

Photo: David Giles



2020 National Sprint Car Hall of Fame Inductee



GREG HODNETT

Driver

By Todd Heintzelman

Photo: Paul Arch



When Greg Hodnett came to Central Pennsylvania to drive Bob Stewart's Apple Chevrolet 12 Sprint Car in August of 1998, it was not supposed to be a long-term thing. The native of Memphis, Tennessee, was the 1993 Rookie-of-the-Year with the World of Outlaws and had fully planned on returning to the traveling series.

After making the Knoxville Nationals A-main in the 12 car and finishing 18th, it didn't take him long to win in Pennsylvania as he quickly swept Tuscarora 50 weekend at Port Royal in the potent 12 car.

Hodnett talked about that win during an interview in 2017 prior to the 50th Annual Tuscarora 50. "It was a unique atmosphere and happens very rarely," he said. "To be a part of it for the first time and actually win in the first time we were there is pretty special. It's a great event and it's a big deal for me. It's pretty special to be able to win it a couple of times."

The following weekend, he won

the National Open at Selinsgrove Speedway in his first start in that race as well. Hodnett spent the 1999 season in Stewart's car before returning to the road in 2000 racing with a new team and mechanic Guy Forbrook.

That promising deal lasted only one year. Hodnett was back in Pennsylvania in 2001. He never returned to the road full-time and made a home in Central Pennsylvania and became a member of the Posse.

While he was always one of the best drivers on the track, he was just as good of a man off of it. He was great with fans, media members and everyone he interacted with. He was never too busy for an autograph from a fan, young or old. He was never too busy for a comment after a race, whether he won or not. If you wanted advice about racing, or life in general, Greg was the man to talk to about it.

Hodnett was a fierce competitor but a humble man. He never gave himself enough credit, but instead gave it to all of those people around him that helped him succeed.

He was one of the smartest people in the pits, as well, with a degree in Mechanical Engineering from the University of Memphis.

During his career, he won over 250 Sprint Car main events, including 20 against the World of Outlaws and 22 in All Star Circuit of Champions competition.

He had a great run with the Apple 12 and won many races along the way with crew chief Lee Stauffer.

They were fast everywhere they went, including the Nationals where he finished sixth in 2002 and then fifth in 2003.

Following his time in the 12 car, he moved into other famous Pennsylvania rides, including the Al Hamilton 77, the Jim and Sandy Kline 22, the John Trone 39 and, finally, the Mike Heffner 27.

He won races and championships for all of them. If not for traveling to higher paying races, his win totals and championships in Central Pennsylvania would have been greater than they already are.

He consistently beat the World of Outlaws when they came to Pennsylvania, including the 2009 Williams Grove National Open in the Kline 22. He was one of the best ever at the tricky paper-clip-shaped half-mile and amassed 73 career wins there

Williams Grove, 1996.



Photo: Paul Arch



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- good enough for third all-time. He won every major race at the Grove, including the National Open, Summer Nationals, Mitch Smith Memorial and Jack Gunn Memorial. He won five track championships - one each for the Klines and Trone and three for Heffner. This is also third-best all-time. Only Lance Dewease and Fred Rahmer have more Grove wins and championships. He always joked about being told early in his career how terrible he was at Williams Grove.

Port Royal Speedway was one of his favorite tracks. He won 52 features there - seventh all-time. Among those wins were four victories in the Tuscarora 50, including his first start in the race in 1998. His other Tuscarora 50 victories came in 2004, 2009 and 2014.

While traveling Saturday nights kept him from Port Royal track championships, he did win a lot of big paying races there, including a \$30,000 score during the Dream Race Extreme in 2008. He won the Living Legends Dream race in 2015 and was a six-time champion of the Bob Weikert Memorial. He beat the All Star Circuit of Champions travelers eight times at Port Royal. Port Royal now hosts the Greg Hodnett Classic as part of Pennsylvania

Speedweek. In a joyous event, Port Royal honored Greg as a Living Legend the summer before his death.

At Selinsgrove Speedway, he won the Jim Nace Memorial National Open four times, including his first start in that race in 1998. He won 17 times at Selinsgrove during his career in limited starts at the big-half mile because 410 Sprints were not a regular division there. He also won the Selinsgrove National Open for

the 360 Sprint Cars.

Lincoln Speedway was not a regular stop for Greg but he picked up 33 features wins including the Icebreaker 30 two times and he had a World of Outlaws win in 2015.

In Pennsylvania Speedweek competition, he won 26 Speedweek races and five championships, including 2018 that he called the 'ugliest championship ever' as he won the series championship on the strength of four runner-up finishes, but no wins. He also called it the toughest Speedweek he'd ever run with 10 straight nights of racing and temperatures in the 90s, plus humidity. He lost several Speedweek titles by less than 10 points during his career. He won that year by two.

In 2016, during a Speedweek race at the quarter-mile Path Valley Speedway, Hodnett and fellow late Hall of Fame inductee Bryan Clauson went back and forth the entire race with Greg getting the win over Bryan. It was one of the best races of that season.

Other than the regular Sprint car tracks in Central PA, he won Speedweek races at Hagerstown, Grandview, Big Diamond, Silver Spring Speedway and BAPS. He won five of the nine Speedweek races ever held at Big Diamond.

Sadly, Hodnett lost his life on September 20, 2018 in a racing acci-



Photo: Paul Arch

Partnered with Dave Helm at Knoxville '97.

dent during the main event at BAPS Motor Speedway.

"He was a great driver," Hall of Fame racer Lance Dewease said. "He won a lot in here [Pennsylvania] and a lot outside this area. Off the racetrack, he was a better person yet. He handled stuff a lot like how I handle it. Once it's done on the race-track, we tend to forget about it. He was a great person. We talked every night. He was one of the first guys to come up and congratulate me when I won a race. I will miss that dearly from him."

An outpouring of respect and honor came from coast-to-coast and not only from the Sprint Car world. Even the Pennsylvania State House of Representatives held a moment of silence for him during a session in the week following his death.

He was born on June 18, 1969. He and wife, Sherry, called Spring Grove, Pennsylvania, home.

Ironically, his final Central Pennsylvania win came at BAPS in July 2018.

He did get back to Knoxville Raceway victory lane in 2018 as he won his preliminary night feature during the Knoxville Nationals in August. He finished 15th in his final Nationals A-main appearance.

He was a second-generation racer. His dad, Hoyette, was also a racer. Greg's career started in 1986 in a Modified Sportsman at Riverside Speedway in West Memphis, Arkansas. He moved into winged 360 Sprint Cars and won the track championship at Memphis Motorsports Park in 1987 and 1988 and began working on his degree as well.

After his Rookie of the Year honors in 1993 in the Hodnett Motorsports/Kele 4a, he moved into the Two Winners Racing car for two seasons. In 1994, he raced through the alphabet at the Knoxville Nationals before finishing fifth in the A-main.

In 1996, Hodnett began driving for David Helm and the 11H. In 1997, he finished second in the Knoxville Nationals to Dave Blaney. He started the 1998 season in the 11H before he and Tim Shaffer swapped rides just prior to the Knoxville Nationals bringing Greg to Pennsylvania where

he raced and eventually made a home for the next 20 years.

Greg Hodnett is greatly missed, not just for his skill behind the wheel, but for his professionalism off the track in everything he did and said. He was one of the sport's greatest ambassadors.

Many of Greg's victory lane interviews began with 'we were very fortunate.' In the end, however, it was the people that knew Greg and got to watch him wheel a Sprint car that were the fortunate ones. 🏆



Photo: Paul Arch

Hodnett making his good friend Lance Dewease roar in 2017.



Photo: Paul Arch

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