



Casey Luna

No one can summarize Casey E. Luna of Belen, New Mexico quite like Casey Luna. "I've been involved in motorsports pretty much all of my life," Luna said.

"I drove locally in modifieds, sprint cars and midget cars. At one point I thought I was good enough to pack up and go to California to race. Once I got there, they quickly set me straight and sent me back home. I've also owned and sponsored race cars and promoted in this business. I still enjoy racing to this day. My wife Beverly and I will never forget all of the fond memories and many friendships we've made through our involvement in racing."

Luna became the owner of the famous number 10 Casey Luna Ford sprint car in 1985. He teamed up with Robby Unser, son of former Indy 500 winner, Bobby Unser. Robby was dating one of Casey's daughters, so when Robby was looking to race a sprint car locally in New Mexico, Luna thought, "Why not?"

"I called one of my friends who built race cars in Phoenix and asked him to build a car for me that would accommodate Robby's long frame. If the kid was going to drive for me, I wanted him to be safe in the car," Luna said. "We did extremely well locally and decided to take our dog-and-pony show on the road with the World of Outlaws (WoO). Traveling that much was really new to us. We really weren't prepared in the beginning and we only had about a third of the equipment we needed for a full-time traveling team."

It should be pointed out, though, that Robby Unser and Todd Kane shared the National Sprint Car Poll "Rookie of the Year" honors for 1985.

Luna said it felt odd for him, the owner of Casey Luna Ford-Mercury, to have to race with a Chevrolet motor. So, he began investigating to see what was available for his team to use from Ford. "My plan was two-fold," he said. "I wanted to supply my race team with a Ford engine, but I also wanted to introduce Ford to this new racing arena. That was my vision. I quickly found that Ford did not have anything in the aluminum small-block engine area that we could use in our race car."

Luna called his friend and fellow racer Jack Roush, who was also an avid Ford backer, to help him out. "Jack suggested I call Ford to see if they could build us a motor. Ford lacked experience in dirt track racing. With nothing out there for us to use, we decided to take it upon ourselves to do the research and development for Ford. Doing the R&D was not easy, and our race team struggled because of it."

Luna said Chevy had a long history in dirt track racing. The other WoO teams could borrow parts and buy them pretty cheap just about anywhere they went to race. Luna's team didn't have that luxury. They had to buy ten of everything. If they didn't have extra parts on hand, they were just out of luck. "We had a lot of problems starting from scratch and working with the Ford deal. Robby was only with us for a short time and

I had to find another driver, which wasn't easy. With all of our struggles, we had been nicknamed "The Penalty Box" and our early reputation wasn't that good because our equipment wasn't all that reliable," Luna said.

In the late Eighties, Luna felt fortunate to draw driver Bobby Davis, Jr., to his team. With the addition of crew chief Kenny Woodruff, the team began to come together. "I've always believed if you can put an exceptional team together, then keep them together for several years, that's half the battle," Luna said. "With the combination of Bobby Davis and Kenny Woodruff we put forth a very good effort."

Luna's team won the 1989 WoO point championship. Yet, Luna called it a hollow victory for the team. "We were basically told we were just lucky to win the Outlaw title that year. The Outlaws had split; part of the group went to form another series (United Sprint Association). Team Luna remained loyal to the WoO series, but the 1989 championship was bittersweet." After helping Luna win the Outlaw title, Bobby Davis, Jr., left the ride to go back home to work with his father. Luna continued with his attempt to help Ford find a place and voice in dirt track racing, and he and Woodruff found a new driver for the car - Dave Blaney. "This team stayed together for four years. We won some of the top sprint car racing events, and the 1995 World of Outlaws championship," Luna said. "This time, we knew we had earned the title outright, and it felt very good. We never did win the Knoxville Nationals. We dominated some of those races, but several second place finishes are all we ended up with. That was a disappointment to me... that we never won a Nationals."

The Lunas left the sprint car racing ranks in 1995. They felt they had finished what they had set out to accomplish, and it was time to move on. Luna said he is satisfied with the efforts they put forth under the Ford banner, as they became true contenders, with the rest of the pack using Chevy engines. He also gives a lot of credit to his California engine builder, Ron Shaver.

"I have to thank Beverly for allowing me to follow my dreams in racing. She has always been an instrumental part of our racing team. We have always worked together and supported each other, and I have the highest regard for her in that fact," he said.

Beverly Luna made her own mark on sprint car racing outside of the family-owned team. She brought

her idea to build a foundation for injured drivers to fruition. With a lot of hard work, fundraisers and gracious donations, she began the Sprint Car Drivers Benevolent Fund. Race fans and drivers won't soon forget all the fun and laughter Beverly brought to the field with the annual driver softball games. Many drivers and their families were helped by this benevolent fund spearheaded by Beverly Luna. Casey

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Luna not only kept an eye on his race team and his Ford-Mercury car dealership, he also served a four-year term as Lieutenant Governor for his beloved state of New Mexico. He also made a run for Governor, but lost. "I found out during the election for Governor that I am not a good loser," he said. "I have always been proud of being from New Mexico, and our race trailer had a picture of the state flag with an invitation to visit New Mexico on the side of it. I really would have like to have served as Governor of New Mexico. I don't know what I would have given up to do it, had I won the election, but I was willing to find out."

Not to be outdone, Beverly became the first woman in their part of the country to own her own automobile dealership. "In the Nineties, Beverly bought a Chevrolet dealership about one mile down the road from my Ford dealership. I'm sure you can imagine the fun we had with that," Luna stated. "Beverly and I have been very fortunate to have had the opportunity to have lived our lives to the fullest. I thank everyone involved for this proud moment and I share it with my wife and family."

Beverly Luna was named the recipient of the North American Sprint Car Poll "Outstanding Contribution to the Sport Award" in 1988 with Elayne Hoff for their efforts with the non-profit benevolent fund, while Casey Luna received the same award the following year for his efforts with the non-profit National Sprint Car Hall of Fame & Museum Foundation.

By Kathy Bell
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