



Photo: Tom Powell



## ROY ROBBINS - DRIVER

By Tom Schmech

Roy Robbins, Jr., was born in a little house on Pull Tight Road on September 19, 1927, near Little York, Indiana, to parents Irene (Childers) and laborer Roy Robbins, Sr. Roy, Jr., grew up in Little York, which is just west of Scottsburg in Washington County, with Stan Bowman as one of his best childhood friends. He was attending Little York High School in 1945 when, at age 17, he falsified his birth certificate to join the U.S Army and serve his country during the final stages of World War II.

Roy first started racing a 1939 Lincoln coupe in 1948 at the Jeffersonville Sportsdrome in Indiana in the Hardtop division of the Kentuckiana Auto Racing Association (KARA). He continued racing Stock Cars through 1954 there and at places like Sutton's Park in Scottsburg, Jackson County Fairgrounds in Brownstown and Sun Valley Speedway in Anderson. His

competition included Andy Hampton, Sr., Stan Bowman, Bill Kimmel, Sr., Thomas "Cotton" Priddy, Milt Hartlauf, Audie Swartz, Darel Dieringer, Sr., and Jesse Baird. He is credited with track championships at Brownstown and Mitchell.

As stock cars were cut down and made lighter and faster, they morphed into modified stock cars throughout the Midwest. Roy Robbins ran this class starting in 1955 at Jeffersonville and Brownstown, and he began traveling to such places in Kentucky as Paris, Kenton Vale and Danville. In fact, two of his earliest feature wins in a modified stock car occurred at Hilltop Race Bowl in Kenton Vale and Rooster Lake Speedway in Paris in 1956.

The 1959 season was a pivotal year for the driver who, over the years, was variously listed as being from Scottsburg, Salem, Seymour, Evansville or Madison in Indiana, or Louisville in Kentucky (where he worked as a mechanic and an ironworker). In 1959, he became a regular at the Lawrenceburg Speedway, which was his 'home' track for the remainder of his career when he wasn't off chasing high dollar shows at other speedways. He scored five feature wins at Lawrenceburg in '59 and he was crowned the Modified Stock Car track champion, over such competition as Stan Bowman, Cecil Beavers, Bob Kinser, Hugh Randall, Calvin Gilstrap, Bill Dugger, Gil Hess and others. Roy's travels took him to Zipp's Speedway in Indianapolis, Ind., Eldora Speedway in Rossburg, Ohio, and the Danville Sportsdrome, and he claimed a feature win at Brownstown.

The next year, 1960, was another big year for Roy at Lawrenceburg but he also traveled to places like Brownstown, Jeffersonville and Mitchell in Indiana and Rossburg, Ohio, Danville, Kentucky, and Boyd's Speedway in Chattanooga, Tennessee. In fact, he was fourth in the Eldora 200-lapper behind Gordon Johncock, Jim Cushman and Bob Pratt, and Roy had two wins at Danville. But the biggest accomplishment was likely his fourth-place finish in a stock car at the Lakewood Speedway in Atlanta in a Midwest Auto Racing Club (MARC) 150-lapper behind Don White, Elmer Musgrave and Paul Parks. MARC is now the Automobile Racing Club of America (ARCA).

Saturday, July 29, 1961, is the date of Roy Robbins' biggest career feature win and it occurred at the Marion County Fairgrounds in Knoxville, Iowa.

Roy won the inaugural 25-lap National Super Modified Stock Car Championship (and \$1,000) by beating Audie Swartz of Muncie, Indiana and Earl Wagner of Pleasantville, Iowa. That race is now known as the Knoxville Nationals. The first two cars in the feature finish sported air-scoops or 'wings,' and they were the only ones with them. It has been said that Roy had seen his first winged modified stock car at New Bremen, Ohio, just weeks before Knoxville; it may very well have been Jim Cushman's car. Roy also set a New Track Record of 23:00-seconds in time trials on the preliminary night at Knoxville in O.J. Huffman's number 37. Setting fast-times and NTRs was a common occurrence for Roy Robbins throughout his career.

Besides the National Championship triumph, Roy also won features in 1961 at Brownstown with the South Central Indiana Racing Association (SCIRA), at Heidelberg Raceway's half-mile in Pennsylvania and South Park Speedway's quarter-mile in Piney Fork with the Pittsburgh Racing Association (PRA) in the same day, at the Mid-America Fairgrounds in Topeka, Kansas, and again at Knoxville on one weekend in August, at Lakeside Stadium in Kansas City, Kansas, at Pittsfield, Illinois, (over Wilbur "Wib" Spalding and Jerry Blundy) and at the Florida State Fairgrounds in Tampa. Modified stock cars had morphed into supermodifieds, which were again lighter and faster, and Roy Robbins, Jr., was recognized as a leader in that division and earned appearance money as a result of his promotional appeal. An additional accomplishment for Roy in 1961 was competing with the United States Auto Club (USAC) in a sprint car at the Salem Speedway.

The following season, 1962, brought nine more feature wins at Lawrenceburg and his second point title there. His travels again took him to tracks in Indiana, Ohio, Kentucky, Iowa, Missouri, Tennessee, Georgia, and Florida. Sadly, on Sunday, June 17, 1962, Stan Bowman lost his life in a USAC feature at Terre Haute Action Track shortly after winning the first USAC Sprint Car race ever held at Eldora Speedway on April 22, 1962. Roy never really got over that loss of his best friend.

Bloomington on Fridays (three feature wins) and Lawrenceburg on Saturdays (two feature wins) were Roy's regular haunts in 1963, and he traveled far and wide, again competing four times with USAC in a Sprint Car. Roy won at the

25th Street Fairgrounds in Columbus, Indiana, in 1964, with SCIRA, but he also tested a NASCAR Grand National Stock Car at Daytona Beach for a car owner in Jacksonville, where Roy had been living at the time. E.W. "Buddy" Baker finished 29th in the Daytona 500 in that car.

Roy won at Lawrenceburg and Bloomington in 1965, but also at the Olympic Stadium in Kansas City in the inaugural 50-lap National Short-Track Championship (over Kenny Williams and Jerry Weld). He also ran the 500-lap race at the Fairgrounds Motor Speedway in Louisville, which was won by Wayne McGuire. Two more feature wins came Roy's way at Lawrenceburg in 1966 and, in '67, he won his 20th feature at Lawrenceburg on Saturday, May 27. Roy Robbins' career wound down in 1968 and '69, but he still drove at Lawrenceburg in both a Sprint Car and a Late Model. At age 41, shortly after his marriage to the former Kathleen Meier Buchanan in early 1969, Roy retired back to Little York and completely walked away from short-track racing.

Roy Robbins, Sr., passed away in 1950. Roy's mother Irene, who was a seamstress at the Excello shirt factory in Seymour, Indiana, died in 1996. Roy, who was inducted into the Knoxville Raceway Hall of Fame in 1983, died in Scottsburg, Indiana, on October 16, 2015. Roy Robbins, Jr., is buried in the Little York Cemetery.

Roy is credited as having raced at 80 different tracks in 15 states and having won in 11 of those states: Kentucky, Indiana, Pennsylvania, Iowa, Kansas, Illinois, Florida, Ohio, Missouri and two others (likely Georgia and Tennessee). 47 career feature wins are fully documented for Roy Robbins, Jr., yet it is unknown how many other feature wins remain unrecorded. ■

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