

NATIONAL SPRINT CAR HALL of FAME & MUSEUM

BOB RUSSO

Robert "Bob" Russo was born to parents Angelo and Janette Russo on February 24, 28 in Syracuse, New York. He was the youngest of four children - brothers Daniel and Larry, and sister Mary.

Bob's love of championship auto racing began with his first experience in 1948 at the New York State Fairgrounds in Syracuse, New York.

A short time later he wrote a story about driver Paul Russo entitled "Basement Besie", story about how the driver built a race car in his basement and then couldn't get it out. He sold his story to Speed Age magazine, a leading publication of that era and it earned Bob a job with them. During his time at Speed Age magazine, he not only published a regular column, but he tested vehicles. He also covered some of the biggest auto races from 1949 to 1957, including the Indianapolis 500 and the Mexican Road Race. Bob freelanced other articles during that time, creating them under the pseudonym of T.J. Terry.

In 1955, while working in the office of Indy 500 official Henry Banks, he organized a group of motorsports journalists into the American Automobile Racing Writers and Broadcasters Association (AARWBA). Today, AARWBA is the largest professional group of its type in the world with more than 600 members. Bob also played a major part in helping Indianapolis Motor Speedway owner Anton "Tony" Hulman form the United States Auto Club (USAC) in 1956, replacing the American Automobile Association (AAA) Contest Board as the sanctioning body of the U.S. Championship Trail.

Also during this time, Russo participated in the Mobil Gas Economy Runs. He not only competed in this annual event but he also helped to train newcomers and to test individual vehicles.

After moving to southern California, Bob worked for a short time writing for Hot Rod

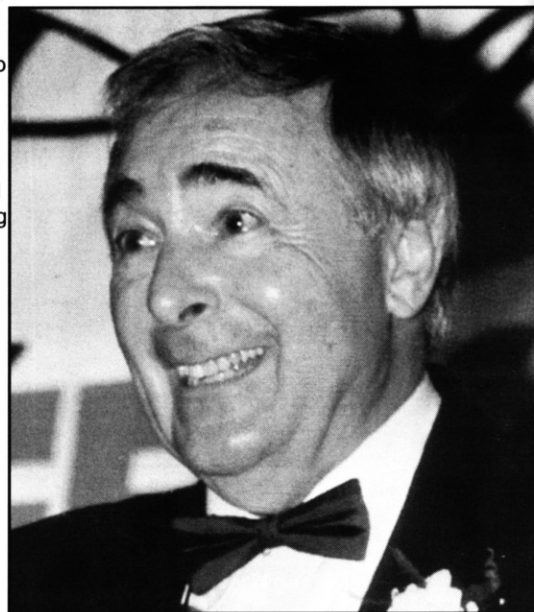
magazine. Shortly after signing on with them, he was hired by National Hot Rod Association founder Wally Parks to spearhead the publicity operations for the 1961 Winternationals, held at the Pomona, California, Fairgrounds. The crowd at the race quickly overwhelmed the facilities and the gates were closed before 10 a.m. on race day, contributing to his legend as an ace promoter.

In 1963, Bob joined Les Richter at Riverside International Raceway where he was director of publicity and marketing. During his time there, he helped to introduce NASCAR Winston Cup, SCCA Can-Am and Trans-Am, NHRA Hot Rod Drags and other major events/series to the growing California market. His efforts greatly enhanced the stature of motorsports nationally with the media coverage he generated.

After leaving Riverside in 1968, he organized the press operations of Sears Point International Raceway, until he was asked to take charge of publicity for the Ontario Motor Speedway. After a brief return to the NHRA, Bob became a management fixture at the Ontario Motor Speedway from 1972 until 1981.

Following the close of Ontario, Bob joined the Championship Auto Racing Teams (CART) Indy Car circuit briefly to publicize the exploits of driver Danny Sullivan for Penske Racing and the Miller Brewing Company. He also represented Miller's involvement in unlimited hydroplane racing and other forms of motorsports.

In the late 1980's, Bob began working for off-road tycoon Mickey Thompson. Russo created the blueprint for the successful run of 'stadium' off-road races held at such unconventional venues as the Los Angeles Coliseum, HoosierDome, SuperDome and the AstroDome. Bob remained with Mickey Thompson Enterprises until his retirement in 1993.



Bob Russo

Since his so-called retirement, Bob worked relentlessly researching the history of American championship racing from AAA to USAC to CART and IRL, virtually lap-by-lap. Bob was a life member of the AARWBA and served as the nominating committee chairman for both the Indianapolis Motor Speedway Hall of Fame and the Motorsports Hall of Fame in Novi, Michigan. He also served on the National Induction Committee of the National Sprint Car Hall of Fame in Knoxville, Iowa. In 1997, Bob helped organize the grand opening ceremonies for the NHRA Motorsports Museum at the Los Angeles County Fairplex in Pomona.

Bob passed away on September 17, 1999, and is survived by his wife Shirley, whom he married on May 20, 1950, and his daughter Terri Freeman (and her husband and children Julie and Keith).