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national sprint car hall of fame



terry McCarl



PHOTO CREDIT: PAUL ARCH

by Bill Wright

Terry McCarl of Altoona, Iowa, is a second-generation driver who has made the most of his passion for Sprint Car racing. His formative years were spent following father Lenard at the racetrack or in the shop building chassis. Unlike a lot of sons who followed their fathers in racing, however, Terry had to scramble and make things happen on his own.

"My dad broke both his legs twice," said McCarl. "He broke his back and a lot of other stuff. Unfortunately, I've emulated a lot of that. Because of that, he would not help my brothers and I race. He didn't want us to get hurt. I didn't race anything until I was 18, and that was after I saved my own money and bought a go-kart."

Perhaps the only Sprint Car driver who raced on roller skates nationally as a teenager, he didn't receive his first Sprint Car ride until Daryl Arends of Algona, Iowa, gave him a shot at the age of 20. He was the Rookie of the Year at the Knoxville Raceway in 1985, and in his second season, he won three times at the "Sprint Car Capital of the World."

"Daryl and my dad were good friends," says McCarl. "Daryl's son Chris had cancer and passed away. Most people thought Daryl was quitting. Chris was the chassis man while Daryl built the engines. It was a popular car, and Daryl hired a lot of drivers, but none of them were kids who had never raced like me. It was funny looking back. My wife Lori was 17 and she was with me. We were in my basement when I called Daryl. I don't think anyone had called him because they thought he was quitting. He was crazy enough to give me a shot."

Terry talked about getting in a Sprint Car for the first time. "I had just raced go-karts for a year. Nowadays, you have kids that are used to a suspension. I had no experience with that. I got in a Sprint Car for the first time on practice night at Knoxville. It was my dad's championship car from a couple of years prior, and he let my brother (Kenny) and I drive it that night. I felt comfortable right away. The

suspension was soft and that felt funny. What blew me away the most was not seeing my front wheels. Those were the biggest things for me."

He started racing locally and then traveled to California in the early 1990s, where he raced weekly for Country Builders Construction before running for a year with the World of Outlaws. Often mistakenly thought of as a local racer, Terry joins the rarified air of Steve Kinser, Doug Wolfgang, Sammy Swindell and Donny Schatz as World of Outlaws winners at Knoxville Raceway in Iowa, Eldora Speedway in Ohio and Williams Grove Speedway in Pennsylvania. He has also topped World of Outlaws events from California to Florida to Vegas to North Dakota and points in between.

"We've won World of Outlaws events in ten different states," said McCarl. "I don't know that people always realize that, because I'm thought of as a local guy. Stats can be manipulated any way you want though. But I think the thing that makes me most proud is winning over 200 features in my own car. I can't think of too many drivers who have done that. There were times where I had to win to make a house payment. No one was twisting my arm to do that. I chose to. But I'm proud of the way we've done it."

Entering 2017, McCarl has accumulated 300 Sprint Car wins at 65 different tracks in 21 states and Australia. Those states include California, Florida, Illinois, Indiana, Iowa, Kansas, Michigan, Minnesota, Missouri, Nebraska, Nevada, New York, North Carolina, North Dakota, Ohio, Oklahoma, Pennsylvania, South Dakota, Texas, Washington and Wisconsin.

Terry has also won with 18 different sanctioning bodies: World of Outlaws, All Stars, National Sprint League, World Series Sprintcars in Australia, NARC (King of the West), IRA, NCRA, ASCS (not counting other regional series wins), Wisconsin, NMRA, ESTS, Sprint Invaders,

NOSA, Sprint Bandits, NST, JSTS, USCS and MOWA. He competed as a regular with the World of Outlaws and All Stars at times over the years.

Terry was good close to home too, of course. He has seven Knoxville Raceway track championships, second only to Danny Lasoski. He is tied with Steve Kinser for third on the all-time win list at Knoxville with 57. He is also a four-time winner of the Knoxville 360 Nationals. He has a record eight track championships at Huset's Speedway in Brandon, South Dakota. He is the all-time leader in career 410 feature wins there with 98.

It took some time to break through and win a championship at Knoxville. "It meant so much for us to win that first title in 1999 (with Guy Forbrook)," said Terry. "I had been going there watching my dad since the wooden grandstands were there. My dad finished second in points one year but never won it) so that was big for my family. I had run second four times in a row. There was a year I broke my hand and that cost us a title to (Johnny) Herrera. The first feeling I got when I won the first one was that I had to do it again. We were fortunate enough to reel off six more."

Maybe the biggest building block in McCarl's abilities as a driver was his weekly trips on Sundays to Huset's Speedway. "What Huset's taught me was really how to maneuver in traffic," he says. "I started 12th on many of those nights. When I started winning regularly, they would start me 16th. When I complained to (track owner) Steve Rubin about that, they started me 18th. Huset's is a fun place. Usually, you have to be able to run the top like an animal, and the bottom with great finesse, like Bobby Allen. It's tough, and unlike a lot of tracks, it will really teach you a lot of things in one night. It's a lot different style than Knoxville."



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Terry McCarl

continued from page 29.

Among the many awards won at Knoxville over the years that Terry treasures are the four times he was voted the "Junior Fan Club Driver of the Year" by young Knoxville fans. The fans are very important to Terry, as he has always been one himself.

From hiding in the rafters in the barns at the Knoxville Nationals as a youngster watching card games to one day promoting himself, Terry has had an unequaled passion for the sport, and has been consumed by it his entire life. 2015 marked the 20th Annual Front Row Challenge promoted by Terry and his wife Lori at the Southern Iowa Speedway in Oskaloosa. For the first time, the event paid \$20,000 to the winner. That winner's share has remained, and will be in effect in 2017.

Promotions were always in his blood. "Since I was a little boy, I've wanted to promote races," he said. "I've always wanted to make the sport better. A good friend of ours ran all the skating rinks in Des Moines. We did all kinds of cool promotions for teenagers. Lori has that kind of background from her family, too. Her father had booths at the Iowa State Fair and other places. I'm a great idea man; I just didn't always have the money to risk."

Over the years, TMAC Promotions has also held the non-wing Ultimate Challenge, paying as much as \$30,000 to the winner. Terry's promotions are a must-see during Southern Iowa Sprint Week in the month of August. His first race promotions came with the "King of the Hill" series in the Midwest in the early 1990s with partner Bill McCroskey. Craig Dollansky was the champion. When McCroskey's car dealership got bigger and Terry left to drive the Holbrook 8H with the All Stars, the successful series was discontinued.

"We introduced a lot of things over the years like playing music," says Terry. "Now, you hear Knoxville and other tracks playing music after not doing that in the past. As a DJ at the skating rink, I knew how music played on emotions. Good announcers who get excited get the crowd excited. We came up with the Front Row Challenge idea, the card (heat) girls, the foot races, the two-lap match races, the championship belt (now also used at the Williams Grove Open), the beads and so much other stuff. Now you see them copied in a lot of venues."

Though his promotional history has built over the years, he will be going in for his driving abilities. "Being in the Hall of Fame is huge for me," said Terry. "I've always been such a big historian. When I was a boy, I looked at the records and kept track of everything. To be in the Hall of Fame now is very humbling. It's the ultimate honor for me."

Next Time You're At The Track...

Arrive Early! You'll get your favorite seats and see the practice periods, which are often an indicator of the night's outcome.

Bring A Stopwatch! You can time laps and check distance intervals all evening.

Bring A Camera! Before, during and after the races, your night is best remembered on film.

Buy Your Track's OFFICIAL RACING PROGRAM by ROYAL PUBLISHING! It's crammed with race photos, profiles and features.

Visit The Souvenir Stand And Photo Booth! There are scores of interesting items and photos of all top competitors for sale.

Watch The Starter All Night! His flag signals control the conduct of all races.

Pay Attention To Your Track Announcer! He reports official lineups, restart orders, finishes, and informs you of upcoming events.

Watch The Back Of The Pack In Early Laps! Some of the night's most daring driving is invariably seen there and then...

Listen To Engine Sounds! You'll often be able to predict trouble for a competitor through subtle motor noises.

Watch The Leaders On Restarts! Trouble often occurs or dramatic changes in position take place on restarts when front runners fail to get away cleanly.

Keep A Lap Scoring Chart! You'll have a detailed record of the night's action.

Visit The Pit Area After The Races! The drivers are eager to meet their fans and to sign autographs.