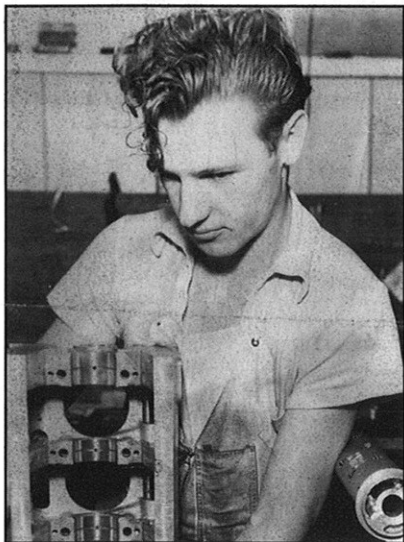


Schroeder Family Photo



Gordon Schroeder

by Larry Ball, Jr.

Gordon Schroeder was born February 24, 1915, in Minneapolis, Minnesota. At a young age the family moved to Santa Ana, California. As a youngster, Gordon would attend races at Legion Ascot.

By the mid-Thirties he was helping as a "stooge" with different big car and midget teams. In 1938, Gordon and a friend made their way out to Indianapolis with the hopes of working for one of the race teams at the Indianapolis Motor Speedway. They had made their way east thinking they

may have an opportunity with Wilbur Shaw's team only to learn they needed no help upon arriving. As luck would have it, Gordon was introduced to Harry "Cotton" Henning who was there with Ted Horn in the Maserati. Cotton allowed the young men to work on the crew. Ted finished fourth in the '38 Indy 500. Also in '38, Gordon built the first open rear end for a midget; he was 23 years old.

Through his friendship with Cotton Henning, Gordon was hired on at Sampson Motors. His new employer built and prepared cars for Indianapolis. Gordon was now in the racing business.

By the mid-1940's, Gordon had started his own machine shop. He would buy a champ car from his former employer (Sampson) and take Sam Hanks to Indy in 1946. The Sampson-powered (actually a Stutz Black Hawk engine) Spike Jones Special qualified on the front row. Unfortunately, their day ended on the eighteenth lap when a broken oil line put them out of the race in 31st position.

It was during the '40s that Gordon first started to really build steering boxes. At that time a lot of racers used a Frankland steering, which was notorious for gears breaking. Initially, he started by making replacement gears. Eventually, he would build a limited number of complete boxes.

Gordon remained a familiar face at the races into the Fifties. This would change, however, with the death of two of his friends, Rex Mays at Del Mar in 1949, and Bobby Ball in February of 1954 (due to head injuries suffered in a midget crash at Carrell Speedway in 1952). Bobby had driven the Schroeder-designed and -built Blakely Oil Special to a fifth place finish at the Speedway in 1951. The Blakely Oil Special was of unique design. Gordon used riveted aluminum rails with magnesium cast cross members. He didn't know how to weld. In addition, the car had disc brakes and an independent front suspension. With Bobby's passing, Gordon started staying away from the racetrack.

Through the '50s Gordon's shop was doing machine work and fabrication for many racers on the West Coast. This included all the torsion bars for the Kurtis-Kraft house cars. By the 1960's that would change. With the mass production of Edmunds and CAE cars, there was a demand for steering boxes. Gordon would fill that demand. The modern Schroeder steering was born. The available options were simple: two ratios and left- or right-handed steering. Widths would differ to accommodate anything from a three-quarter midget to a modified.

During the '70s Gordon would develop the first quick-release steering hub approved by NASCAR. This same design would eventually be found on sprint cars, midgets and champ cars all over the country.

With the growth of the business, Gordon began mass-producing other racing components. In 1980, Schroeder Racing Products started mass-producing torsion bars for TQ midgets. This coincided with Gordon's son Gary winning three TQ championships. Soon the product line expanded to include full midgets and sprint cars. After building the bars for Jeff Gordon's successful open-wheel cars, Schroeder began manufacturing sway bars for the Busch and Cup cars that Jeff drove. Now almost all successful NASCAR teams use Schroeder bars. In fact, Schroeder has supplied all the NASCAR champions for the last decade.

After over a half-century manufacturing racing products, it is easy to see the impact Gordon had on sprint car racing. From his contributions to safety with the quick-release steering hub and the reliability of the Schroeder steering gear and Schroeder bars and arms, Gordon's contribution to sprint car racing was significant.

Around 1985, Gordon retired from the business. Gordon passed away on August 31, 1995. His wife Carmen passed away in 2000. For many years the Schroeders celebrated the history of open-wheel racing in Los Angeles, hosting the "Gilmore Roars Again" party held annually at their ranch in the Hollywood Hills. The Schroeders had two sons, Gary and Alan. Today, the Schroeder Racing Products company is managed by Gary. Alan lives in Denver and is the technology manager of the Pepsi Center, home to the Avalanche and Nuggets sports teams.



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