



Shane Carson

by Galen Kurth

Shane Carson started his auto racing career on a Friday the 13th, but it doesn't seem to have been a bad omen. That was in 1973. Thirty-four years later, he's still occasionally strapping into race cars, when his job as Industry Relations Coordinator of the World Racing Group allows.

When he first took to the quarter-mile track at the Oklahoma City State Fair Speedway, he already had one title to his name. He was the Oklahoma 125 cc amateur motocross champion, having started on bikes because you had to be 18 to race cars in those days. His father, 2003 National Sprint Car Hall of Fame inductee Bud Carson, was the promoter at State Fair Speedway in those days so there wasn't much chance of lying about his age, either.

Shane won his first feature a month later and his career was off and running. He was Rookie of the Year that season and then began racing at Tulsa in 1975. After finishing second in points in the modified division there, he moved up to sprint cars, racing all over the Midwest. His first tour was with LaVern Nance and included a 1977 win over Doug Wolfgang in Phenix City, Alabama. He spent part of that year running Nance's all-aluminum sprint. "We blew the motor at Knoxville, which probably saved my life," he recalled. Earl Wagner outlawed the car before anyone else young and brave enough tried to drive it.

In 1978, driving for Bob Trostle, he was the Knoxville Raceway titlist and champion of the National Speedways Contest Association (NSCA). He started 1979 driving the Loretta Lynn Special, which quickly became the Gambler Special. Just as quickly, he was back with Trostle. He set fast time at the Knoxville Nationals that year and then repeated as winner of perhaps the first real 'big money' World of Outlaws (WoO) race -- the \$10,000-to-win season-ending Busch Bash at Earl Baltes' Eldora Speedway. He'd taken the inaugural running in '78 with an old car and a lot of nitro running for the Nickles brothers, who got so excited they ruined their van jumping up and down on the roof as the laps wound down. Running the full World of Outlaws schedule didn't make sense for him at that time. "It's a battle. You've got to go to every race to keep up. The pressure is too high."

Promoting special events like the World of Outlaws appearances in Oklahoma City beginning in 1980 helped keep him off the road, but he's one of very few promoters who could make the main in their own shows. In his only two years of full-time World of Outlaws campaigning, he managed to finish third in the standings in 1982 and fifth in 1983.

Carson turned his attention to the National Championship Racing Association (NCRA) in the mid-1980s, staying closer to home to run their championship dirt cars. In 1985, he won their biggest race, the Hutchinson Nationals, in Pat Suchy's Gambler, and in 1986 he was the 100-inch dirt champ car season title-holder. He won the NCRA championship dirt car title over Mike Peters, Jon Johnson, Greg Wooley, and Larry Dewell, respectively.

Before the NCRA club switched to running 410-cubic-inch sprint cars, he'd amassed seventeen wins in the 100-inch cars. By far one of his biggest wins was at his 'home' track at State Fair Speedway, where he battled Rich Vogler for 50 laps in the USAC-NCRA Challenge Series show between the United States Auto Club and the National Championship Racing Association. Vogler had incited a near riot by launching NCRA star Jon Johnson over the fence on the opening lap, and after Carson hammered a slide job home to take the lead with less than five laps remaining, he could have at least been elected mayor of Oklahoma City on the spot.

When the NCRA shifted to sprint cars, Shane began a long relationship with Dallas car owner James Helms. The 125 car was a familiar sight near the front of any NCRA race. Between 1990 and 1999, Carson was only out of the top five in season points once; when he finished sixth in 1996. The pair also enjoyed some success on Emmett Hahn's American Sprint Car Series (ASCS) circuit, occasionally running the Speedweek series (winning the week-long title in '94) and events at Helms' home track, Lanny Edwards' Devil's Bowl Speedway in Mesquite, Texas.

Carson was one of the first of the 'big name' sprint car drivers to accept an invitation to run the winter circuit in Australia. Always a great ambassador for the sport, his success and popularity with the fans helped pave the way for what is now a common practice among America's top dirt track sprint car drivers.

When James Helms passed away in 2000, Shane's career took a turn. He was invited to become a 'ride along' instructor for the Richard Petty Driving Experience and spent the next several years carrying paying passengers around high-speed paved ovals. It was enormously satisfying to Carson that wherever he went, from Indianapolis to Bristol, Tennessee, to Daytona Beach, Florida, people recognized him. Said Shane, "The people knew who I was because I'd raced around there in sprint cars."

In 2005, the World of Outlaws called Carson back to the dirt track wars, not as a driver, but as their Vice President of Race Operations. As the organization moved from its identity with Ted Johnson to that of a major corporate entity with a ticker symbol on Wall Street, it was important that someone with Shane's lifetime ties to the sport, someone who is liked and respected by the drivers, owners, promoters and suppliers, be actively in charge of on-track operations. Today, the Charlotte-based World Racing Group is the umbrella organization for the WoO sprint car and dirt late model tours, the Super DIRTcar Series, and the United Midwestern Promoters (UMP) DIRTcar Racing organization.

Shane Carson has worked the track and sold programs at his father's promotions, sweated out paying the purse at his own, been his own crew chief and truck driver, and managed to finish in the top five in over half of the races he's ever started. That includes a win in the 2006 Masters Classic at Knoxville, so the figures aren't even all in yet. Shane was inducted into the Knoxville Raceway Hall of Fame in 2001.

If it has to do with sprint car racing, Shane Carson, who was born July 21, 1954, in Oklahoma City, has done it and done it exceptionally well. Shane, the son of Bud and Mary Carson, resides in Yukon, Oklahoma, with his wife Debbie and daughter Kristen, although he spends a fair amount of time at the World Racing Group headquarters in Concord, North Carolina, and on the road with the WoO Sprint Series.

Shane has three siblings: Scott (who raced supermodifieds and passed away in 1999), Steve and Kim.