



national sprint car hall of fame



john Singer



PHOTO CREDIT: GENE MARDERNESS

by Bob Mays

John Singer was born on October 4, 1939, in Sedalia, Missouri. Eventually, the family settled on a 245-acre farm outside of Latham, Missouri, where Singer first learned that hard work equaled results. Growing up on the farm taught John many valuable lessons. He became proficient at working on farm equipment; he just loved fixing stuff, which led him to automobiles. Cars were, in fact, his only form of recreation. He left home at age 16 and eventually found himself in the Navy. Since everything in the Navy runs off some kind of engine, John couldn't help but learn.

After three years in the Navy, Singer came home to Tipton, Missouri, and built his first race car. It was a Supermodified that he ran at Capitol Speedway in Jefferson City, Missouri. He found out quickly that a bad car was one thing, but a bad driver was something else. After putting up with one particular guy for several races, and constantly fixing crash damage, he was able to obtain Roy Hibbard's services for one race. A top-five resulted and Hibbard brought the car home without a scratch. From then on, Singer might put up with a bad car, but he would never put up with a bad driver.

Not long after, John hooked up with Torn Corbin for a shot at USAC in a car Corbin had just bought from Don Brown but they soon found out they didn't have the finances to compete in that league.

Corbin eventually sold the car to Keith Barker with Singer going along as part of the deal. Jay Woodside and Eddie Leavitt were employed as drivers during the 1969 and 1970 seasons and many victories resulted. On October 25, 1970, the Barker team arrived at the Sacramento Mile for the 100-mile Supermodified race when Singer quit the team and moved over to crew on the Cahill Brothers car driven by Jan Opperman. This was the

infamous race where three drivers - Ernie Pursell, Walt Reiff and Jimmy Gordon - were killed.

Singer decided to throw in with Opperman for the 1971 season and spent the winter building a new car in Roger Beck's shop. That year was a magical one with 26 feature wins, including the Knoxville Nationals and turned out to be Opperman's only Knoxville Nationals victory.

When the Cahills decided against racing at the end of the year, Singer ended up in California building cars for Roger Beck. It wasn't long before John fielded a call from Don Maxwell in Lincoln, Nebraska, with a job offer. Maxwell was just getting his car building business started and needed help. So, Singer packed his bags and headed halfway across the country.

One of the cars built at Maxwell's during that time went to Leroy Kallweit and Gary Swenson. That car, with sponsorship from Speedway Motors, was the one used to nearly sweep the Winternationals Sprints at Tampa, Florida in 1974. Opp won the first three races with a second and a crash in the five-race series.

Next, Singer teamed up with Opperman and Fred Aden, but John got frustrated with Opp trying to juggle USAC Sprints, Indy Cars and outlaw racing. Jan eventually crashed the car at the end of 1974 and Aden called Singer to fix it. Singer hired Roger Rager to drive the car for the 1975 Western World at Manzanita and nearly won it. While leading, dirty fuel caused the injection to get plugged up and Rager went from leading to eighth, then back to fourth when it cleared out again.

Aden hired Eddie Leavitt to drive his car in 1976, but first, Singer had some work to do for

Jan Opperman. Opperman had the Speedway Motors car at Terre Haute, Indiana, for the Tony Hulman Classic, but was having motor problems. Opp called on Singer to straighten things out and the result was a victory in the Hulman.

Back with Aden, Singer engineered his second Knoxville Nationals victory with driver Eddie Leavitt. Then came stints with Shane Carson and Ron Shuman before Singer took a job working for Indy Car owner Bobby Hillin. With Bubby Jones in the seat, they qualified 33rd and finished 21st, not bad for a rookie dirt tracker and his dirt track mechanic.

Singer was lured back to Indy by Roger Rager in 1979. In 1980, they stuck an old Wildcat chassis with a school bus motor into the greatest spectacle in racing, starting tenth and finishing 21st.

After his Indy experience, Singer longed to get back to what he really loved - working on dirt track cars. He went back to Tipton, Missouri, and set up shop building engines. In 1989, Doug Wolfgang needed engines for a new team he was starting and he called on John Singer. The result was three-dozen wins and another Knoxville Nationals title.

Singer continues to build engines in his Tipton shop for a select number of Sprint Car teams including five-time ASCS Warrior champion Jonathon Cornell. It seems that as long as John Singer is around, Sprint Car racing will always have plenty of horsepower.