

# NATIONAL SPRINT CAR HALL of FAME & MUSEUM

## DICK “TOBY” TOBIAS

Richard Lincoln Tobias was born on February 12, 1932, in Lebanon County, Pennsylvania. His father took a young Dick and his brothers to watch the races at the Lebanon Fairgrounds, and since that time it became Dick's mission in life to be a racer. In elementary school, Dick fulfilled that dream with his bicycle in his neighborhood in Lebanon.

In high school, Dick was an outstanding athlete in both football and track-and-field. In fact, he was offered a football scholarship at the Wyomissing Polytechnical Institute of Technology, which is now an extension of Penn State. However, hard times forced “Toby”, a nickname given to him by his older brother/United Racing Club (URC) driver Lawrence, to go out and work to help support his family. The nickname was given him by his older brother Lawrence, a Keystone Roadster Racing Association driver at the Zellars Grove and Hilltop speedways in and around Myerstown (Penna.).

Toby entered his first race in 1950 at the old Hilltop Speedway and he won in his very first outing. As he recalled, “I was so afraid the others would run over me, so I closed my eyes and put my foot in it. When I opened them, I found myself in front of the pack!”

This early career was short-lived, as he ran about a dozen races before he entered the service as a fireman in the U.S. Navy in 1951. Upon his return in 1954, Dick married Mary Heisey, a girl whom he had met at a skating rink. Since then, the Tobias household has grown to include Ronnie, Debbie, Scott, Tina and Richard (Jr.)

In addition to his vows of marriage, Toby also promised his wife that he would never race again. Less than a year later, that second promise was broken as Dick became a protege of American Automobile Association (AAA) “big car” racer Mark Light, also of Lebanon. Dick drove the Bill Gettle number 17, primarily at the Williams Grove (Mechanicsburg) and Circle M (Auburn) tracks in Central Pennsylvania. However, he also campaigned throughout the circuit, and in 1958 he ventured and won regularly at the Nazareth Speedway in Eastern Pennsylvania. In fact, he won so many races at the Nazareth half-mile that his fellow racers petitioned the promoter to have Toby banned from competition there.

In 1959, Tobias won his first track championship at the Port Royal Speedway while driving the Regester Chevrolet modified against his future friendly rival Leroy Felty. Dick repeated the Port title the following season, and he also finished second to Don “Dutch” Hoag in the year-ending classic at Langhorne (Penna.). In 1961, Toby won fourteen championships and finished second in both point championships at the ‘Grove and the Port, and he also was bridesmaid to Bobby Malzahn in the Langhorne 100-miler.

In 1962, Toby won only six features all season, yet he managed to finish fourth in points at the ‘Grove behind Johnny Mackison (Sr.), Felty and Bobby Hersh. 1962 also marked the opening of Tobias Speed Equipment in Lebanon, which is still going strong today.

Toby was extremely consistent in ‘63, and it paid off with the Selinsgrove Speedway and Williams Grove Speedway track titles in his lightweight 30 by 90. He also finished third in the Reading Fairgrounds opener behind Al Tasnady and Frankie Schneider that year, which is when big-block modifieds, or “heavies”, replaced jalopies on the weekly card.

In 1964, Dick Toby Tobias experienced the best year of his career when he teamed up with owner Roy “Shorty” Emrich and mechanic Davey Brown (Sr.) on the Cumberland Valley Racing Association super-modified circuit. At Selinsgrove, they won 17 of 22

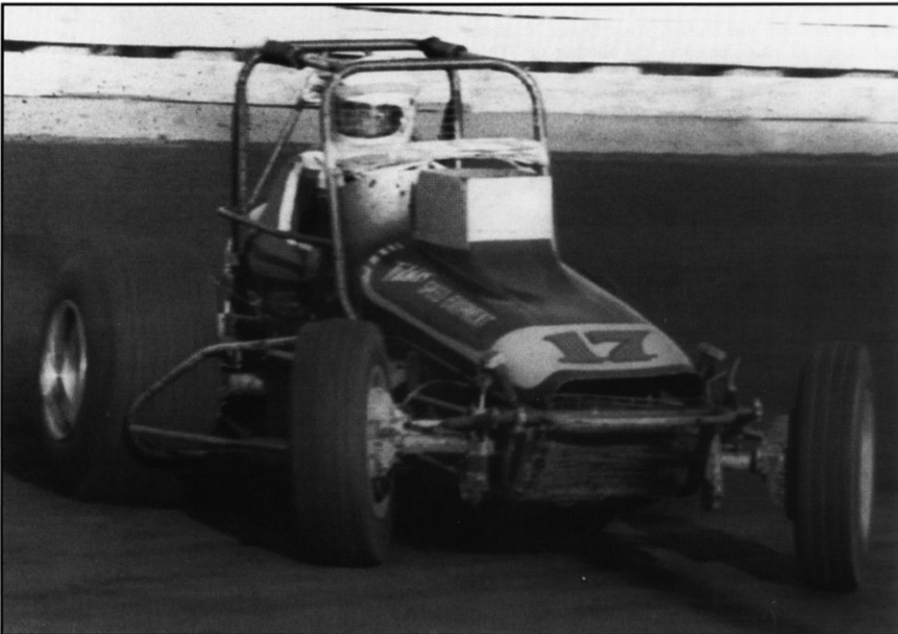
features, co-winning the track title with Leroy Felty. At Williams Grove, they won another twelve mains and co-won that title with Gene Goodling. They also won five shows and finished the season third at Susquehanna behind Goodling and Milford Wales. Their other two wins that season came at Port Royal, giving them a total of 36 checkered.

Tobias and Brown switched over to the “heavy” modifieds of Eastern Pennsylvania in 1965, teaming with car owner A.T. Consoli. After a slow start, the team clicked off five straight wins at Reading, and won other shows at Hatfield, Nazareth and Port Royal in Pennsylvania and at the Victory Speedway on the Orange County Fairgrounds in New York. It is interesting to note that Tobias won at Reading with the “heavies” and at the Port with the “supers” with the same revolutionary car. 1965 was also the year that the Dick Tobias Fan Club was formed.

In ‘66 Dick ran the Consoli car at Reading on Fridays and Harmony (N.J.) on Sundays, and the Regester super-modified at Port Royal on Saturdays. He won fourteen times that summer and finished second to champion Pete Swarmer in Port Royal points. The following year, Toby won the point title at Reading, was leading in points at Harmony when it closed in mid-season, and he finished second in points to Gerald Chamberlain on the asphalt at Hershey Stadium. It was at Hershey that he won four times with a cut-down ex-Troy Ruttman champ car.

Tobias, ever the innovator, built a new modified for Reading's Friday and Sunday night schedule in 1968. Mid-year rules didn't slow him down, though, as he won the two nights' titles by finishing in 41 of 44 races.

In 1969, at Reading, Dick Tobias tried his hand for the first time in a full-caged United Racing Club (URC) sprint, which was owned by Russ Ruppert. Toby won his heat and the 25-lap feature! It also marked a turning point for Dick, as he went on to win seven out of ten races with URC and another 30-lap open competition sprint car race at Reading. He also won five modified stock car that year at Reading. By the end of the Sixties, Dick had also been recognized as the most popular owner/driver at a variety of tracks: Williams Grove (1964), Hershey (1967), Reading (1968). For the most part, Toby moved on to United States Auto Club (USAC) competition in the Seventies.



Dick “Toby” Tobias

(Mel Stettler Photo)

( Dick “Toby” Tobias Bio Continued Below )

### Dick “Toby” Tobias Cont.

Because of his growing speed shop and chassis business, Toby saw limited USAC action in 1972, making just nine starts in sprint car competition (22nd in



Dick “Toby” Tobias

(Bruce Craig Photos)

points) and two starts in dirt champ cars (12th at Springfield and 19th at DuQuoin). And the following year, after a misunderstanding over registration procedures, he made even less USAC starts. Instead, he returned to his roots in Central Pennsy modified and super-sprint action and it was as if he had never been away. He won twenty features overall in 1973, including one in his first time back to the modifieds at Reading and one in the Ruppert sprint at Harrington (Del.). He won the “Daniel Boone 200” at Reading that year, too. On September 16, 1973, he ran the “Delaware 500” NASCAR Winston Cup Grand National race at Dover (Del.) Downs International Speedway, finishing 38th aboard the Norris Reed 1971 Mercury.

Toby continued racing Northeast modifieds in the mid-to late Seventies, winning many of that sport's premier events, including the 1975 “Schaefer 100” at the New York State Fairgrounds in Syracuse (with Davey Brown, Sr.), the ‘76 “Daniel Boone 200” at Reading again, and the Labor Day ‘77 New York State Fair Championship race at Syracuse. He also continued running and winning in the open comp sprints, finishing third in points at Reading in ‘76 behind Bobby Allen and Steve Smith (Sr.) and capturing another win at Selinsgrove in ‘77. During this time, Dick also began promoting races at the Penn National Speedway in Grantville (Penna.). He often worked cooperatively with Keystone Auto Racing Speedways (KARS) promoter Jack Gunn on the scheduling of sprint car races.

Toby finished second to modified hotshoe Gary Balough in the 1977 “Schaefer 100” at Syracuse, which was actually rain-delayed until April of 1978. However, according to master mechanic Brown, “Toby got tired of the modifieds. He wanted to go

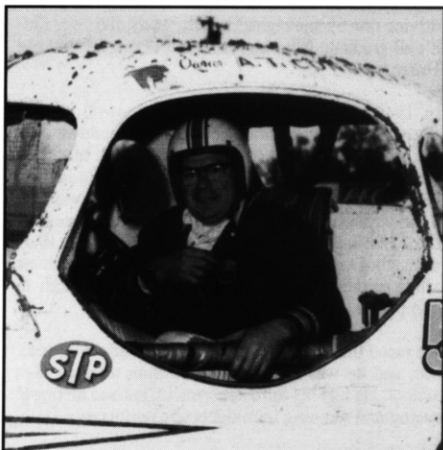
In 1970, Toby ran the Russ Ruppert-owned, Tobias Speed Equipment number 17 sprint car on the USAC national trail and he collected two wins in 14 starts: at Williams Grove in July and at Terre Haute (Ind.) in August. However, he broke his hip in a freak accident at Earl Baltes' Eldora Speedway in Ohio and was sidelined for the remainder of the season. Still, he wound up 13th in points and was named USAC “Sprint Car Rookie of the Year”. He also made two Illinois starts in their dirt championship car division, finishing 19th at Springfield and eighth at DuQuoin.

The next season with USAC, Tobias notched two wins again, this time in 18 starts with Ruppert of Dover (Penna.). The wins came at Reading in April and at the Knoxville (Iowa) Raceway on June 5th. He finished seventh in sprint car points behind Gary Bettenhausen, Larry Dickson, Rollie Beale, Sammy Sessions, Lee Kunzman and Don Nordhorn. He also ran one show each in 1971 in three other USAC national divisions: midget, dirt championship (11th at Nazareth in the Ruppert/Tobias/Windmill Truckers Center car) and stock car (10th in the “Pocono 500” super-speedway event as a teammate to champion Larry “Butch” Hartman).

1972 also marked a turning point for the East Coast Modifieds. At a rules meeting held by the Reading Stock Car Association (RSCA) in the winter of 1971-72, it was decided to allow homemade frames in the construction of the “heavies”, instead of the previously-used mid-50's Chevy frame rails. Reading star and Lebanon speed shop owner Tobias had seen the handwriting on the wall and had started to develop a workable modified frame unlike anything that had ever been used before. His idea was one that would eventually bring along many copiers and even start a cottage industry in itself, with open wheel people like Grant King and Kenny Weld getting involved. The chassis was as close to being the kind that supported a sprint car as was possible without it being a sprint chassis. Besides the influx of Tobias-style chassis, the popular coupe and coach body styles were being replaced with the use of the greatly-modified Gremlin, Pinto and Vega sheetmetal. The new rules were easily incorporated into Glenn Donnelly's fledgling Drivers Independent Race Tracks (DIRT) circuit in upstate New York, too.

USAC sprint car racing.”

Again, it was as if Tobias had never left the circuit, collecting two wins in just six starts. And those wins came on May 6th in the prestigious “Tony Hulman Classic” at Terre Haute and on May 26th at the Indiana State Fairgrounds in a 34-lapper. Tragically, six-time career USAC feature winner Dick “Toby” Tobias was killed on June 23, 1978, at the Flemington (N.J.) Speedway during a USAC sprint car event. Funeral services for the multi-time modified/sprint car champion were held at the Rohland Funeral Home on June 28 and interment was at Kochenderfer's Cemetery in Lebanon. Dick was posthumously inducted into the Pennsylvania Sports Hall of Fame in 1981 and the DIRT Motorsports Hall of Fame in 1992.



Dick “Toby” Tobias

(D.I.R.T. Motorsports Photos)