

L.A. "LES" & BERYL WARD

Leslie Allen "Les" Ward was born near Minneapolis, Kansas, on December 16, 1909, to W.A. and Lucy Myrtle Ward. He saw his first races in that area as a teen ager and became 'hooked' for life.

Beryl Marie Eldringhoff was born May 10, 1915, to William and Aloria Eldringhoff near Hollis, Kansas. Being farmers, the big event each August/September was the North Central Kansas Free Fair in Belleville where they attended the 'big car' races. When Beryl was eleven, the family moved to Minneapolis, Kansas, where she later met Les and it became a three-way love affair - a boy, a girl and race cars. After a five-year courtship, they were married February 15, 1934, and they spent their honeymoon at the annual Automobile Show in Kansas City, Missouri. It was there that they met W.W. "Cockeyed" Brown, who had built and raced a car at Belleville in 1911.

They lived in Concordia where Les was a master optician. Beryl was a housewife until 1943, when she was needed as a secretary at the Concordia prisoner-of-war camp. After the war she continued working as a secretary, until both she and her husband retired in 1980.

Les and Beryl's interest in racing only increased through the years. Though both worked full time, their vacations, holidays, sick leave and 'taking time off' were all given to race meets. In 1938, they attended a race in southern Kansas. As a fun thing, Les wrote the story of the race and filed it in his desk.

Unknown to him, Beryl typed and sent it to National Auto Racing News, which became National Speed Sport News (NSSN) after the war. To the surprise of both, press credentials were sent to Les by edi-



Beryl & L.A. "Les" Ward

Beryl Ward Collection

tor/publisher Chris Economaki, appointing Les the paper's representative in Kansas.

Les was also an amateur photographer. While Beryl was getting information on cars and drivers for the story, and scoring the races, Les was taking photographs. About six thousand photos are in their files. No photos were ever sold, but, at Christmas, the Wards sent photos to each driver and owner. Beryl was thrilled when soon thereafter credentials were received from NSSN for her as representative and Les as photographer. The 'Ward Racing Team' was born!

Beryl was chief scorer for the first long- distance late model stock car race in Kansas following the war. It was a 150-miler held on a one-and-a-half-mile oval on a cement airport runway in Herington. Together Les and Beryl scored several 200-lap late model stock car races on half-mile tracks in Kansas.

The Wards reported races across the country for National Speed Sport News, all as a hobby. They covered the annual Pike's Peak Auto Hill Climb for twenty years, as well

as the legendary Belleville High Banks half-mile track since 1938. Les was much more than a correspondent, and when he saw potential in a young driver, he tried to give him a career boost. He helped fledgling tracks as an advisor and, if needed, he worked as an announcer, flagman, timer, judge, scorer and pit man. The Wards aided tracks in securing sanctions for their races, and helped the sanctioning bodies recruit teams for those events throughout the mid-west.

L.A. "Les" Ward passed away rather unexpectedly on March 26, 1986. Through the urging of Chris Economaki and the late Jim Jensik of the Belleville Fair Amusements Committee, Beryl has stayed on as an NSSN correspondent to the present time. Since her husband's death, Beryl has annually given the L.A. "Les" Ward Memorial Award for Sportsmanship at the prestigious Belleville Midget Nationals.