



## 2020 National Sprint Car Hall of Fame Inductee

# PAUL LEFFLER

## Owner/Mechanic

By Bill Wright

**P**aul Donald Leffler was born June 30, 1926 in Shelby County, Indiana, to parents Roy and Gertrude Leffler. A Navy veteran of World War II, Paul was a gifted builder and mechanic. He not only built the chassis but built the engines for many of his race cars as well. Others that he built chassis for included fellow National Sprint Car Hall of Fame inductee, Glen Niebel, Lee Elkins, Bob Jones, Larry Davis, Charlie Masters, Bob Lowe and several others.

Leffler came from a time when things were fabricated in the shop, not bought off a shelf. For Paul, this included chassis, bodies, front axles, tail tanks, radius rods and many other smaller parts. As many cars that were run out of his shop, Paul had to be extremely hard working!

Leffler built a number of cars that went on to claim United States Auto Club (USAC) National Sprint Car championships. He was crew chief and co-owner with Dr. Ward Dunseth on Greg Weld's 1967 championship run. He won fourteen times when paired with Dunseth. He also teamed with Ralph Hulsman as a co-owner and added eight more (for 22 total wins between 1966 and 1976). USAC lists 29 wins for Leffler as an owner or co-owner.

From 1977-80, he built, setup and maintained cars for owner Sherman Armstrong. The result was 34 more USAC National Sprint Car victories and two more USAC titles. Driver Tom Bigelow brought the team a championship in 1978, while Leffler's

son Greg won it all for Armstrong and his father in 1979. Most of Bigelow's then record 52 victories with USAC came with cars Paul built and was crew chief on. Tom's 14 wins in 1977 is still tops all-time for a driver with the series.

Leffler's reach went far greater, having built over 60 open wheel machines in his time. Customers driving Paul's creations won many other USAC events, as well as championships at tracks like Kokomo and Lawrenceburg. Help in the Armstrong shop came from fellow National Sprint Car Hall of Fame inductee, Wally Meskowski, and Bob Lowe.

Leffler built, maintained, and was crew chief on four USAC Sprint Cars and two Dirt Champ Cars in 1978 alone. Other drivers who gained victory with USAC in his creations included Jud Larson, Al Smith, Bob Wente, Bruce Walkup, Sammy Sessions, Larry Dickson and Gary Bettenhausen. He also served as crew chief for wins Johnny Parsons, Bubby Jones, Chuck Gurney and Sheldon Kinser.



Photo: John Maloney

In 1979, he took on Indy Cars with Armstrong. They had two that year and upped the ante to four in 1980.

In 1979, Howdy Holmes was Rookie of the Year at the Brickyard, finishing seventh in the race, while Bigelow checkered fourteenth.

Three cars made the Indy 500 the following year, and Paul remains the only mechanic to have three cars finish in the top ten. Bettenhausen and Bigelow started in the last row, and finished third and eighth, respectively, while Greg Leffler finished tenth.

Leffler dabbled in the rear-engine Sprint Car game, building cars from scratch for Johnny Parsons Jr. and George Snider.

Paul Leffler passed away on January 24, 1992, at the age of 65. 🏆