstown (PA) ultimately ended Jan's driving career.