

NATIONAL SPRINT CAR HALL of FAME & MUSEUM

WILBUR SHAW

Wilbur Shaw was born in Shelbyville, Indiana on October 31, 1902. As a boy and a young man, Wilbur learned the value of a good education from his mother and a love of the outdoors from his father. In 1920, Wilbur got his first taste of dirt track auto racing after he met local Indianapolis hotshoe Bill Hunt and went to work for him. A year or two later, the young Shaw hooked up with owner Roscoe Dunning. In 1923, Wilbur won the National Light Car Championship and by 1924 he had competed on most of the "outlaw" tracks in Illinois, Indiana and Ohio. He was racing against the likes of Dutch Bauman, Louie Schneider, John Gerber and Howdy Wilcox II.

In 1924, Bauman, Cliff Woodbury and Shaw (and promoters Frank Funk and Jack Leach) joined the American Automobile Association (AAA), which was the sanctioning body of the prestigious Indianapolis 500-mile race. However, the really good rides were already taken by such drivers as Pete DePaolo, Harry Hartz, Louis Meyer, Ray Keech and Frank



Wilbur Shaw
Bruce Craig Collection

Lockhart. And the AAA contest board wasn't helping Funk at Winchester Speedway nor Leach at Chicago's Roby mile track, so in 1926, the disgruntled foursome again went "outlaw" racing. Shaw again enjoyed much success on the Indiana bullrings. At the same time, Wilbur met and married his second wife, Cathleen "Boots" Stearns.

In the early 1930's, Wilbur started spending more and more time racing in Southern California, particularly at Ascot. His weekly competitors were AAA West Coast champion Ernie Triplett, Lester

Spangler, Kelly Petillo and Chet Gardner. It has been said that Wilbur was the first driver to wear a hard helmet, which was presented to him in 1932 by Major H.O.D. Seagrave of England. It was actually constructed of many layers of linen shellacked together. Within three years, almost every sanctioning body in the country had mandated crash helmets in their rules.

By the mid- to late-1930's, Wilbur was establishing himself as quite the Indianapolis star, winning the Memorial Day classic in 1937, 1939 and again in 1940. In his efforts to concentrate on Indy, Shaw curtailed his dirt track racing appearances in the late 1930's. Due to its inactivity during World War II, Shaw's beloved Indianapolis Motor Speedway was in great need of repair in 1945. Wilbur, with the help of Anton "Tony" Hulman, transformed "The Brickyard" into a showplace in just a few short years. Shaw, as president of the Indianapolis Motor Speedway, remained active until his tragic death in an October 30, 1954 airplane crash.

Wilbur "Bill" Shaw, Jr. today resides in Warrenton, Virginia.