

EDDIE SACHS



Eddie Sachs

Bruce Craig Photos

Eddie Sachs 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 the 1958 United States Auto Club (USAC) Midwest point championship.

Edward Julius Sachs was born in Allentown (Penna.) on May 28, 1927. His parents were divorced when he was five years old, and Eddie was raised by his father, a traveling salesman, in Greensboro (N.C.) and his grandmother back in Allentown.

Eddie went to Edwards Military Institute in Salemburg (N.C.), and graduated in 1946. He enlisted in the Navy, although he was released after nearly being crushed to death by truck backing up to a loading dock. In 1948, Eddie went to the 'big car' races at the Greensboro (N.C.) Fairgrounds after seeing an ad in the paper. He snuck into the pits and met driver "Dutch" Culp from Allentown. Sachs stayed in Culp's pit all day, and soon decided that he wanted to follow in Culp's footsteps on the way to racing fame and fortune.

The naturally happy-go-lucky Sachs withdrew from college, packed his bags and followed Culp from the next race in Raleigh (N.C.) to the season-ender at the legendary Williams Grove Speedway in Mechanicsburg (Penna.). Unfortunately, the event was rained out and suddenly the college dropout was left in Allentown with no job and no money.

Sachs made it through the winter of 1948-49, and in the spring, he began following the American Automobile Association (AAA) 'big car' circuit again. However, someone directed him to the class 'B' circuit, where he would have a better shot at landing a ride. Eventually Eddie was given an opportunity to drive a 'big car' owned by a friend of Charlie Sacks at a race track in Gratz (Penna.). Unfortunately, Eddie failed in his two attempts that day to show his driving talents.

A determined Eddie Sachs then began showing up at class 'B' midget events, up and down the East coast trying to con his way into rides. After a year and a half of that routine, and becoming a pretty good class 'B' midget driver, Eddie got his first ride in an Offenhauser-powered midget. After another dubious debut and resultant hospital stay, Eddie became a pretty fair midget racer and he was even landing regular 'big car' rides.

In 1951, he raced 'big cars' in the East, then late in the year he hauled to the Midwest and eventually all the way out to the Pacific coast. While at Lujie Lesovsky's shop, Sachs was called upon to drive a championship car at the Arizona State Fairgrounds in Phoenix. Again, a crash ended his day prematurely, but he wasn't deterred. At the Indianapolis (Ind.) Motor Speedway the next May, Sachs attempted to get a ride without having any pit credentials. When he was thrown out, brash Eddie responded, "I'll be back. Remember the name, Eddie Sachs!"

And while the slender and prematurely balding Sachs flunked his Indy rookie tests in 1953, '54 and '55, he was smart enough to take his steadily improving 'big car' racing abilities to the most visible venues possible, the high banks of Salem (Ind.), Winchester (Ind.) and Dayton (Ohio). The 'hills' were the domain of some of the bravest sprint car drivers in racing, namely Pat O'Connor, Bob Sweikert, Mike Nazaruk, Larry Crockett, and Duane "Pappy" Carter, Sr. He was also getting chances to race the championship cars on the mile tracks, debuting at Sacramento (Calif.) in '53.

In 1954, Eddie Sachs challenged the best of the AAA Midwestern division and finished second in the point championship to defending titlist Pat O'Connor. Trailing them at the end of the season were Nazaruk, Carter, Sweikert, and Crockett. At season's end, Sachs spoke out about the poor safety conditions and skimpy purses, and was suspended by AAA. He was later reinstated only after submitting a formal apology.

The following season, the boastful Sachs backed up his words with another runner-up placing, this time to Bob Sweikert. Following them in the '55 points were O'Connor, Andy Linden, and Carter.

1956 was a landmark year for Sachs as he passed his Indy rookie test and was first alternate for the '500', he won his first championship car event at Lakewood Speedway in Atlanta (Ga.), and he again finished second aboard the Bill Cheesman Offy to Pat O'Connor in the Bob Estes machine in the tough USAC Midwestern division points. Sachs' victories came at Winchester twice, New Bremen (Ohio) and Salem. In addition, Eddie was starting to spend some time driving USAC midgets.

Sachs had another good year going in 1957, as he qualified on the front row for the Indy 500. However, in August, he was severely injured in a midget crash at the 16th Street Speedway and he wound up spending four months in the hospital. The Center Valley (Penna.) resident, who owned a tavern and a motel there, made only six sprint car starts that year, yet finished tenth in the Midwestern points.

1958 was perhaps Eddie's greatest racing season, finally clinching the USAC Midwest championship with four wins at Salem twice, Terre Haute (Ind.) and New Bremen. Following Sachs for the title were A.J. Foyt, Elmer George, Don Branson, and Rex Easton. The "Clown Prince of Auto Racing" also took fourth place in the Eastern points with a win in the Cheesman Offy at Williams Grove. He finished behind champion Johnny Thomson, Van Johnson, and Fred "Jiggs" Peters in the East. Sachs also led the Indy 500 in '58, although he finished 22nd, and he won the Langhorne (Penna.) and Hoosier Hundred championship car races.

He was back on the front row of Indy in 1959, and he won champ races at Syracuse (N.Y.) and Trenton (N.J.). He also finished second to champion Tommy Hinnershitz aboard John Pfrommer's sprinter in USAC's Eastern division points, winning at the legendary Reading (Penna.) Fairgrounds in the Peter Schmidt Offy. In the Midwest, Sachs finished fourth behind Branson, Foyt and Bud Tingelstad.

1960 was Sachs' last year competing in the sprint car division, and he finished fifth in the East and tenth in the Midwest aboard Wally Meskowski's Competition Engineering machine. He also won the Trenton championship car event again.

From 1961 until his tragic death (with Dave MacDonald) at Indy on May 30, 1964, Eddie kept adding to his credentials - winning two more championship races at Trenton, winning two USAC stock car events at Milwaukee (Wisc.), and finishing second in the '61 national championship point standings on the strength of his near-win at Indy in the Dean Van Lines Special. Sadly, at the time of his death, he was living comfortably in a Detroit (Mich.) suburb with his second wife Nance and their son Eddie Sachs, Jr., and people were finally paying attention to his proclamation... "I'm the greatest race driver in the world!"