



Emmett Shelley

Race driver, race car owner, race mechanic, racing secretary, and host to racers.

At one time or another all of these terms could have been applied to Emmett Shelley. He was a man who wore many hats in eastern auto racing circles.

Emmett T. Shelley was born to Bartram and Mary Alice Coder Shelley in Steelton, Pennsylvania, on December 20, 1900. Bartram owned the Central Hotel in Steelton (with his brother Kirk), the Steelton Bottling Works, and then the Hotel Wellington in Carlisle.

By 1930, auto salesman Emmett had married Thelma Aleen Matter and was living in Harrisburg. Eventually they had a daughter, Mary Jane.

Best known for his long stint as the "Racing Secretary" at the Williams Grove Speedway, Shelley's career in racing started well before "the Grove" was built.

A fan of the sport for some time, Shelley first became more involved in 1927 when he bought a Model T Fronty Ford racer. Shelley not only owned this car, but for a while he drove it himself.

Then he began hiring drivers to pilot his race cars. During the 1930s, he owned several "big cars" with his most successful driver being eastern standout Ottis Stine. Others who drove for car owner Shelley included Howard Roser, Bill Shoop, and Ted Kline. Shelley also did much of the mechanical work on his race cars.

Late in his career as a car owner, Shelley purchased the sprint car once owned by Ted Horn that had been driven during the 1947 season by Tommy Hinnerhitz. Shelley stretched the car to champ car specs and put Stine behind the wheel. Although, the combination never really got going very well, it was the last days of racing for one of the East's most famous cars.

In the late 1930s, Shelley was instrumental in convincing his good friend Roy Richwine to build a new modern speedway in Central Pennsylvania. Shelley saw the potential for a top race track in the area, and worked hand-in-hand with Richwine to build Williams Grove Speedway. The end product

was the Grove, which opened in May of 1939. Richwine named Shelley as his "Racing Secretary" and it was Shelley who was instrumental in gaining American Automobile Association (AAA) sanctions for racing at the Grove.

On a side note, just before Williams Grove opened for competition, one car took to the track to test the facility. The car was the big car owned by Shelley and piloted by Stine. Shelley owned the first race car to ever take laps around the Mechanicsburg, Penna., oval.

Shelley's job as racing secretary saw him booking the racing events at Williams Grove and traveling to other races to ensure that all the top drivers would be racing in the Grove's events.

Shelley worked for Richwine at Williams Grove from the time the track opened until Richwine passed away in 1960. He started the 1961 season working for Richwine's son, Bob Richwine, who took over operation of the speedway. However, early on, Emmett Shelley and Bob Richwine disagreed over the operation of the speedway, and Shelley stepped away from active involvement in the track's operation.

While he was always a part of the racing programs at Williams Grove, Shelley earned his living as the owner of the Wellington Hotel in Carlisle. It was a popular spot where most of the racers of the day stayed when racing at the Grove, as it offered gaming opportunities for its patrons. So, indeed, the proud member of the Carlisle Elks Lodge, Masonic Lodge and Zembo Shrine was host to many of the great racers of the era.

While Shelley stepped away from active involvement in the racing he didn't step away from racing at the Grove. He remained an interested spectator for the rest of his life, even as his eyesight and hearing were failing him.

In 1959, a year before Roy Richwine's death, Richwine and Shelley put together a large oldtimers event at the Grove. A large tent was erected outside

the first turn and many former racers attended. All sorts of racing memorabilia were on display in the 'Williams Grove Museum of Speed' and there were some plans to turn the old mansion outside turns one and two into a permanent museum. Both Shelley and Richwine were members of the Gettysburg Region of the Antique Automobile Club of America (AACA), and often offered use of the Williams Grove Amusement Park to the club for its social affairs.

Roy Richwine's death on August 9, 1960, put all those museum plans on hold, but they never really died in Shelley's mind. When Jack Gunn took over operation of the Grove, he and Shelley struck up quite a friendship. Most folks agree that it was Shelley, along with people like Lloyd King and Carl Sweigart, who convinced Gunn to form the Williams Grove Old Timers (WGOT) organization in the mid-1970s.

It was from this WGOT organization that the current Eastern Museum of Motor Racing (EMMR) and the restored fairgrounds at Latimore Valley were born. So, perhaps Shelley's dream of a museum at Williams Grove was finally realized, although it's a few miles down the road in York Springs, Penna.

Always known for a twinkle in his eye, a quick wit, and an ever-present cigar, Emmett Shelley spent most of his 77 years around eastern auto racing. He died in March of 1978 and left a void that has never been filled.

By Bryan Householder

Photo credit: Eastern Museum of Motor Racing Collection

CONGRATULATIONS INDUCTEES!

From The Team At



574-223-3016



**Bob's
CUSTOM
TROPHIES, INC**

OFFICIAL TROPHY COMPANY
FOR KNOXVILLE RACEWAY
34 YEARS RUNNING

216 W. Salem • Indianola, Iowa
(515) 961-7342 • Fax (515) 961-6377

www.bobscustomtrophies.com

**Trophies • Plaques • Medals
Rubber Stamps • Signs • Badges**

"Making Memories Since 1978"