

national sprint car hall of fame



KNOXVILLE, IOWA



bob Mays

by Donna L. Wilson

Born January 16, 1953, Bob May's interest in racing began at the age of three years old, when his father took him to his first race at Capitol Beach Speedway in Lincoln, Nebraska. He was totally awed then and he remains so today. In 1974, he was asked to join the pit crew of Dick Maul, a micro-midget racer, and at the end of the 1974 season, Mays and Jim Adams bought the car. Adams and Mays raced the car through the 1975 season, then Adams sold his interest in the car to Bob.

In addition to racing, Mays also learned a great deal about track preparation during 1976-77 seasons. His work schedule allowed him to get to Lakeside Speedway early Friday morning and work all day, along with track owner, Jay Nottingham, doing everything he needed to do to prepare the track for that evening's race. It was quite an eye opener about what it really took to put a race track in shape each week.

Mays started collecting racing photos in the mid-1970s, but good shots seemed few and far between. So, Bob sold his micro-midget after the 1978 season, bought a camera and started traveling around the sprint car circuit taking photos. In 1980, he was named track photographer at Midwest Speedway in Lincoln and joined with another race shooter, Jim Jones, to form Fastrack Enterprises. Their first publication, The Fastrack Pictorial, came out in 1982. By this time, Bob was shooting for weekly race papers, Hawkeye Racing News, Western Racing News and National Speed Sport News and the monthly sprint car magazine, Open Wheel. In 1983, he became a correspondent for Western Racing News, reporting on the goings on at Midwest Speedway and many other tracks. Following the 1984 and 1985 race seasons Mays and Jones again published Fastrack Pictorials, covering the open wheel nation from coast to coast.

Although he was having success taking photos, Mays never stopped collecting. Some of the top lensmen that Bob has bought from include, Mike Arthur, Beetle Bailey, Leroy Byers, Jim Chini, Phil Dullinger, Walt Imlay, Armin Krueger, John Mahoney, Joe Orth, Bob Sheldon, Bob Scott and countless others. Other collectors Bob has traded or bought from include, Doug Haack, Ralph Hibbard, Rich Imlay and Mike Pogue. Mays' photo collection is now in excess of 20,000 images.

Halfway through the 1986 season, Bob bought a mini-sprint and hit the circuit once again. In 1989, Mays was named Most Improved Driver at Cornhusker Raceway Park in Waverly, NE.

That same year, Mays won his one and only point title, the Indoor Championship of the Eastern Nebraska Modified Midget Association. Bob won the final race of the series which was held at Veterans Auditorium in Des Moines, IA, on New Year's Eve.

In 1990, Bob was named Sportsman of the Year at Cornhusker Raceway Park and won Reporter of the Year by the National Modified Midget Association while writing and shooting photos for the Pit Stop Magazine.

Mays was ready for a new challenge by 1992, sprint cars. A couple of races stand out during the years Mays raced the big cars. The first was in 1994 when he finally was able to circle the Nebraska State Fairgrounds track, where as a kid he snuck into in order to catch a glimpse of the IMCA big cars. The other occurred in 1995, when Mays was able to race with sprint car legend, Lloyd Beckman, at Webster City, Iowa. The 68-year-old Beckman won the race over Mays, but Bob went wheel-to-wheel with the many-time champion.

Mays has always been curious about racing history, so in 1990, he ventured to the Lincoln City Library where he heard micro-film archives of local papers were kept. He found race results of 11 different tracks in the Lincoln area, going back to 1915, and this was just the start.

When discussing his ever-expanding project to the manager of the micro-film services at the library, Bob was informed that the Nebraska Historical Society had micro-film of virtually all Nebraska newspapers! This started a wintertime project that encompassed the next ten years and uncovered nearly 4,000 races at more than 300 race tracks in Nebraska, Iowa, Kansas and several other states. Upon the dawn of the digital age, Mays has been able to expand his race search to a national level.

Tony Glenn, the promoter of auto racing events at the Nebraska State Fair, asked Mays to take over as media director in 1998. It was a dream job for Bob, who as a kid, snuck into many events during the fair. Now he was getting paid to watch and write about his beloved state fair track. In 2002, a change of administrations ended that great gig.

By this time, he was already thinking about his next project. Bob had talked about a book on the old supermodified days, so in just short of

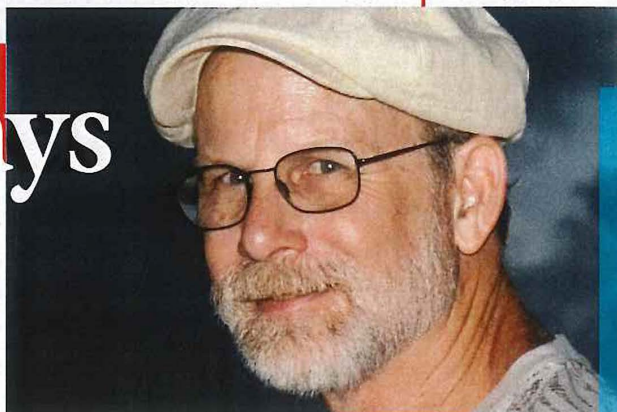


PHOTO CREDIT: MAYS FAMILY COLLECTION

four years, High Plains Thunder, Supermodified Racing in The Midlands rolled off the press on March 7, 2002. The book chronicled the history of Supers in the Iowa, Kansas, Missouri, Nebraska and Oklahoma areas from 1955 to 1983. The book was a huge success, selling out in less than six months and resulting in a total of four printings. For fans across the Midwest, High Plains Thunder is seen as the bible of supermodified racing.

Bob had been shooting photos for FlatOut Illustrated since 1999 so in 2003, Editor, Justin Zoch, asked Mays if he wanted to write a column for the magazine. Bob said he would give it a try. It's now 2018, and he is still writing stories, feature articles, side bars and columns for FlatOut on many racing legends including Hank Arnold, Jon Backlund, Lloyd Beckman, Roy Bryant, Wally Campbell, Thad Doshier, Kenny Gritz, Doug Howells, Lonnie Jensen, Leonard Kerbs, Harold Leep, John Singer, Bob Slater, Bob Trostle, Bill Utz, Bobby Ward, Pappy Weld, John Wilkinson, Jay Woodside, Gordon Woolley and many others.

Don Radbruch had been doing a regular feature in FlatOut, called "Long Ago," but when Radbruch passed way in 2008, Zoch asked Mays to take it over. Bob renamed it "Competition Archives," and it has been going strong since. Included among the drivers and owners featured in Competition Archives, are Gary Bettenhausen, Tony Bettenhausen, Jerry Blundy, Ralph DePalma, Larry Dickson, Tommy Hinnershitz, Bob Hogle, Ted Hom, Parnelli Jones, Rex Mays, Barney Oldfield, Jerry Richert, Bill Schindler, Buddy Taylor, Bill Vukovich, A.J. Watson and many more. Mays joined with another 3 Wide Media title, Dirt Modified on a history page called, "Modified Chronicles," which started running in 2017.

Bob and Ray Valasek together wrote a book on the history of the Valley County fairgrounds track. In 2004, Valley County Thunder, The History of Racing at Ord, Nebraska, was called "the best book of the year," by National Speed Sport News editor emeritus, Chris Economaki. Ord's racing history started in 1926, and continued into the 1960s, featuring some of the most famous stars of the day on the high banked track. Lloyd Axel, Jerry Blundy, Red Campbell, Johnny Gerber, Jud Larson, Lloyd

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Ruby and Chet Wilson are just a few of the legends highlighted in the book.

In June 2005, Big Car Thunder, Volume I was born and Volume II was published in April 2009. These books covered IMCA in the post-World War II era along with many of the smaller circuits which came and went from 1946 to the mid-1980s.

His fifth book was released in 2015, Competition Portraits, The Dirt Championship Cars, featured photographs spanning the history of dirt champ car racing from 1946 to 1987. The unique feature of Competition Portraits is that it is made up entirely of posed shots from some of the masters of the art including, Leroy Byers, Gene Crucean, Walt Imlay, Armin Krueger, John Mahoney, Bob Scott, Bob Sheldon, Ken Simon and many other great lensmen.

Bob's sixth book The High Banks! Belleville's Amazing Track and the Men Who Tried to Tame Her. came out in in 2017. National Sprint Car Hall of Famers, L.A. Ward and Beryl Ward chronicled the track from

1934 through 1997, and as a result, they get credit as co-authors of the book. Beryl in particular, worked tirelessly to keep Belleville's racing history together through photographs, journals and scrapbooks right up until her death in 2006. The book covers Belleville's history from its first race on July 4, 1910, through the 1997 Belleville Midget Nationals which was Beryl's final race as a correspondent for National Speed Sport News.

"Speedy" Bill Smith hired Mays as a research tech at the Speedway Motors Museum of American Speed in 2007. Bob has overseen several major projects at the museum including redesigns of the main room and midget area along with the layout of several dioramas. Mays was able to get Smith together with the restoration team of Mark Randol and John Layne in order to get four significant cars restored. Joe Saldana's "Mechanical Rabbit," the Speedway Motors roadster and sedan, both driven by Lloyd Beckman, and the Central Excavating Special driven by Bill Vukovich and Rodger Ward, were each impeccably restored by Randol and Layne for the museum.

Bob was elected to the board of directors for the Nebraska Auto Racing Hall of Fame in 1998 and has served twice as president of that organization. In 2006, Mays was inducted into the Belleville Highbanks Hall of Fame.

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