



Photo: Paul Arch

2020 National Sprint Car Hall of Fame Inductee



WALTER DYER

Owner

by Bryan Householder

Over the years in Sprint Car racing, there have been certain cars that have gained an identity of their own. It didn't always matter who was driving the car, that car was known to fans when it came through the pit gate. In the East, one car that gained that identity was "the car with the bricks on the wing". That the car had a triple digit number "461" didn't hurt the image.

The "Brickmobile" was fielded for more than 30 years by Walter Dyer. A mason by trade, his race cars were always supported by Walter Dyer Masonry. Thus, the well known "bricks on the wing". Actually the bricks were not always on the car, but they came early in Dyer's career as a car owner and stayed the course. The equally well known #461 is a story all its own, and it was there almost from the beginning.

Walter Dyer grew up on a farm on the Pennsylvania/Maryland border and developed a love of all things automotive at an early age. That farm is in Pennsylvania, but once had a Hancock, Maryland, address. An original marker for the Mason/Dixon line actually sits on the farm.

When Walter was a very young boy, his father motorized a cart for him to ride around the farm. By the time he reached his early teens, Dyer was driving a farm truck hauling tomatoes and peaches from the

fields for his father to take to the processing plants. He always had fast street cars in the 1950s and after going into the masonry business in 1963, his love for fast cars and racing continued. It was in the 1966-1967 time

frame that Walter began helping local Late Model racer John Ebersole, who raced primarily at Dyer's closest track in Hagerstown. Walt worked on the race car and would buy a tire from time to time. That was his start in local auto racing.

By the mid-point of the 1967 racing season, Dyer was hooked on the sport and decided to take the plunge to become a car owner. But, he didn't buy a Late Model. Instead, he went the open wheel route. The 1967 season was when the Central Pennsylvania circuit began its evolution into Sprint Cars, but Hagerstown was one of the tracks that had held out for the cut down "Bugs" during the 1967 season.

On July 11, 1967, Dyer purchased the Bug with the \$ for a number that Jack Denniston had driven to several victories the previous season. Turn around was quick for the newly formed Dyer team. Just a few days later, on July 15, the Walter Dyer Masonry team showed up at the paved quarter mile oval inside Hershey Park Stadium for its first race. The \$ had been changed to Ebersole's number from the Late Model #46, and the team was on its way.

The next night they made their first start at the full half-mile clay oval in Hagerstown. But, there was a catch. Driver Bill Ulsh was already driving a number 46 racer at Hagerstown.

Officials asked Dyer and team to tape a one in front of the number for the evening. They did so, but when they got home that night, Dyer decided he didn't like the number 146. By the next weekend, the one had been painted on behind the 46 and thus the #461 entered into its quest for the history books.

Things didn't always go well in those early years. Dyer and his team were learning things from the ground up and there were a lot of race cars around the area back then. Over the next several years, Dyer's cars began to get faster, and there were several drivers who followed Ebersole into the cockpit. Donnie Hill was the next regular driver and he was followed by Bob Elbin.

By the start of the 1973 racing season Walter Dyer had found himself yet another driver. This time it was a transplanted Californian, with long hair and a beard. Jimmy Edwards had heard about the big money being offered for Sprint Car racing in Pennsylvania and had moved east. For that 1973 season, he hooked up with Dyer's team.

At the start of the relationship, Dyer, a crewcut farm boy from the heart of the farmland, told city boy Edwards that if he were to get Dyer his first career win, Walt would let his hair grow long.

If it was that challenge, or just that both Dyer and Edwards were true racers, but, that win was just around the corner. Fittingly, the first win came at Hagerstown on May 6 of 1973. Dyer's hair got longer and longer as the summer progressed. With Edwards at the wheel, the Walter Dyer Masonry #461 became a threat to win on most

any night. Something else changed that season as well.

Dyer's daughter, Linda, had found something to make the car look better. She found some contact paper that looked like bricks. Starting that season Linda applied the bricks to the wing of the car using the contact paper. Ever since that time the "Brickmobile" would indeed be "the car with the bricks on the wing". Well, almost. There was a short time when the brick paper became unavailable, but there was some contact paper with masonry stones on it. That season, the car was the "Stonemobile". Then Walter decided to begin painting the bricks on the wing.

In 1974, for the only time in his career, Walter Dyer fielded two cars. The #461 came out his racing shops with Jimmy Edwards as the driver, while a second car came out of the Hanover shops of its Texas transplant driver Van May. That car carried May's traditional 69. Both teams fared well that season.

The next year Edwards moved on and May found other support. Dyer hired veteran driver Jimmy Sheaffer to drive his machine and thus began several years of consistent racing with a few wins thrown in here and there. Over the next three or so years, Sheaffer and Garry Howsare both spent alternating time in the #461, and Sheaffer scored a big win in Jack Gunn's Summer Nationals at Williams Grove in 1977.

Rod Gross followed Sheaffer in the car for a year or so before Billy Stief took over the controls of the #461. With Stief at the wheel Dyer's car won it's first World of Outlaws race, and the first \$5000 to win local show in Pennsylvania. That one was at Lincoln on July 4, 1980.

In 1984, Scott Tobias, son of Hall of Fame driver Dick Tobias, drove for Dyer. Then in 1985 Walt's wife Marsha convinced him to take a year off since the family was expecting two granddaughters that summer.

He returned in 1986 with Joey Allen, brother of Hall of Fame driver Bobby Allen. Over the next several years Walter switched back and forth between Joey Allen and Paul Lotier, who was married to Dick Tobias' daughter Debbie.



A WoO with Lance Dewease at the Grove in '94.

During this time frame, both drivers scored numerous wins in the #461, and both drivers won point titles at Port Royal. Joey Allen also won with the All Stars at East Bay in Florida.

When Allen and Dyer parted ways, Walter had several different drivers for a while before he settled in on a young promising driver in late 1991. That driver was Lance Dewease. Together Dyer and Dewease helped rewrite the Central Pennsylvania record books and had over 100 wins together, four Port Royal titles, two Williams Grove titles, Knoxville Nationals Rookie of the Year, Williams Grove National Open winner, Port Royal Tuscarora 50 winner, PA Speedweek champion, Grandview Thunder on the Hill champion, Hagerstown Octoberfest winner. The wins just kept coming, against the Pa Posse, the World of Outlaws and the All Stars.

By this time, of course, Walter Dyer had been at it a long time, and it was time to slow down a bit. Lance moved on and Walt had a few others in the car. Curt Michael got Walter Dyer his last career win. Fittingly, it came at Williams Grove Speedway on April 6, 2001. Look close - that is 4/6/1.

Walt stepped away as a car owner after 2001 but did come back for one year in 2007 with his granddaughter's husband Tommy Beavers as his driver. His last race was at Hagerstown's Octoberfest in 2007. Walt fielded cars from 1967-2001 except for 1985, and then again in 2007.

For all his career as an owner,

Walt's late wife Marsha was at his side. Daughters Linda and Kim were both loyal supporters as well. Linda's husband Alan Northcraft became a longtime crew member, while Kim stayed on the sidelines as a fan not attending every race. Walt's Grandchildren also followed the Brickmobile for years.

Larry Younker was a longtime crew member joining the team in 1970 and staying around until the end. Kevin Hendershot was there from 1989 until Walt retired.

Over his years in racing, Walter Dyer had 15 full-time drivers and 36 different drivers piloted his car. Some of the names who took occasional rides in the #461 include Hall of Fame drivers Keith Kauffman, Smokey Snellbaker and Kramer Williamson. Pennsylvania stars like Dub May, Steve Siegel, Johnny Grum, Jimmy Nace, Len Thompson and Jay Myers also drove the #461. Mike Wagner and Cliff Brian each got their only career Williams Grove win in the #461, and George Ferguson Jr won the Port Royal's Labor Day Classic for Walt.

Walter Dyer, who is now 86 years old, has been honored by the Auto Racing Club of Hagerstown, the York County Racing Club, Williams Grove Speedway and Port Royal Speedway. His induction into the National Sprint Car Hall of Fame is a crowning achievement on a spectacular career.

