



Hank Arnold

Henry Alan "Hank" Arnold was born in Sharon, Wisconsin, on March 28, 1931, to parents Virginia "Jennie" and Harold Alicen Hap Arnold.

Hank built his first race car in 1950 in Tucson, Arizona, but he was too young to drive so he turned it over to his friend Roger McCluskey. This car was a simple jalopy, but Arnold put it to good use in learning how race cars worked. In 1956, Arnold built his second car which he named "Party Doll." This was the first in a long line of cars to which Arnold gave a name and is generally considered to be the first true supermodified to come out of the Southwest.

By this time, Hank was also driving, and he and Party Doll collaborated for about 30 feature wins. His next car was "Payola" because, Arnold noted, "It was like having to play to play." Payola was also very successful winning not only races, but also tracktitles in the Tucson area. Another of Arnold's creations was the "Stinker" and he won many races in this car too.

In 1962, Arnold built what was to be his masterpiece. It would be the car that would define his career in many ways and was called "The Twister." A true supermodified, "The Twister" set the tone for supers around the country for years to come. Arnold did a masterful job of designing the body; its lines were a perfect interpretation for the era. When it appeared in the July, 1963, issue of *Hot Rod Magazine*, "The Twister" became a national celebrity. Many builders, including Luther Brewer, Johnny Capels, LaVern Nance, Dale Parson, Gary Stanton, Bob Trostle, Jack Walker and Warren "Jelly" Wilhelm, designed cars that copied "The Twister"'s body work.

As if the visual aspect of "The Twister" wasn't unique enough, there were the mechanical features which set the car apart. In between the frame rails was a fairly normal 301-cubic-inch Chevy, however, sitting on top of the engine, in place of a normal carburetor or fuel injection, was a GMC 4-71 supercharger. Hank's main problem with "The Twister" was getting it unhooked enough to keep at least one front wheel on the track. When he did, Arnold was nearly unbeatable.

Hank decided to take it to Knoxville for the 1963 Nationals, and any one who was there that weekend remembers the sights and sounds of "The Twister". Arnold made the A-main on Saturday and came away with a 23rd place finish, but what everyone remembers was Hank pulling wheelies down the straight-aways the entire race.

Arnold won a total of six track titles at Tucson, along with a pair of Arizona State championships and was the kingpin at the Manzanita Speedway in 1960 and '62. He didn't win all the time and was also involved in a couple of serious crackups. In 1960, at the Arizona State Fairgrounds one-mile track, he tangled with Don Davis during a 100-mile California Racing Association (CRA) event and wound up with a broken neck. At Manzy in 1963, he broke his back in a supermodified race. Because of these crashes, Arnold had to wear a back brace much of the time, but he continued his racing career in spite of the pain.

One well known aspect of Hank Arnold's career was his friendship with Roger McCluskey. At the Arizona State Fairgrounds for a CRA race in 1960, McCluskey was late arriving to the track; Arnold had qualified his own ride second quick, then jumped in McCluskey's car and recorded the third fastest time. McCluskey finally showed up, and his excuse for being tardy was a hilarious one. It seems Roger was the superstitious type and while driving from Tucson to Phoenix, a black cat ran in front of his car. Well, McCluskey believed if a black cat crossed your path you had to start the day over, so he turned around, drove home, took off his clothes, got into bed and started the day again, thus believing he would break the spell of the ebony feline. Apparently it didn't work, as Arnold crashed out of the

race and McCluskey suffered a flat tire while leading in his Ecce Special.

Hank Arnold was a great ambassador for racing and one of the most beloved drivers in the history of Arizona motorsports. Arnold went to great lengths to help out his fellow racers, whether it was going to Albuquerque, New Mexico, to boost the program or leaping into a fire to pull a fellow driver out of harm's way or spending time with all his fans, especially kids, after the races.

At Manzanita on June 17, 1967, Hank Arnold was fatally injured in an accident during a heat race when he tangled with another car and flipped onto the guard rail. It ended the career of perhaps the

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most popular driver in Arizona history. Arnold had just gone into business with his friend Roger McCluskey the Monday before the accident.

The first Hank Arnold Memorial race was run at Manzy one week after his demise, and it was won by another of Hank's good friends, Bob Huebner. The Hank Arnold Memorial has continued on a yearly basis at Manzy through the 2008 season and is now run at Tucson's USA Raceway. Several years ago, "The Twister", was restored by Don Brown and now serves as the pace car for the Hank Arnold Memorial - a fitting tribute indeed.

By Bob Mays

Photo Credit: Don Brown Collection