



national sprint car hall of fame



greg Stephens



by Dean Mills - Photo Credit: Patrick Grant

Greg Stephens was born November 12, 1948. He was responsible for the majority of the television coverage of the World of Outlaws during the 1980s, 1990s and early 2000s. His Motorsport Video company produced video of every major short track race in the country from the Knoxville Nationals, the Chili Bowl, the Kings Royal, the Turkey Night Grand Prix and beyond. Through years of toil and travel, Greg earned his way to the Hall of Fame with his dedication and determination, creating a niche in the sport that didn't exist before him.

"My dad (Jack) worked on a race car, an old jalopy in our hometown of Taylorville, Illinois," Stephens said. "When I was four or five, he would take us to the shop on Saturdays, and then we'd go to the track. We would go to little Springfield, and Macon, places like that."

Thus, from his youth forward, Greg was always at the track on weekends. "I was always a car nut," he explained. "I always paid attention to the cars. And, as I got older, and could afford it, I started to buy cameras. Still cameras, and then movie cameras. When video cameras came out, I had one (right away). I had a portable recorder that I would hang on my side, and I took a motorcycle battery and learned how to wire it up to run the camera and the portable deck. That's how we did it back then."

Through a co-worker, Greg befriended a car owner from St. Louis, and his obsession with documenting races developed from there. "In 1984, I started shooting the MARA Midgets," said Stephens. "I went with Joe Martinez who owned a car that Arnie Knepper drove, and I went with them to DuQuoin. I would shoot there, and I had a little microphone, and I would announce the races while shooting them. I bought another recorder and learned how to record from tape to tape. People found out I was doing this, and they started buying videotapes for \$15, which was pretty neat." In 1985, Greg and his friend Jim Childers, who was the announcer for the MARA Midget Series, traveled to the famed Eldora Speedway for the 4-Crown Nationals. "Jim and I went around and did interviews, and I put together a video of it. That was basically the first real production I ever did."

When the 4-Crown video became a pretty popular item, that opened Stephens' eyes to a career in motorsports video production. "Randy Gosnell owned a production company

in Indianapolis. He saw my 4-Crown video and told me I cover a race really well, and that we could make some money together covering races."

Shortly thereafter, in December of that year, Greg quit his job at Sabreliner as a typesetter, and set out on a career in motorsports videography. In early 1986, Gosnell's production company covered the Hoosier Dome Invitational for Midgets in Indianapolis, as well as a Mickey Thompson Off Road Series. In addition, Walt Glatther hired Greg to shoot the Tractor Pulls at the old Saint Louis Arena (known as the "Checker Dome"). Glatther then told Greg he could get him credentials for Daytona the following month. At the time, Greg didn't own any professional production equipment of his own. Making a call to Gosnell, he purchased a 3/4 inch video deck and recorder, as well as a tripod, for \$2,000 and set out for Florida. While down there, he arranged to cover the All-Star Circuit of Champions events at East Bay during Florida Speedweeks. "I was able to contact the folks at Motorweek Illustrated (hosted by Dave Despain), and go over and cover the Sprint Car races for them. They gave me their Fed Ex account number and that was my first professional gig as a freelancer at \$250 a night."

"Walt and I then went over to Daytona," said Stephens. "He takes me in the NASCAR office and we walk right upstairs and he introduces me to Bill (France), Sr. and gets us credentials to shoot at Daytona. And Greg Oldham is there, with Larry Nuber and Bob Jenkins (hosts of Speedweek), and I met Tim Derooin, who I still do freelance work with to this day. I also met Chet Burks who worked for SETN, Special Entertainment Television Network out of Salem, North Carolina, and he put on a show called This Week in Motorsports. He told me to send him footage anytime I covered Sprint Cars."

As to his style, "I was self-taught, mostly," said Greg. "I got some advice from people along the way. D.O. Laycock gave me some pointers and was something of a mentor to me. And Greg Oldham, Bob Jenkins, and Larry Nuber all advised me on things to look for, but for the most part, I was completely self-taught."

In 1987, Greg met with Ted Johnson and began shooting the World of Outlaws Series on a semi-regular basis. "That was a tough year.

Photo Credit: Patrick Grant

Motorweek went off the air, and then it was just Speedweek and This Week in Motorsports. And that is the year Steve Kinser won practically every race I shot. He won 69 features (including 24 of the last 26) that year." This was also the year Greg picked up his iconic Ford Econoline Van. For the better part of two decades, you could nary go to a Sprint Car or Midget race of any significance without seeing Greg's grey van. From 1987 - 2004, Greg put four engines in it, did one transmission rebuild, and put 840,000 miles on it.

At the beginning of 1989, USA was formed to compete with the World of Outlaws and Greg was contacted to shoot the series for them. Over the course of the next couple years, Stephens mixed short track dates with TV work, balancing between USA and WoO events, as well as Indy Car, IMSA and beyond.

At the end of 1990, after a couple of years of acrimony, Ted Johnson approached Stephens about returning as the World of Outlaws official videographer for the 1991 season. "In 1991, ESPN2 started a program called RPM2Night," said Stephens. "Plus, Speedweek was still on. Chet had left his SETN show and went to produce (the reboot of) Motorweek, and Pat Patterson had started a show called On Pit Road. There was a time I was getting paid tow money by the Outlaws, same as he was paying his teams, and selling to four different shows. That was good money back then."

In July of that year, Ted Johnson confided in Greg that Diamond P was no longer going to cover the Knoxville Nationals and solicited Greg's help to make something happen. "I contacted Chet Burks, and we put together a deal to cover the Nationals for Prime Network." It was produced right out of his production van. In addition, in 1992-94, Greg was an integral part of Pat Patterson's productions of the Slick 50 Series at Manzanita Speedway and Canyon Raceway in Phoenix. Greg continued as the World of Outlaws videographer for 10 more seasons, supplying