

Newton "Buzz" Rose

by Jim Chini

Newton Rose? That's what his parents named him back in 1938, but he's been known as "Buzz" ever since. The nickname didn't come from Emmett "Buzz" Barton, as many think, but from a wooden pull-toy that he received as a Christmas present in his native Colorado. The toy was shaped like a bee with wings that spun around and a noisemaker that buzzed. Buzz and the bee were inseparable and before long whenever he entered a room people would say, "Here comes little Buzzy!" Rose once related that the toy probably saved his career when he began driving sprint cars. "I know that Frank Winkley would have turned around and walked away when I showed up in the International Motor Contest Association (IMCA) if I had told him that I was Newt Rose from California!"

Little Buzzy saw his first auto race at the Colorado State Fair in 1947. It was an IMCA program and Deb Snyder beat Emory Collins in the day's feature race. The die was cast. Buzz Rose was going to be a sprint car driver when he grew up. Rose spent every summer from 1948 to 1953 with his aunt and uncle in California. First in Fresno and later in southern California, his uncle took him to races at the Fresno Airport Speedway, Gilmore Stadium and Carrell Speedway. This just whetted his appetite for race car driving. When his father passed away in 1950, his mother moved them to southern California.

Buzz's first venture into racing came when he took the inheritance left to him by his dad and bought into a small race track called Micro Park in Torrance, without telling his mother. He also bought a micro midget to drive there, but the whole thing went up in smoke when the city closed them down---seems that someone forgot to get the necessary permits! In an effort to replace some of the lost money, Buzz took a part time job with Louis Senter at Ansen Automotive. This all would have been fine, but in the back of Senter's shop was an ancient rail-frame sprint car that was the very first sprinter to ever win a California Roadster Association (CRA) race. Buzz bought the car, along with a "Cragar-in-a-basket" for power. After a lot of 'midnight oil' sessions, the car was ready to race and the young high-school student entered his first CRA sprint car race at the Gardena Stadium in 1956. It took only five laps for the Cragar to go up like a hand grenade, putting a promising career on the sidelines once again.

Next up was co-ownership of a midget car with his friend George Courtesis. Buzz drove the car in United Racing Association (URA) programs for three seasons, but never really cared for midgets; at 6'2" and 200 pounds he was just too big to be comfortable in the cars. Besides, as Buzz said, "They didn't go fast enough, I wanted to drive sprint cars!"

That opportunity came in 1958 when Ken Stansberry hired Buzz to drive his sprinter in the CRA. "Kenny really got me started. His car was completely safe and handled well but he didn't have a lot of money to put into the engine," said Buzz. "We had a stock Olds with three carbs on it. This was okay for the

quarter-miles like Gardena Stadium, but at the bigger tracks like Ascot that poor engine really had its tongue hanging out."

Buzz also enlisted in the United States Marine Corps (USMC) during 1957 and for the next two years his appearances in a race car were sporadic, sometimes coming under the pseudonym 'Baron Manfred Von Erlacher'. On his release in late 1959, Rose landed a CRA ride in Lester Robertson's Cadillac-powered rocket ship, recently vacated by A.J. Shepherd. That summer they took off for the IMCA fair circuit. When Buzz returned home in the fall, he was firmly seated in one of the legendary Ennis M. "Dizz" Wilson Offies for the 1961 season. Through the summers of 1961 and '62, Buzz drove for Dizz with teammates Leroy Neumayer, Jim McElreath and Johnny Rutherford on the IMCA, Midwest Association for Race Cars (MARC) and CRA circuits. As Buzz related, "That was my favorite period of driving sprint cars. We all lived at Dizz's place in Mitchell, Indiana, worked on the cars and traveled together. That was when I really

learned how to drive a sprint car. In fact, the race in my career that is most memorable for me came in 1961 when McElreath and I ran one-two in the very first ever sprint car program at the Eldora Speedway---damn that was fun!"

After an abortive attempt at United States Auto Club (USAC) championship car racing in the fall of 1962, ("That car had less horsepower than Stansberry's Oldsmobile," said Rose) and a recall into the USMC, Buzz competed with the IMCA and the CRA through 1974 when two things happened. Not necessarily in order, he got to thinking that maybe he was getting a little too old to be doing this and he met the love of his life, Cathy Ring, shortly after the '74 Western World Championships in Phoenix. Buzz and Cathy were married the following year and his driving sprint cars was history.

Over the next 22 years Buzz devoted his time to providing for his family through a wholesale motorcycle accessory industry in the Southwest and even made a race driving 'comeback' in sports cars from 1986 to 1992. In '97, frustrated at the lack of information available about the IMCA, Buzz found his second love, or as Cathy puts it, "My competition," producing books on the history of sprint car racing. The history of the IMCA was followed by four American Auto Racing Writers and Broadcasters Association (AARWBA) award-winning books about the Cental States Racing Association (CSRA), the CRA (two volumes) and the American Automobile Association (AAA)/USAC (two volumes) sprint car circuits. In the works is a two-volume set that chronicles the history of the United Racing Club (URC). Buzz was a good sprint car driver, but it is for his efforts in preserving the history of the sport that he will be remembered by most. He wore many hats in his career: track owner, car owner, promoter, driver and historian.



Jim Chini Photo

