

NATIONAL SPRINT CAR HALL of FAME & MUSEUM

BUD CARSON

by Galen Kurth

Bud R. Carson, who was born on December 2, 1926, worked as a civil engineer for the State Fair of Oklahoma, but a desire to find healthy, family-oriented fun for his sons lead him to a lifetime involvement with auto racing. He was looking for a project for the boys to get involved with in 1954, and became interested in the Soap Box Derby. But, before it was over, he helped create the largest Soap Box Derby event in the world.

His success with that promotion caused a group of drag racing enthusiasts to approach Bud in 1955 with a plan for a drag strip on the grounds of the State Fair in Oklahoma City. He got the project approved and built, and within a few years, the drag strip hosted one of the first National Hot Rod Association (NHRA) U.S. Nationals events.

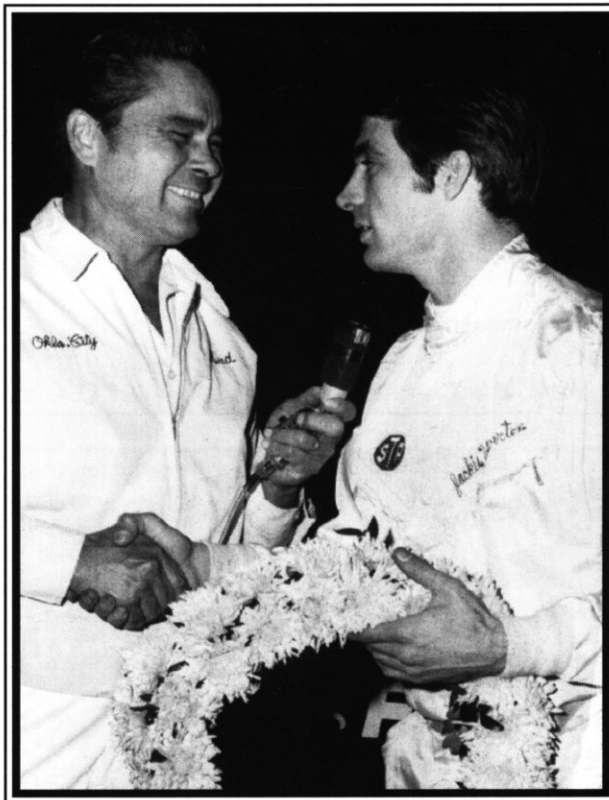
In 1957, Carson turned his attention to oval track racing with Tom Fitzpatrick. Bud and his wife, Mary, created MAR-CAR to promote racing at Oklahoma City's State Fairgrounds Speedway. Initially, they competed with the Ray Lavelly-promoted races at Taft Stadium, but when Lavelly left for California, the way was open for MAR-CAR to take over the Taft operation, too.

For several years in the late Fifties and early Sixties, Carson split the shows between Taft and the State Fair track. By 1964, the cars had gotten too fast and the fields too big for Taft, so everything was moved to the half- and quarter-mile Fairgrounds tracks.

In 1967, Bud Carson and his MAR-CAR, Inc., team became the third promotional affiliate for the International Motor Contest Association (IMCA), alongside Frank Winkley's Auto Racing, Inc., and Al Sweeney's National Speedways, Inc., circuits. Sprint cars and late model stock cars were IMCA's premier touring divisions. Bud continued promoting the modified and super-modified divisions at the local level, in addition to special events featuring midget cars, motorcycles and more.

High costs pushed Carson out of track promotion in the mid-1970's, but even then, he staged independent monthly races for "low-buck" classes. He looked to bring back the racers who had been forced out by the cost of racing. "As the costs have gone up, the fun in racing has decreased," Carson stated. "I want everybody who comes through the pit gate to have a smile on his face. If you can't have fun in racing, I don't want to do it."

The State Fair called on Bud to again promote the weekly races when the man who had leased the track had



Bud Carson (Left)

Galen Kurth Collection

to give them up in 1986. Car counts were down and crowds were low. Carson made the necessary changes and rebuilt the program, being credited by many with literally saving racing in Oklahoma City. He continued as promoter at the twin speedways until his death in 1991, building a program that was acknowledged as one of the best in the country. In 1989 and '90, Carson and State Fair Speedway won regional promotional honors and he told a reporter at the time that the key to the track's success was, "the crew and the desire. The desire to do an excellent job."

Announcer Jack Miller got his first auto racing job with Carson and he well remembers the desire for excellence. "Bud asked me if I'd like to try announcing the auto races, but before I could take the microphone, I had to do every job at

that track. I worked the pit gate, signing in cars. I was in the flag stand. I even worked with the medics on the ambulance. Everyone had to know every job at that track. It made me a much better announcer and made everyone else better at their jobs."

Carson's influence extended far beyond Oklahoma City. He was a founder and the first president of the National Championship Racing Association (NCRA), which combined the efforts of several tracks in Oklahoma, Kansas, Texas, and Louisiana. A common set of rules and a set of "national" races built a series that dominated the region and helped make stars of drivers like Harold Leep and Emmett Hahn.

One of Carson's major beliefs as a promoter was co-operation with other promoters. He wouldn't promote against another track's big shows, and frequently shuffled his own schedule to permit "his" drivers to compete at another speedway. His primary principle, however, was that local racing had to remain affordable. In an interview shortly before his death, Carson was asked about the future of local racing. He replied: "I don't think there is any limit to the future in racing. As a sport on a local level, it always has its devotees. As long as we approach this thing with the idea that every race cannot be a reproduction of the Indianapolis 500 or Daytona 500, and keep it affordable where people can get into it, there will be racing."

Bud Carson passed away in October of 1991. The Carson name continues in auto racing, of course, in the person of Bud's son, Shane, who is an NCRA and World of Outlaws (WoO) veteran and the present leader of MAR-CAR.

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