

NATIONAL SPRINT CAR HALL of FAME & MUSEUM

DON MACK

Don Mack was born on July 6, 1939, in Grand Forks, North Dakota, to parents Frank and Marie Mack. He had three brothers, Dave Dennis, and Linus, and two sisters, Karen and Jane.

Don, an ex-football player, went to an auto race in 1959 at the local Grand Forks dirt track and proceeded to buy his own B-modified. Mack started racing at the dirt tracks of Grand Forks, and Glyndon, Minn. It wasn't long before he was one of the area's top super-modified/sprint racers.

According to Don's owner/mechanic for eighteen years, Doug Howells of Hunter, N.D.,

"Don started driving for us in 1963. We always kinda traveled around home. We went to South Dakota, Kansas, and Iowa. There wasn't any Outlaw deal back then, but if there was a special show that paid pretty well, we were there. We raced local tracks like Grand Forks and Glyndon. That was 250-300 miles from our place, but we raced there quite a bit. We raced at North Star Speedway in St. Paul, Minn., and when they built that Hartford track near Sioux Falls, S.D., we raced there."

Mack was regularly winning races and championships at Minot, Grand Forks and Glyndon in the mid-to late Sixties. In 1966, Don finished second to Russ Laursen in the super-modified points at the Twin City Speedway in Blaine, Minn. He was even defeating the traveling international Motor Contest Association (IMCA) hot-shoes, nabbing wins at Huron, S.D., in 1966, and Owatonna, Minn., in '67. Said Howells, "We didn't really follow their whole circuit. We just ran with them when they were close to our place."

In '68 Mack finished eleventh in IMCA points on the strength of four wins at Chippewa Falls, Wisc., Fargo (twice), and Huron with owner Max Campbell, and mechanic Howells.

The six-time Fargo champion and the six-time North Dakota super-modified champion made an all-out run for the IMCA point title in 1969 aboard the Campbell Chevy. He wound up the year tied with Jay Woodside as runners-up to titlist Darl Harrison. However, Mack claimed six wins in 28 events that year at Tampa, Fla., Chippewa Falls, Huron, Cedar Rapids, Iowa, Fargo, and Spencer, Iowa.

In 1970, Mack finished eleventh in IMCA points, again teamed with Max Campbell. He won once that year at Huron.

Throughout his career, Mack often found it hard to balance his work and his racing. Don, with his wife Janis and their children, successfully farmed 3000 acres of wheat, potatoes, barley, and sugar beets on the Minnesota side of the rich Red River Valley. It wasn't easy being gone from Tri-Mack Farms.

Mack backed off the IMCA fair circuit in the early Seventies. However, that didn't mean he quit traveling nor winning in the yellow, white, and red number 4 machine. He consistently put his Paul Leffler and Don Maxwell sprinters into victory lane at places like Minot,

second in the annual Cheater's Day race at the Sioux Empire Fairgrounds in Sioux Falls later that year.

About the same time, in the late Seventies, Don Mack and friend Hank Albers bought an Indy Car from Art Sugai and began looking for sponsorship support for an Indy 500 bid. It was a frustrating process as they saw firsthand the lack of opportunities at that time for successful short track racers. They eventually sold their car.

In the fall of 1979, Don's parents were killed in a highway automobile accident.



Don Mack

Palmer Berger Photo

In 1980, Don Mack and Doug Howells made a run at Ted Johnson's WoO tour. They ran the first 31 shows, but Don retired abruptly and surprisingly in late May at Earl Baltes' Eldora Speedway in Ohio. At the time, he was in the top five in WoO points. According to Doug, "Don had been talking about quitting for a couple of years. I guess when he realized he couldn't take care of this farming operation and still do the Outlaw deal, he just decided it was time."

Said Joanne Howells, "He always said that when he got to be forty he was going to quit. He quit in May and he turned forty that July. Over an eighteen year period, I don't think Don Mack

ever complained."

Grand Forks, Fargo, and Winnipeg, Manitoba. His competition came from racers like "Buck" Peterson, Henry "Hank" Albers, Gordy Lamb, and best friend Dave Skari, who was tragically killed at Fargo in 1974.

However, starting in 1976, the Mack/Howells combination started being more adventure-some, and it paid off in national headlines again. Don won the "St. Paul Golden 200" at the Minnesota State Fair on pavement in '76.

He followed it up with wins in both "Florida 500" sprint car races that were run at the asphalt Golden Gate Speedway near Tampa in 1977 and '78.

And, as an encore, Mack won the "Little 500" pavement race in Anderson, Ind., with relief driver Curt Kelley, in 1978. Clearly, this accomplished veteran could handle himself well in long-distance races on pavement.

And, in 1977 and '78, he was still winning events like the Dave Skari Memorial at Fargo, Thunder Bay, Buffalo River (Glyndon), North Starr (Blaine), Watertown, Hartford, and Fairmount. Don finished third in the first-ever World of Outlaws (WoO) show at Devil's Bowl in March of '78, and he lapped everyone but

Thus, the driving career was over for a man, who had won hundreds of features, yet flipped only six or eight times.

Don spoke about his long-time owner, mechanic and friend Doug Howells, "He was really the key to the whole thing. Doug is just about the best there is, especially in this part of the country."

Although he quit driving, Mack continued his involvement in sprint car racing by co-promoting the annual WoO stop at the Red River Valley Speedway in West Fargo with his long-time friend Hank Albers. He is currently co-promoter and managing partner of River Cities Speedway in Grand Forks, N.D. with Wayne Anderson.

And the Mack name has been carried proudly in the Red River Valley region throughout the Eighties and Nineties by Don's brother Linus, and sons Todd and Don Jr. ("Sonny"). Don and Janis also have two daughters, Kathy and Pam, twelve grandchildren and one great-grandchild.