

## Dick Simonek

by Larry L. Ball, Jr.

Richard H. "Dick" Simonek was born in Wayne, New Jersey, on June 15, 1907. He began his career in racing while working with Fred "Jiggs" Peters at his machine shop in Paterson, New Jersey's 'Gasoline Alley'. In 1936, Peters and Simonek would field a car together driven by Joie Chitwood and Granville "Buster" Warke. While they would have some success, it would not be until World War II that Dick Simonek's legend would start in earnest.

During World War II, Dick would partner with Ted Horn to run a machine shop in Paterson. After the war, and with the return of racing, Ted and Dick would make history. They would remain partners until Ted's fatal accident at DuQuoin, Illinois, on October 10, 1948. In 1946 they would field three cars with Horn, Tommy Hinnershitz, and Walt Ader as drivers. Ted Horn would win the American Automobile Association (AAA) National Championship and Eastern title three straight years: 1946, '47, and '48. This feat would never be duplicated.



Simonek Family Collection

It was on the Championship circuit that Dick's ingenuity would become most obvious. In 1947, his first year with Ted on the Championship circuit, Dick had become concerned with the weight of pistons. Through Ted's connection with mechanic Harry C. "Cotton" Henning, and the Maserati, Dick came up with a plan for reducing the weight of the Offy piston. He contacted a local foundry about casting his new piston design in magnesium. When the new pistons arrived, the weight of each had been cut in half! These new pistons also created higher revolutions. This would have been obvious to anybody that heard the engine, so Dick dealt with that by running a split exhaust.

Dick was an exceptional machinist. He would build all of the steering and gearboxes used by the race team. In addition, before fuel injection became the norm, Dick fabricated his own carburetors. Apparently he was not satisfied with the performance of the popular Riley carburetor and considered the Winfield obsolete.

The Championship division of AAA was the home of the 270-cubic-inch Offy. Dick thought otherwise. During their domination of this division, the Horn/Simonek entry was giving up almost forty cubic inches to the competition. Not having a 270, Dick would make his own crankshafts turning the 220 Offy (used in the sprint division) into a 233. It has been estimated that Dick would have 200 man-hours in each crankshaft. Again, given the lighter pistons

Dick had developed, the little 233 could turn a much higher rpm (revolutions per minute) than the laboring 270's.

After Ted's death in 1948, Dick would campaign the car with Tommy Hinnershitz behind the wheel. Tommy and Dick would make a successful team until parting ways in June of 1951. With Tommy's exit, Bill Schindler would finish out the year with Dick. By 1951, the old rail frame sprinter was becoming obsolete. Dick struggled to make any money with Schindler in the car, and decided to call it quits.

When Dick decided to no longer campaign a car on the tough eastern AAA circuit, it didn't indicate the end of a career. Instead, Dick would buy engine-balancing equipment from California's Ed Iskenderian, and start the next chapter of his career. Dick would have the only shop on the east coast providing engine balancing for all types of racers. He would cater to the open wheel, stock car, sports car, drag car, and boat-racing crowd. During this time he would do quite a bit of machine work for Tommy Hinnershitz, who by this time was quite a successful owner as well as driver. He was also balancing Lee Petty's engines. It was not uncommon for Lee to bring ten assemblies up from North Carolina every year. An interesting thing about Dick was, even though he did so much engine work over the years, he never used a torque wrench. He never even owned one.

In the late 1950's, Dick would become an engine tech inspector for the National Association for Stock Car Auto Racing (NASCAR). He would retire to Florida in 1965 and continue with NASCAR until '67. Sadly, Dick passed away on November 13, 1997, in Ormond Beach, Florida. His wife of 70 years, Lena, and their only child Charles live in Florida today.