

NATIONAL SPRINT CAR HALL of FAME & MUSEUM

DON PEABODY

by Paula Magee

Don Peabody was born in La Habra, CA, on April 6, 1924, to Harold and Marjorie Peabody. It was there that he, along with his brother and sister, spent their childhood in the house that their parents built.

Don served in the United States Air Force in World War II. Upon his arrival home he began driving trucks for a living. In 1960 he and his wife Norma started their own trucking company, California Ammonia Transport. It was there that he honed and perfected his strong business sense.

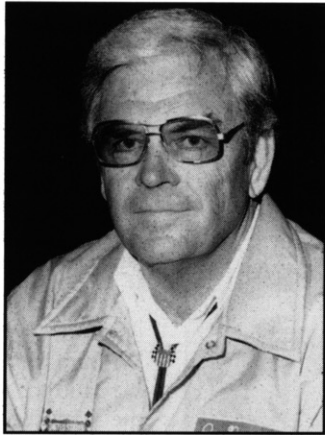
Racing was something that always interested Don. In the early years of the California Racing Association (CRA), he drove roadsters. In 1963 he purchased his first sprint car, making a wise decision to own and not drive the car, evidenced by a championship win in 1970 with Billy Wilkerson behind the wheel.

In 1972 Don Peabody divested himself of any owner's interest and became the highly successful president and racing director of CRA. He stayed in these two key posts through 1976. Don met the test of leadership; CRA flourished as never before. Under his reign, sprint car racing at J.C. Agajanian's Ascot Park in Gardena, CA, became "the" Saturday night motorsports attraction on the Pacific Coast.

In 1978 Don and Norma decided to sell their trucking company and "go racing" full time. It was then that Don was hired as the sprint car coordinator for the Indianapolis-based United States Auto Club (USAC). His bright and innovative business intuitiveness began to initiate a steady change in USAC sprint car racing. In an effort to make the sprint division as nationwide as possible, he began expanding its schedule to tracks they had not raced on in years and some they had never raced on at all. Don Peabody was his own man. There was no question of whom was running the USAC sprint car division.

On April 23, 1978, the future of American open-wheel racing was changed forever. Don, along with seven other USAC officials (Ray Marquette, Stan Worley, Shim Malone, Judy Phillips, Ross Teegarden, Frank DelRoy, Dr. Bruce White) and the pilot (Don Mullendore), was killed in a charter

plane crash near the Rush County town of Arlington, IN. "Boston" Louie Seymour, a long-time sprint car owner and friend, took Peabody to Trenton from Reading, PA, to board the flight after a sprint car race. Seymour later reported that he had tried three times to talk Don out of taking the flight. He wasn't sure exactly why he was so adamant, but he mentioned to several reporters later that the pilot was wearing green, which has been considered a bad omen amongst racers throughout auto racing history.



Peabody Family Collection

After Don was killed, many articles and tributes were written. While he would have been flattered and moved by all of them, Don would have been most touched and entertained by the one that was written by Jack Lindberg of the "Kansas City Star" newspaper. To quote, "when Don Peabody walked into the newsroom of the Star you knew...right away he was something special. He was taller than most, slender, and his steel gray hair seemed to add strength. He sure liked eyeball-to-eyeball contact, and he had a friendly look about him. And at the late afternoon luncheon it was apparent immediately that when he ordered his first martini a second would follow." That was Don Peabody in a nutshell.

Don Peabody is survived by his wife, Norma, daughter, Paula, and two sons, Richard and Dennis.