

NATIONAL SPRINT CAR HALL of FAME & MUSEUM

BRYAN SAULPAUGH

by Jeff Adams

Bryan William Saulpaugh was born on a farm in Taylor Ridge, Illinois, in 1906 to Fred U. and Giralda N. Saulpaugh. As a young boy he would experience speed by racing his bicycle around the dirt roads and hills near home. As he entered high school he would have a 25-mile round trip by bicycle to school and back each day, this even after practicing football in the fall.

In the mid-1920s, after his schooling, Bryan dabbled in motorcycle racing before being encouraged in 1927 by "big car" owner Guy "Barney" Regan of Rock Island, Illinois, to try big-time auto racing. Barney supplied a mount for many of Bryan's early exhibitions in the Tri-Cities area. It has been said that Bryan took out a few fence posts in those early drives, but that he showed a fearless courage that would gain him some respect by fellow Tri-City drivers, most notable being Maynard "Hungry" Clark of nearby Milan.

By 1929 Bryan was in the "Skinny" Clemons CM-4 car, which was one of the more prominent cars in the Midwest. He took his first big win on September 15 at Sterling, Illinois, defeating the great "Dutch" Baumann in the feature on the fast three-quarter-mile track. He also gained the nickname "Soko" for the way he used his front bumper to let slower cars know that he wanted to pass.

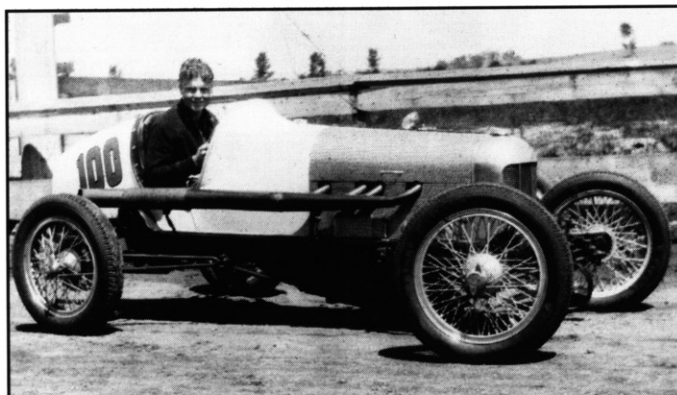
In 1930 Bryan teamed up with Bill Howe from St. Louis and his potent Hiss-powered number 100 machine. The combination was a hit as the two won races all up and down Illinois and the surrounding states with the Tri-State Association, the I & I circuit, and the International Motor Contest Association (IMCA).

Bryan's career really took off when he formed a bond with the great Leo "Foxy" Krasek in 1931. Driving the famous number K-4 sprinter, Bryan became a contender wherever he raced. He wrapped up state championships in Iowa, Nebraska and Indiana. The duo even invaded the East Coast for the first time in October and won a 50-lapper at the Rockingham Speedway in Salem, New Hampshire.

Before 1931 was over, Bryan was making his first appearance on the West Coast being billed as the "Midwest Cyclone." He won a 100-lapper at Legion Ascot on December 20 driving the Danny DePaolo Miller number 22 car, finishing ahead of "Wild" Bill Cummings, Elbert "Babe" Stapp and Wilber Shaw, respectively.

Just two weeks later on New Year's Day, Bryan crashed into the judge's stand during a race at Oakland, California. His injuries, which included broken wrists, collar bone and a possible fractured skull, hospitalized him until February and forced him out of competition for a total of three months.

When he recovered, he went back to the Midwest and he proceeded to pick up where he left off when he and Krasek continued their winning ways. Together they took on the Easterners again with big wins at Reading, Penna., Woodbridge, N.J., plus others on the Ralph "Pappy" Hankinson Circuit. Bryan Saulpaugh was recognized as the 1932 Eastern American Automobile Association (AAA) point champion, edging out the great Billy Winn.



Larry Sullivan Photo

Bryan continued his driving duties out west again and ran a service station for the Gilmore Oil Company in Hayward, Calif., with his boyhood friend Leo Doeckle. However, on April 22, 1933, while practicing the DePaolo car for a 150-mile event at Oakland the following day, Bryan lost control of the car in the south turn while trying to keep the car from shooting into the infield and doing even more damage. The car flipped three times with the final time landing on Bryan. He was pronounced dead at the scene. At age 27, Bryan left behind his parents, two sisters and his fiancée, Miss Jane Casey.

In the short period of time he spent racing, he gained many fans with his racing abilities, great personality and sense of humor. Sympathy letters poured in as they mourned the loss of their hero. Bryan's fellow racers termed him a "dashing, pleasant youngster" who had a sportsmanship code, which made him popular wherever he appeared both on and off the track. He was very devoted to his family and friends and, years later, Bryan was mentioned by Leo Krasek as being Leo's all-time favorite driver.

Other highlights of Bryan's career include competing in the Indianapolis 500, as in 1931 he drove relief for Chet Miller and took an eighteenth place car to tenth place before giving it back to Chet. Then, in the 1932 "500," he put Harry Miller's car on the outside pole but broke an oil line on lap 53 and retired. He was a favorite going into the 1933 Indy 500 and was considered a contender for the world speed record that was held by Sir Malcolm Campbell of Britain. "Soko," "Cyclone," even "Southpaw" were common nicknames that he couldn't shake during his short career. However, one thing is for sure, there was only one Bryan Saulpaugh.