

BRUCE CRAIG

by Bryan Householder

Bruce Craig was born and lived in Phillipsburg, New Jersey. In fact, he spent his entire 63 years in the house his parents owned there. That's not to say he spent his whole life in Phillipsburg, however. Much of his life was spent traveling from one sprint car race to the next. Documenting the history of those races with his camera, and his mind.

Bruce began attending races as a youngster when his father would take him to see the colorful action that was East Coast sprint car racing. Those trips began a lifelong love for the sport.

It wasn't long before Bruce took up a camera, and began to amass his incredible collection of racing photographs. At first the photos were just those he had taken himself, but then it began to grow. Bruce realized that as the older generation began slipping away, their work would be lost if someone didn't do something.

So, as older racing photographers began retiring, or passing away, Bruce would purchase their collections. Over the years he became one of the biggest collectors of sprint car photographs from the days gone by. But it wasn't just his collection of photographs, it was his knowledge of those photos and the subjects behind them, that set Bruce apart.

National Sprint Car Hall of Fame driver Lynn Paxton perhaps put it best. "Bruce was always attending races, and always taking photographs. Over the years he also amassed a tremendous collection of photos from old-time photographers. But it wasn't just the photos, Bruce had the knowledge to go along with them."

Paxton continued, "He knew the cars in those photos; he knew the drivers. He could tell you about the cars, and where they went during their whole racing career."

In a time when sprint cars raced for many years, knowledge like that was very important for those documenting the history of the sport, and also for those who wanted to restore a vintage race car.

Restoring vintage race cars is also something Bruce Craig did during his life. Over the years he rescued quite a few old race cars, and while not always the person to do the restorations, he was often the person who got all the parts together. His wife Jeanne says that he was most proud of a vintage Ted Horn racer that he had found. Bruce collected all the proper parts for that car, but then let someone else do the final restoration.

While he didn't complete that car, Bruce did have a number of cars of his own. One was a 1946 Kurtis-Kraft midget driven by Ronnie Householder. Two of his cars were donated to the Eastern Museum of Motor Racing. One was a Hillegass three-quarter midget that was Mario Andretti's first open-wheel ride. The other was a vintage 1920s Harry A. Miller "big car."

His wife Jeanne says that Bruce loved auto racing, and had a vast knowledge of the sport. Jeanne herself is a racing buff. Her father was National Sprint Car Hall of Fame racer Tommy Hinnershitz. Jeanne recalls how her father and Bruce loved to sit down and talk about racing from days gone by.

She says, "They both knew so much about racing history, and had great memories. There was seldom a time that they didn't know all the facts about any race they discussed. Dad so loved to sit and talk with Bruce, and it was seldom that either had to correct the other about facts from some event. They both remembered so well."

It's been close to three years now since Bruce Craig passed away. That was a day, says Lynn Paxton, when East Coast sprint car racing lost one of its greatest historians. Fortunately, Bruce Craig's vast collection of racing photographs still exists. Dale Snyder, of Nazareth, PA, currently has those photos, although they still belong to Jeanne Craig. Hopefully they will always be accessible to the current historians of the racing world.



Craig Family Collection