



Glenn Fitzcharles

by Bryan Householder

Pottstown, Pennsylvania's Glenn Fitzcharles had a remarkable sprint car racing career, but that's only part of his story. Quite simply, Fitzcharles had a remarkable race-driving career. The only type car he raced and didn't win with was a three-quarter (TQ) midget, and that might be because his one shot with those cars came with a balky engine that just wouldn't run.

The United Racing Club (now Company) has been touring the East Coast for more than 60 years, bringing

sprint cars to many tracks that wouldn't see them otherwise. In those years, no one has won more URC features than Glenn Fitzcharles. His record stands at 81 wins, five more than closest challenger Dave Kelly, and 15 more than fellow National Sprint Car Hall of Fame inductee Kramer Williamson, who is the nearest active driver.

Fitzcharles began his driving career at the end of the 1965 racing season in hobby stock (now limited late model) cars. While his first race was actually at Hatfield, Pennsylvania, his early racing was done mostly at Grandview Speedway in Bechtelsville. His first race at Hatfield was the last race of the season there and he won his heat and came from last to finish third in the feature. The next day was the final race of the season at Grandview. That day Fitzcharles won the heat and the feature.

After moving to Grandview's sportsman modified cars, race wins still came on a regular basis. By 1970 he moved to the full-modified racers at the famed Reading Fairgrounds. Again the wins came, and he often ventured to New Jersey where he was a regular winner and point champion at places like Flemington and East Windsor.

Then came the fateful night late in the 1976 season at Flemington. At the time URC actually used larger engines than those on the central Pennsylvania sprint car circuit. In fact, those cars were limited to 312-cubic-inches at several tracks. Car owner Ted Brewer's number 35 had one of the 312 c.i. engines, while his regular driver Jay Myers had his own car with a larger engine.

For the Flemington show, a deal was worked out that saw Myers run Fitzcharles' backup modified, while Fitzcharles got to run Brewer's sprint car, since Myers was driving his own car with the bigger engine.

Flemington was one wicked race track, measuring nearly 5/8-mile, almost flat, and square with four distinct turns. It wasn't for the faint of heart. Things didn't work out quite as planned that night. Fitzcharles was involved in a heat race tangle that rendered his regular modified unusable and he bumped Myers from the backup car. But, he kept the ride in Brewer's sprint car.

At the time URC forced newcomers to start in the rear of the feature field. So even though they qualified in their heat races, Fitzcharles and Myers were forced to start in the last row of the feature.

Before the race, Myers told Fitzcharles that the number 35 seemed to feel better the harder it was driven. He said, "Just follow me up through the field, and drive it as hard as you can."

So that's what Fitzcharles did. He followed Myers up through the field, except when they got to about third and fourth, Fitzcharles realized that Myers was actually holding him up. So he passed Myers and the two cars in front of him, and went on to win the race. Afterwards Myers joked, "I'll never let you drive my car again."

Fitzcharles was still a modified driver who dabbled in sprint cars for a number of years after that, but the sprinters were beckoning. It wasn't until 1985, that he decided to go sprint car racing on a regular basis.

Doris and Roland Squibb bought a former (Bob) Weikert's Livestock-owned, Ben Cook-built car and together they and Fitzcharles tackled the URC circuit. They ran that car for a season, and then got a new Cook car for 1986. As the '86 season was winding down the Squibb's let Fitzcharles know they would be getting out of the car owner ranks. They were moving to Florida to care for their aging parents.

The team was sold a week before the final race of the season, and Fitzcharles was left rideless. Longtime URC car owner Donald Kerr called to offer his assistance. Wayne Rice was Kerr's regular driver, but they had an older car sitting in the garage. It just needed to be "gone over" and needed an engine. Fitzcharles had an engine from one of his sponsors, and his team brought the car to his shop. They finished it up sitting in the pits at Flemington the night of the race.

Still, it worked pretty good and Fitz qualified for the feature. He worked to the front from his mid-pack starting position, only to be involved in a tangle when the leaders caught lapped traffic. Both front tires were flat, and some radius rods were bent. They had to borrow tires from Rice's trailer, since they had no spares. Fitzcharles rejoined the back of the pack just before the race restarted. There were 17 laps remaining, and Fitzcharles began working his way to the front. He got there and scored the feature win. It was car owner Kerr's first win in 31 years of trying.

Needless to say, Kerr called the next week offering Fitzcharles a ride for the next season. Fitzcharles said 'yes', but only if they got a new car. They did, and the team stayed together until Kerr's death in the mid-1990's.

It was with Kerr that Fitzcharles rewrote the URC record books. They won races at nearly every stop on the tour, including Canada, and places down south like the 311 Speedway in the Carolina's.

After winning four consecutive URC point titles from 1987-90, Fitzcharles decided it was time to try the waters in central Pennsylvania. "I wanted to try that challenge before I got too old. I didn't want to get to the end of my career and say I wish I had tried that before I was done. The World of Outlaws (WoO) say Pennsylvania is the hardest swing they make. I know it. Out there you have to have the car just right, there are so many good drivers."

Fitzcharles did well in Central Pennsylvania as well, winning the season opener one year at Lincoln, and picking up wins at Williams Grove and Selinsgrove as well. He stayed there until Kerr's passing left him searching for a ride.

He found that ride with Henry Fenimore and returned to URC in 1995. He won the 1996 URC point title with that team and continued to add to his record-breaking URC win total. In 1997, Fitzcharles moved to the Vince Gangemi team.

During the 1999 racing season Fitzcharles made a decision. He was going to call it a career, and he was going to do it on his own terms. He drove his final race at the same place that started his career so many years earlier, the Grandview Speedway.

Fitzcharles says he's not the type of guy who can now go to the races to watch. When he's at the track he feels like he has to get back in a car. He does, however, occasionally go to watch his grandson and granddaughter race motorcycles. Both have very promising flat-track cycle careers blooming.

"What I enjoyed so much about URC was traveling to all the different tracks, meeting all the different people. Racing people are great. Last summer I went to a race at New Egypt because they wanted some older drivers there. While I was there I saw a woman I remembered from Flemington because her grandmother had always cheered for me. I asked about the grandmother, and she told me, 'she's down there in the stands'. She came out to the races that night because she heard I was going to be there. The grandmother was 92 years old. Racing people are like that."