



sprint car hall of fame



richard Griffin

PHOTO CREDIT: JOHN MAHONEY

by Dean Mills

Richard Griffin was born in El Paso, Texas, on November 28, 1963, and was raised in Silver City, New Mexico. The son of Lela and Robert “Doc” Griffin, Richard didn’t grow up at race tracks per se but did occasionally go to races in his youth. “My dad raced jalopies and ran some Midgets but always as a low buck racer,” said Griffin. “He had gotten out of it in the early ‘60s, and we didn’t go to the track much.”

The idea of Richard becoming a racer, though, was never a foregone conclusion. It wasn’t until he befriended some guys who raced motorcycles that his racing career began. “I got a motorcycle when I was 13 and met up with some friends who took me along with them to a race track in Deming, about 50 miles from Silver City,” said Griffin. “I raced motorcycles for about two years and had some success and won some races. My mom and dad were not fans of me racing motorcycles. They were afraid I was going to get hurt. When I turned 15, my dad helped me get my first race car.”

Doc helped him into a street stock and started at Las Cruces and El Paso. Showing a great deal of natural ability, Griffin won races as a rookie and won the championship. He moved to Modified Stocks and completely dominated, winning 21 features. “I had some friends racing Sprint Cars, and they let me hot lap one. Before too long, my parents told me they’d buy me a Sprint Car.”

Over the course of the next couple of years, Richard campaigned the family-owned car locally. “We won some races,” Richard said nonchalantly. In fact, he won 10 races as a rookie between El Paso, Albuquerque and Las Cruces. In addition, the Griffins traveled to Manzanita and impressed the competition enough that local parts distributor Lowell Carstens hired Richard in 1983 to pilot the famed Speed Mart 91. “Lowell gave me my first

calling Richard, “The Fast Kid from Silver City”; his first nickname.

After three years together, Richard left the Speed Mart car and 1985 found him aboard the Bill Hardy 77, which he piloted to his first career CRA win at Manzanita on July 13. He also drove the Don Turpenning #5 and earned the Manzanita Speedway championship.

In 1986, he teamed with Tom Klein. “I used to hang out at Klein’s shop, and talked to him at the track a lot,” Richard said. “He had Wayne Bennet driving for him and just wasn’t ready to hire me yet. But when that day came, we won quite a few races together around the Phoenix area.” It is Klein that is the architect of the nickname, “The Gasman”, as Richard worked for his father’s propane distribution company. However, the nickname was clearly a double-entendre.

Over the next few years, Klein and Griffin competed in everything from the World of Outlaws, to SCOA, and CRA, racing from California to New York. In 1987, he ran for Bob Smith in the Stewart Fabricating #70, winning 10 features and scoring the Triple-State Championship in Arizona, Texas, and New Mexico. In 1988, he found victory lane a lot in Klein’s car and won a MMOA Midget race on the Manzanita 1/2 mile in a car owned by Wayne Weiler.

In 1989, Klein and Griffin took on the American Indy Car Series with the idea of getting Richard to the next level. Piloting a two-year-old March chassis that Roberto Guererro had run in CART, Griffin managed to score a victory on September 30th at Shangri-La Speedway in Owego, New York, proving that he could win in anything. Richard finished the season second in points and earned Rookie of the Year honors. However, Richard’s Indy Car career ended abruptly when funding dried up the next season. “We had some great times on the road racing Sprint Cars, just Tom and I; he

said warmly. “It was always just the two of us, except for when we were in Arizona and (former SCOA Mechanic of the Year) George Eckert was there to help us.”

The 1990 season brought victories in the Albuquerque Stampede, the Outlaw Winged Sprint Car Rally in Juarez, Mexico, and a second place in SCOA points. This period also saw major changes in Richard’s life, as he got his pilot’s license, and went to Western New Mexico University, where he met his future wife, Charlotte. He then started Griffin’s Propane, Inc., in 1991, which today has 100 trucks and 60 employees servicing customers in Texas, New Mexico, and Arizona.

For the ‘91 campaign, Griffin teamed with Pepper and Tony Fite to campaign their Ford-powered car with CRA and won both nights at Knoxville Raceway, as well as a victory at Eldora Speedway six days later during the CRA Midwest Tour. In 1992, he won five CRA races at Manzanita and backed that up the next year with two CRA victories at Bakersfield and a triumph at Manzy. That year, he also finished second for Keith and Rusty Kunz at the Belleville Midget Nationals behind Lealand McSpadden.

When CRA folded in early 1994, Fite scaled back his racing operation and Richard found a ride with his friend Andy Morales in the famous “Tamale Wagon” following McSpadden’s departure from the seat. Together for two seasons, Griffin and Morales competed in the USAC Silver Crown Series as well as the upstart Sprint Car Racing Association (SCRA). “Andy and I were really good friends, but we struggled racing together,” Richard said. “I don’t even know why. We just never really clicked for whatever reason.”

For 1996, when Lealand McSpadden retired after winning the SCRA Championship in ‘95, Richard once again replaced McSpadden behind the wheel of the Ron Chaffin owned #50, wrenched by Bruce Bromme, Jr. “The Little Red Sucker” was to be the car he would spend the rest of his career in. Five victories during their first campaign together put Richard in position to win the championship on the final night but a pair of flips in preliminary action prevented him from competing the rest of the evening and handed the championship over to Ron Shuman.



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national sprint car hall of fame



Richard Griffin

continued from page 16

Another five wins the following year once again saw Griffin in the points lead on the final night but the retiring Shuman again stole away the title with last lap heroics that edged Richard by two points.

The next year, 1998, served up six wins and his first career SCRA championship. A year later, four Manzanita wins and a Perris triumph brought a second consecutive SCRA title.

The turn of the century produced nine wins, including four at Manzanita, as well as a Terre Haute victory in the Non-Wing World Championship series that also served as his lone USAC National Sprint Car win en route to a third straight championship campaign. In addition, the team was crowned Non-Wing World Champions.

In 2001, he had eight wins but a work related injury during the latter part of the season forced Griffin to miss two events, which eliminated them from title contention.

Another six wins came in 2002, including triumphs at the Las Vegas Dirt Track and Lincoln Speedway in Pennsylvania, which netted

Chaffin, Bromme, and Griffin their fourth SCRA title in five years, as well as their third consecutive Non-Wing World Championship.

The 2003 campaign began five wins in four different states and a fifth SCRA title. A victory in the "Ron Shuman Classic" on August 22nd was the 51st and final win of Griffin's SCRA career, as he retired at season's end at the age of 40. "I know how hard it is to win championships with SCRA and I definitely cherish each one of them," Griffin said at the time. "I was just lucky enough to get hooked up with good people. I hope I've represented SCRA in a good way."

In retrospect, Griffin recalls his years with Chaffin and Bromme as the best team he ever drove for. "Ron was my kind of guy," he says about his car owner, who passed away in February of 2016. "He liked to drink beer and have fun, and he gave us everything we needed to win." As for Bromme, Griffin says, "Bruce's record speaks for itself. We rarely had any failures and he always gave me a good car. I'm really grateful for my time with those guys. It was the best era of my career." Bromme, a 2011 NSCHoF inductee, passed away at the age of 62 in August 2014.

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