

BOB KINSER

Bob Kinser is being inducted into the National Sprint Car Hall of Fame in 1999 in honor of his outstanding achievements as a driver, including his having won 29 track and association championships and over 400 career features.

Bob Kinser was born to Zelbert and Mary (Watson) Kinser on August 21, 1931, in Heltonville (Ind.), which is in the stone quarry country between Bedford and Bloomington. By high school, his family had moved to Smithville, where Bobby attended high school and met his first wife, Cora Richardson.

Jalopy stock car races were popular in the early 1950's at the local Bloomington track, where Bob's parents and family were spectators. By 1954, Bob had bought a '36 flathead Ford coupe for \$125 and was competing at Bloomington and Mitchell (Ind.) with no money, no real knowledge of racing and an old Army tank helmet. Earl Fleetwood helped Bobby, who was also befriended by racer Jim Waltz. The following year, with Waltz's motors and advice, Kinser started winning in his car numbered 707. And, two years later, after teaming with boyhood friend and fellow racer Rex Mitchell, Bob Kinser started winning consistently. His years in the late '50's in the Bill- and Earl Fleetwood-owned modified numbered F800 produced 28 wins and his first track championship at Columbus (Ind.).

In 1959, Bob drove his first super-modified for Earl Fleetwood and his Fleetwood Trucking Company. He then moved into Pete Brewer's Cadillac-powered machine, which was an ex-"Dizz" Wilson car. After a couple of seasons, Kinser drove for Lawrence and Clyde Fox in their shortened ex-Sumar Indy roadster nicknamed 'the Rockin' Chair Special'. Before long, Lawrence bought a new Floyd Trevis-built chassis for the young brick mason who already had four children: two girls Dee Ann and Pam, and two boys, Steve and Randy.

In 1965, Bob Kinser asked his friend Galen Fox, himself a mechanically-talented Bloomington area stock car racer who was unrelated to the Fox brothers, to be his full-time mechanic. Together the Kinser/Fox combination captured the tough South Central Indiana Racing Association (SCIRA) championship from 1965 through '68.

The super-modifieds were quickly becoming full-blown sprint cars, and the circuit consisted of

tracks in Indiana towns like Brownstown, Columbus, Kokomo, Putnamville, Paragon, Terre Haute, Haubstadt and Bloomington. Their rivals included skilled competitors like Cecil Beavers, Dick Gaines, Bobby Black, Roy Robinson, Hershell Jenkins, Calvin Gilstrap and Wayne Wolf.

With Galen Fox as chief mechanic, Bob Kinser drove the number 53 'Rockin' Chair Special' sponsored by McDaniel Furniture and Dave McIntyre Chevrolet. Later, Don Nordhorn was added as a teammate in the number 52 Fox brothers machine. They also started travelling more, hitting places like Eldora (Rossburg, Ohio), Central Pennsylvania, Plant Field (Tampa, Fla.), Manzanita (Phoenix, Ariz.) and Knoxville (Iowa) for the big-money shows. The competition at these events included the likes of Norman "Bubby" Jones, Jan Opperman, Kenny Weld, Jerry Blundy, Lou Blaney, Ted Wise, Joe Saldana, Ray Lee Goodwin and Sheldon Kinser.

After the Fox brothers team disbanded in the late 1960's, Bob Kinser drove for Karl Kinser. He ran a pavement roadster number 22 at tracks like St. Paul (Minn.), Heidelberg (Penna.), and Hoosier ovals Salem, Winchester and Anderson, which annually hosted the "Little 500" sprint car classic. Bob also drove for Ennis M. "Dizz" Wilson in his fabled number 71 machine.

For most of the decade of the Seventies, Bob drove for Bloomington building contractor Jerry Shields. In 1971, Kinser was nearly unbeatable, winning 28 features that season with Denny Mitchell as his mechanic. It was also the year he bested the International Motor Contest Association (IMCA) at Plant Field in February, earning a whopping \$1,735. He ended the season tied with Ray Lee Goodwin for seventh position in IMCA points.

It was during this time that Bob's marriage to Cora ended in divorce, yet he soon found a kindred spirit in Mahala Reathaforde of French Lick (Ind.). She also had been married before and had four daughters of her own: Mary, Nancy, Kay and Sha. Mahala and Bob took up residence in nearby Bedford. They were married on June 30, 1969.

It was also during this time that Bob Kinser earned the reputation as a fighter on- and off-the-track. According to Mahala, "If a guy starts banging Bob, he'll go down and give him a warning. The next time it happens, Bob don't usually talk. He always got a cigar in his mouth and when that cigar drops out of his mouth, watch out 'cause usually the guy

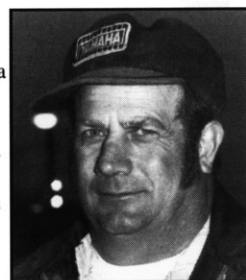
he's after hits the ground before the cigar does."

According to his son Steve, "My dad's tamed down a lot, just like his racin' has. There used to be a lot of fighting going on, fighting after the races, and I think Bloomington area guys used to be the best at it. Or the worst, whatever you prefer. In the old days, Dad'd put dirt in your face in a minute. He'll kill me for saying it, but I remember when I was in the fourth or fifth grade and it was the first day of school and we were supposed to introduce ourselves to the class. I stood up and said, 'My name's Steve Kinser, and my dad drives race cars, drinks beer and like to fight.'"

During the Eighties and into the Nineties, Bob was best known as the pilot of the Bayless brothers sprinter number 17. In fact, it was in their car that Bob won a United States Auto Club (USAC) main event in 1985 at Bloomington over a field including Jack Hewitt, Rick Hood, Sheldon Kinser, Larry Rice, Steve Butler, Randy Kinser, Andy Stapp, Rich Vogler, Kevin Huntley and Steve Chassey.

During the 1970's, '80s and '90s, Bob has competed in a wide variety of sprint car races, from open competition to those of the following sanctions: American Speed Association (ASA), IMCA, Midwest Outlaw Super Series (MOSS), All Star Circuit of Champions (ASCoC), California Racing Association (CRA), USAC, and World of Outlaws (WoO). Bob's last race was aboard the Casey's General Stores number 47 in the 1996 "Goodyear Masters Classic" at Knoxville. In 1981, Bob Kinser was elected to the Hoosier Auto Racing Fans (HARF) Hall of Fame.

Despite Bob's steel blue eyes, stone-faced scowl, massive size and his quick temper, he was and still is a truly good-hearted man with a great sense of humor and a genuine love of people, especially his family and friends. Said he, "There really wasn't near so much fightin' as everybody says. But there was a few fights there." Today, Bob, who lives with Mahala in Bloomington, spends his time with kids and grandchildren. He is especially enjoying his time mentoring Steve's son Kraig in mini-sprint competition in the Midwest.



Bob Kinser John Mahoney Photo



Bob Kinser

Bruce Craig Photos