

national sprint car hall of fame

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KNOXVILLE, IOWA

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emmett Malloy

by Bud Mayson

Emmett Malloy, born April 11, 1908, was an Iowa farm boy who moved west in the 1930's and settled in Inglewood, California. He made his money as an excavating contractor during the region's post-war population boom, allowing him to not only provide a comfortable living for his wife and nine children, but also to indulge in his love of racing.

Malloy built Carrell Speedway in 1940, with the hopes that it would become the go-to place for racers in Southern California. The half-mile dirt track stood near the corner of 174th Street and Vermont Avenue. Though not far from the site of the more well-remembered Ascot Park, the two racetracks were not built on the exact same spot. Ascot was located south of Carrell, at 182nd Street and Vermont in Harbor Gateway. (Because of its proximity to Gardena, track operators always referred to it as being in Gardena.) Carrell was part of a whole circuit of local automobile raceways scattered around in the Los Angeles area in the first half of the 20th century.

Carrell was built on land owned by Judge Frank R. Carrell, a longtime justice of the peace and community leader in Gardena. Carrell was in the first graduating class of Gardena High School in 1907, and in the years since, owned a large amount of property in the area, including a share of Hollywood Park, a local horse track. (Judge Carrell passed away after a heart attack on Sept. 27, 1947, and hundreds turned out to pay tribute to him at his memorial service.)

Carrell quickly became a hotbed of West Coast racing, hosting all kinds of events, from open-wheel racing to stock cars, sprint cars, motorcycles and foreign cars. It remained a dirt track until October, 1948, when it was paved. It was the site of the first ever CRA (California Roadster Association) event; this is the same club that became the California Racing Association (CRA) after switching to sprint cars as the old track roadsters faded out.

Some of the era's most popular racers competed there, including, Johnnie Parsons, Jack McGrath and Troy Ruttman. In retrospect, perhaps the most famous driver to cut his teeth on racing at Carrell was 1963 Indianapolis 500 winner, Parnelli Jones.

Another famous person associated with Carrell Speedway was film star Mickey Rooney. He played scruffy mechanic-turned race car driver Billy Coy in "The Big Wheel," which was released in 1949. The film was set at Carrell and used a good deal of film from races held there.

NASCAR was in just its third year of existence in 1951, but the fourth race of that season turned out to be historic in hindsight: The stock car race at Carrell, won by Marshall Teague in his Hudson Hornet on April 8, 1951, was the first NASCAR race to be held west of the Mississippi River.

Racing continued to be popular during the early 1950s. Legendary racing promoter J.C. Agajanian, who went on to operate Ascot Park for decades, also managed Carrell Speedway for two separate stints, from 1947-1950, when he had a falling out with track management, and then from Dec. 1953 until the track closed for good. The track's closure was announced in April 1954, when W.L. Bolstad of the California Department of Public Works told track lease holders (and brothers) Bob, Ken and Dee Durr that the state had purchased the right of way going through the speedway site for construction related to the Harbor Freeway.

In 1949, Malloy decided to climb over the fence that separated promoters from participants and bought a sprint car. The car he bought was a good one, built in 1937 by Roy Richter for J.C. Agajanian, it featured a potent 220 Offenhauser engine. Malloy hired a former midget driver, Bob Pankratz, to wrench the car and a 19-year-old kid that had been banging around the jalopy circuits to sit behind the steering wheel. The kid's name was Troy Ruttman.

The Malloy team dominated the AAA Midwestern circuit and Ruttman would have won the point title if not for breaking his leg at a champ car race in Arlington, Texas. As it was, Ruttman won seven midwestern races and finished second in the standings despite missing a third of the season. In addition, Mel Hansen won two races while subbing for the injured Ruttman and Troy won once at Williams Grove on the AAA Eastern Circuit and once at Carrell on the AAA West Circuit.

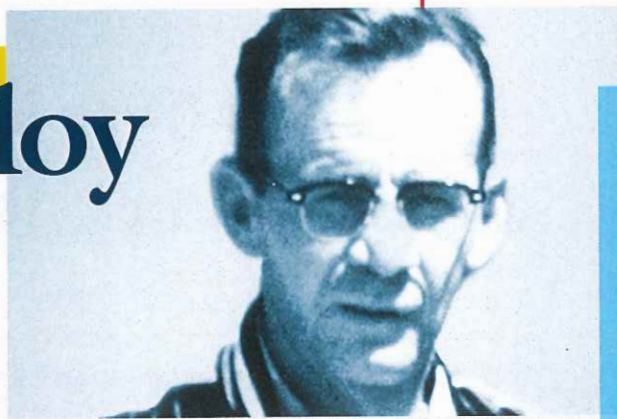


PHOTO CREDIT: MALLOY FAMILY COLLECTION

The year 1950 was more of the same for Emmett Malloy's team. Ruttman won 14 races across the AAA sprint season and was the only driver to win across all three circuits (East once, Midwest ten times and West three times). Throw in a single victory in the Malloy Deuce by Andy Linden at Carrell Speedway and you have a fairly dominating performance.

At the end of the season, Pankratz decided to stretch the wheelbase of the Deuce and run the last two champ car races of the 1950 season. With Ruttman committed to another team, Malloy hired midget sensation Bobby Ball to wheel the car at Phoenix and Bay Meadows. Ball responded by putting Malloy's car on the pole for the Phoenix 100-miler! He then put the car in the second row at Bay Meadows, but top ten finishes proved more elusive than top ten starts.

Those two starts got Malloy to thinking about becoming a bonafied champ car owner, so, after selling the sprint car to Duane Carter, Malloy soon had Pankratz building a car for Indy and the champ car circuit.

Jimmy Reece was hired by Malloy for the AAA senior circuit and started with a 17th at Indy in 1954, and six top-fives over the course of the season. Other drivers included, George Amick, Jimmy Davies, Edgar Elder, Gene Hartley, Eddie Johnson and Roy Prosser.

Emmett Malloy was a track owner and a winning sprint car and champ car owner during dirt racing's Golden Age. It was also racing's most dangerous era and yet the worst injury any driver behind the wheel of one of Malloy's cars suffered was a broken shoulder. A pretty darn good record for a decade spent at the top of the sport in the 1950s. Emmett Malloy passed away in 1971.