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national sprint car hall



Photo by: John Mahoney

Bob Frey

by David Sink

Bob Frey was born in Elyria, Ohio, to parents Rudy and Joyce Frey on October 25, 1950. Frey developed an interest in auto racing because his father took him to races at Lorain County Speedway in South Amherst, Ohio, as a youngster.

Frey began his racing career at the same speedway at age 20 in 1970, certainly late by today's standards. However, at the time, 21 was the legal age and his father and mother had to sign to let him race.

The first few months of his career saw Frey competing in the 'Rat Racers' novice stock car class. Frey's father realized his son wasn't doing anything but picking up bad habits running these entry level cars. He helped Frey with half of the money to purchase another car if he would consider his offer.

The two purchased a sprint car with a carbureted gasoline engine and Frey started running on dirt at Hilltop Speedway in Millersburg, Ohio. A short time later, they purchased Steve Lehnert's roadster and competed regularly at Sandusky and Lorain County Speedway's each weekend.

By late 1972, he was showing flashes of brilliance. He finished second to Armond Holley at Lorain County and ran second to Butch Wilkerson during an ASA show at Anderson in August with the newly purchased roadster.

These performances caught the attention of Ohio car owner Ernie Ensign, who had just purchased a brand-new Paul Leffler built car and was looking for a driver for the 1973 season. The new team was fast right out of the box. Frey won his first career sprint car feature victory on April 29 during an ASA show at West Chester, Ohio. Frey finished ninth in his initial Little 500 start and captured another ASA victory and a handful of wins in northern Ohio to close the year out.

After a victory at Miami-Hollywood Speedway during Florida Speedweeks, and the Florida Winter championship, it appeared 1974 would be his breakout season. He captured the pole for the Little 500 with new one and four lap track records. Unfortunately, Frey flipped the Ensign car at Sandusky and broke his arm in the process the next day. Frey was replaced by Larry Dickson for the race two weeks later. Dickson won the Little 500 as Frey's replacement, from the pole, in a race Frey believes should have been his victory, as he laid in a hospital bed.

Frey returned to victory lane later in the season with back-to-back ASA victories at IRP and Anderson. Frey and Ensign mutually parted ways due to personal reasons after the 1974 season.

From 1975-1979, Frey competed exclusively with USAC chasing the USAC National Sprint Car Series championship driving for several car owners during this time. Frey also competed for car owner Urbie Durnwald at Sandusky and Lorain County Speedway when time allowed.

In 1980, Frey returned to the Little 500 for the first time in seven years and found victory lane driving Urbie Durnwald's Ford powered sprint car. The Little 500 win landed him a CART / INDYCAR Series start at Michigan in September and led to two other starts and two unsuccessful attempts to make the Indianapolis 500 starting field through 1982.

During that 1980 season, Frey teamed with car owner Glen Niebel for some of the better paying pavement sprint car events throughout the country. The team captured the 1980 Snowball 100 at Winchester Speedway in early November to close the season out on a high note.

Over the next 13 racing seasons, Frey and Niebel were nearly unbeatable. The duo won every major pavement sprint car race the sport had to offer. USAC removed pavement from the USAC National Sprint Car Series schedule after the 1981 season and the team was left with just a handful of unsanctioned high paying sprint car events to compete in - most notably the Copper World Classic and Little 500.

Between 1981-1987 the team captured the Copper World Classic four times. In addition, they won the Little 500 four times and had two second place finishes in the race between 1985-1990.

Most of their success together started in 1985 when Niebel debuted a Chevrolet V-6 engine in competition. Driving for Niebel, Frey was victorious in USAC Sprint Car, USAC Silver Crown, and ICAR events. Frey retired from racing after the 1993 season, which was his 24th, at the age of 42 to focus on business. He had just become a licensed mortician and owned two mortuaries in Wickenburg, Arizona. He sold his business in 2005 and retired. He currently resides in Wickenburg, Arizona.

Since his retirement from auto racing, he has been inducted into the Little 500 Hall of Fame, Sandusky Speedway Hall of Fame, the Lorain County Speedway Hall of Fame and, now, the National Sprint Car Hall of Fame.

