

NATIONAL SPRINT CAR HALL of FAME & MUSEUM

EDDIE LEAVITT

Edward Richard Leavitt was born on December 24, 1942, in Independence, Mo., to Astor and Letha Leavitt. His parents operated a propane gas company.

As a youngster living on a farm in Grain Valley, Mo., Eddie had the typical inclinations of most kids his age; he had a thousand pets including skunks, snakes, squirrels, ponies, dogs, cats and more. After attending Grain Valley schools, Eddie graduated from the Wentworth Military Academy in Lexington, Mo. Eddie played first trumpet in their marching band and drum and bugle corps.

After school, Eddie worked for his parents before striking out on his own as a full-time truck driver. He lived in Kearney.

In 1956, Leavitt went to the Olympic Stadium in Kansas City to watch midget auto races. He fell in love with the sport.

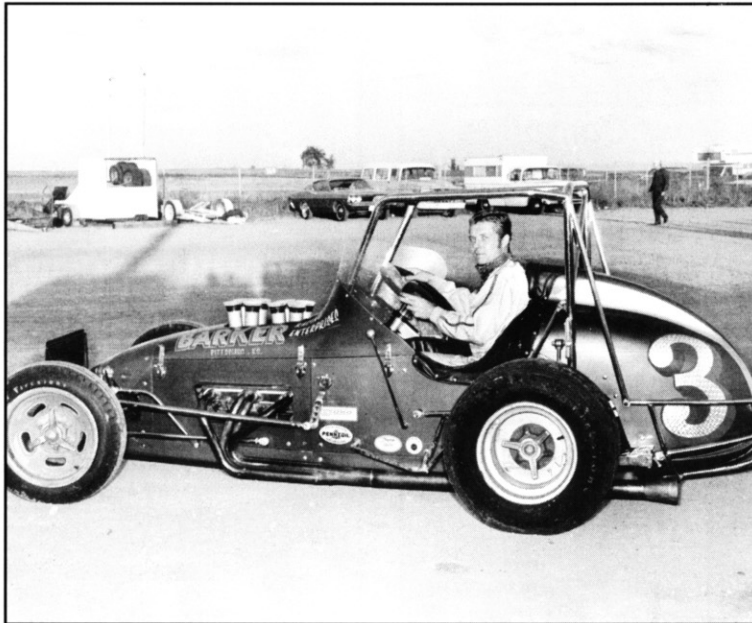
In May of 1962, he and friend Pat Patterson began building his first race car. By August it was ready to go. Leavitt recalled that he raced for the remainder of the year and all the next year at the Olympic and Riverside Stadiums, and he never completed a race. In '64, Eddie received six dollars at the first race of the season. He wanted to keep and frame it, but soon realized he needed gas money to get back home.

Eddie bought a better car with a better engine in 1965, and he started winning heats and 'B' main events. Finishes in the top three were becoming commonplace by '67 and he occasionally saw victory lane after a main event.

It was during the late Sixties that Eddie started doing a little racing with the International Motor Contest Association (IMCA), and traveling up to Knoxville Raceway in Iowa. In 1969, he won at Holts Summit, Topeka (2), and Knoxville.

In 1970, Eddie drove the Don Brown-built Keith Barker Chevrolet to two wins at Tampa, Fla., and Topeka, Ks., and a fifth place finish in IMCA points. John Singer was the mechanic on the car that year in which Leavitt claimed IMCA's "Most Improved Driver" award. He also won at Knoxville (3), Sedalia, Marshall, Eagle, and the Jayhawk Nationals at Topeka.

Leavitt finished third in 1971 points behind Jerry Blundy and Dick Sutcliffe, and he captured three IMCA wins at Tampa, Des Moines, Iowa, and Oklahoma City, Okla. That year he won IMCA's "Sportsman of the Year" award while still driving for Keith Barker of Minden Mnies, Mo. Eddie also finished third in that year's Knoxville Nationals behind Jan Opperman and Earl Wagner.



Eddie Leavitt

John Mahoney

In 1972, Eddie finished eleventh in the IMCA points, and was fourth in the Smith number 44 machine at the Knoxville Nationals behind Kenny Weld, Billy Shuman, and Lonnie Jensen. He also won twice at Knoxville and twice at Topeka.

Eddie did not qualify for the Knoxville Nationals A-main in 1973 in the Moulin number 1x sprinter, although he did win two races at Knoxville and the Third-mile Nationals at Eagle. He finished fifth at the Western World Championships at Manzanita Speedway in Phoenix, Ariz.

In 1974, Leavitt finished seventh in IMCA points. He also placed ninth in the Knoxville Nationals aboard the Smith 44, and he won the Cheater's Day race at Souix Falls.

Eddie Leavitt won the 1975 Knoxville Nationals aboard the Roger Beck-built R&H (Ricke & Hill) Farms black number 40 sprint car. He led the 30-lap race, part of sprint car racing's "triple crown," from start to finish and earned \$3,000. He collected other wins that year at Midwest, Lincoln, Sedalia, and the Jerry Weld Memorial at Lakeside, and four shows at Knoxville.

One year later, Leavitt successfully defended his Knoxville Nationals crown driving the Don Maxwell-built, Fred Aden-owned Galdeen number 4J machine. He won \$4,000 for the 1976 win. He also won at Des Moines (2), Eagle and Knoxville (5). Leavitt finished fifth at the Pacific Coast Championships at Ascot Park that year.

In 1977, Eddie Leavitt made a tough decision to race full-time for Don Siebert and the Siebert Olds team of Shelbyville, Ind. Don owned a dirt sprint car, asphalt sprinter and a dirt championship car, and they all were wrenched by Jim McQueen. For his efforts in 23 races on the tough United States Auto Club (USAC) circuit, Leavitt was rewarded

with a win in Rossburg, Ohio, Sixteenth place in points and the USAC "Rookie of the Year" award. He also finished 20th in the USAC Dirt Car points while driving for Siebert. On the way to the Knoxville Nationals, they won the Jayhawk Nationals at Lakeside. And they finished eighth in the Western and seventh in the Pacific Coast.

Leavitt made nine USAC sprint car starts for Siebert in 1978, earning one win at Reading, Penn. Leavitt completed the season driving the Dick Morris-owned number 49 car, winning at Knoxville, Oskaloosa and Grand Prairie, Tex. He also finished third in the Knoxville Nationals behind Doug Wolfgang and Steve Kinser.

Eddie drove for Morris again in '79 winning at Hartford, Denver and Albuquerque.

In 1980, Eddie Leavitt finished fifth on the Phoenix mile, then beat Lealand McSpadden at Manzy in the Gibson/Robbins number 2x sprinter. Rim-riding Eddie won the prestigious USAC-sanctioned Tony Hulman Classic at the Action Track in Terre Haute, Ind., while driving for "Boston Louie" Seymour. He also drove the Max Rogers number 49 car to wins at Knoxville and Sedalia.

1981 saw Eddie Leavitt making thirteen USAC sprint car starts for Bill King/Bill Powers and winning twice at Fremont, Ohio, and Charlestown, Ind., in the Joe James/Pat O'Connor Memorial. The USAC Silver Crown Series for dirt championship cars also fell victim to Eddie Leavitt in July of 1981 at Williams Grove Speedway in Mechanicsburg, Penn. Leavitt was wheeling the Commercial Truck Components car.

From 1982 until 1985, Eddie Leavitt made a handful of USAC sprint car and dirt championship car starts, his last at the Indy Mile for Louis Seymour in May of '85.

In 1984, Leavitt was inducted into the Knoxville Raceway Hall of Fame on the strength of his 21 Knoxville feature wins and his ten Nationals A-main starts in 16 attempts. Those included seven top 10 finishes, his fifty laps led, and his two back-to-back wins.

According to mechanic John Singer, "Eddie was a good race driver. He didn't tear your stuff up. He'd make you money."

Eddie continues to live in Kearney, Mo., today, and he frequently visits his children Mary, Vicki, and Eddie Jr., who follows in his father's footsteps by racing weekly at Knoxville Raceway.