

W.W. Bowen

W.W. Bowen first appears in the sport assisting International Motor Contest Association (IMCA) promoters at some of the smaller midwestern state fair races in the early 1920s.

He soon took on partner Don C. Onley of Los Angeles, California, and the new company of Bowen & Onley set up its headquarters in a boarding house in San Antonio, Texas. Onley had gotten his start in the business working at Legion Ascot Speedway in California and then as an official with IMCA.

By 1926, the pair were promoting non-sanctioned "outlaw" races mostly at county fairgrounds in Iowa, Missouri, Kansas, Oklahoma, and Texas. However, their schedule also included some larger venues such as the Tulsa, Oklahoma, fairgrounds and the two-mile Pleasanton Road Speedway at San Antonio, Texas. Their popularity among contestants and fair boards alike appears to stem from assurances that Bowen & Onley promoted races would not be hippodromes and that any local driver would be allowed to compete on an equal footing if they could come up with a car. The group ran a lot of dates, sometimes several times per week, and a number of mostly lesser-known drivers followed the Bowen & Onley circuit. John Gerber was one of the regulars on that

circuit in 1926 and, although there was no formal championship, Gerber won more features at Bowen & Onley races than any other driver that year. Gerber is quoted as saying of the experience, "The purses were not great but neither was the competition. We made enough for road money and didn't disappoint the paying customers."

The traveling group developed camaraderie and appear to have enjoyed the time they spent racing for Bowen & Onley.

By 1927, the operation had grown so large that the company split into two sections, both still headquartered in San Antonio. Bowen & Onley promoted races from the Mississippi River to the Rocky Mountains and from Oklahoma to the Canadian border. A new section of the company promoted races in Texas under the name the Texas Speedway Alliance, which listed its officers as W. W. Bowen, President; J. F. Hatton, Vice-President; and Don C. Onley, Secretary-Treasurer.

The two sections continued to promote races in their respective areas through 1928, with Bowen & Onley adding dates at the Kansas State

Fair in Hutchinson.

In 1929, Bowen & Onley became The Bowen Company of Auto Races, but Onley stayed on as an employee.

In 1930, in addition to his regular schedule, W. W. Bowen, with Don C. Onley's assistance, promoted an American Automobile Association (AAA) sanctioned race at Bo Stearns' Track at Wichita, Kansas under another new company name Bowen Auto Races.

1931 found W.W. Bowen still heading the company but now it was all one division known as the Bowen Auto Racing Association.

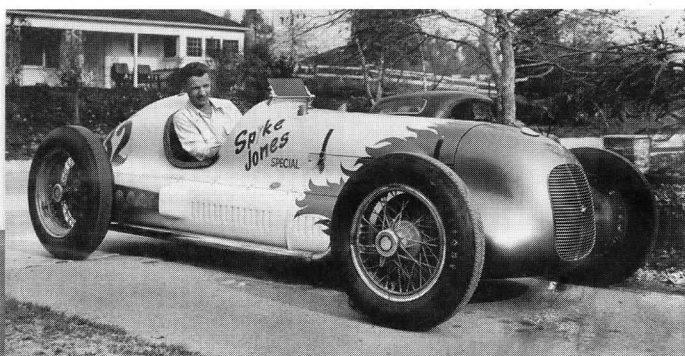
The Great Depression took its toll on Bowen's promotional company. It did not survive and he moved to Dallas, Texas. Don C. Onley continued to promote an occasional auto race on his own as well as a few boxing matches from Indiana to California until 1939, when he, too, stepped away from the sport and settled in Los Angeles.

By Robert Lawrence

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