



by Pat Sullivan

In the course of auto racing history some drivers have enjoyed remarkably long careers. Yet there are few drivers who can match Bob Gregg's record for longevity and sustained excellence. Consider this. In a career that lasted for nearly a half-century, Bob Gregg graced victory lane in six different decades.

Gregg arrived on March 8, 1920, but where he was born is shrouded in mystery. His place of birth is commonly noted as Minneapolis, but what is known is that he was adopted nearly at birth. Bob was soon off to Texas with his adoptive parents, and for him they would always be known as Mom and Dad, while his brother Jerry remained with his natural mother and father. His upbringing in Texas exposed him to the real world quickly, but his parents subsequently moved to the Pacific Northwest. Legend has it that, while a teenager, his car broke down near the shop of Portland, Oregon, midget owner Clarence Smith. It was here that Gregg caught a glimpse of a midget and climbed in to see how it felt. It was a start. By 1938, he was making laps at the famed Jantzen Beach Speedway, and in the early days of his career he made his mark in the small cars. Then, like all stars, he got a nickname all of his own. Because he liked to feel the pedal, and partly due to his 6' 2" frame, he began racing without shoes and soon became known as "Bullet Bob the Barefoot Boy." After he was

BOB GREGG

DRIVER

burned a time or two, he switched to moccasins and then boxing shoes, but the legend was already in place. A break in his racing career came when he joined the Air Force with dreams of becoming a bomber pilot. That ended when a case of appendicitis nearly killed him. He recovered and went back to racing and resumed his winning ways.

He was destined for the National Midget Hall of Fame. Between 1947 and 1962, he won 13 season titles including 6 OMRA (Oregon) and 4 WMRA (Washington) Championships. His competition in the northwest at the time included George Amick, Shorty Templeman, Jack Turner, and Len Sutton. His talent would carry him to the Midwest and East, where he got a chance to race a midget for owner Ashely Wright and compete in the famed Tangerine Tournament in Florida in 1957.

His prowess in midget racing was undeniable, but in truth he excelled in any type of race car. In 1950, Bob passed his driver's test at the Indianapolis Motor Speedway, but during a qualification attempt a broken tie rod put him in the fence. By now, Gregg was also a force in sprint car and supermodified racing. His son, Mike Gregg, also a member of the National Midget Hall of Fame, notes, "Sprint cars back here in the 50's were what we called big cars. When they made the change to modifieds, they added a bolt on roll cage, but when they raced as a sprint car they took it off."

Bob had enormous success in the Bob Pankratz-built sprint car that became known as the Cheeseman Offy when it ventured to the Midwest, and also in one of the famed Blue Crown Specials powered by a 270ci Offenhauser engine. He scored major victories at Portland Meadows Speedway, and in 1951 he was victorious in the American Racing Association 100-mile sprint car race in Reno,

Nevada. Underappreciated is his performance with the Canadian American Modified Racing Association (CAMRA). The series visited tracks in Salt Lake City, Denver, and Eugene, Oregon, as well as Nanaimo, British Columbia, Edmonton, and Calgary. "Those guys raced hard," Mike Gregg notes, "but they travelled together, stayed in the same hotels, and helped each other out." Stars of this circuit included future Indianapolis 500 veterans Billy Foster, Jim Malloy, Art Pollard, Eldon Rasmussen, and Tom Sneva. In nine seasons from 1964 through 1972, Bob finished 2nd in points six times and 3rd in the final standings on three occasions. In 1962 (a season where he was the Oregon and Washington Midget champion), he won the eight-race US/Canada Gold Cup for sprints/supermodifieds. By every account Gregg is credited with over 20 major championships.

Because of his versatility and lengthy list of accomplishments, and versatility, he was named the Driver of the Century by Golden Wheels Vintage Racing Club. Gregg's last race came in 1986 at Denver's Lakeside Speedway. He passed in Vancouver, Washington, in 2022. Mike Gregg participated in his father's last race, but he will always cherish the memory of one special night with his dad. "In the 1980s, I came back to Washington for a race," he recalls, "and I brought a new set of Hoosier tires with me. My dad also got a chance to drive, so I gave him the set of tires, and he won it and I got second. I couldn't get him." Bob Gregg was over 60 years old at time.

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