

## GARY STANTON



Gary Stanton

Gary Stanton was born in Buffalo, New York, on October 8, 1944, to parents Peggy Cunningham and Richard Stanton. He has a brother, Dana, and a sister, Joy. As a youth, in Los Angeles Calif., and later Pheonix Ariz., Gary was always busy building things, from model airplanes to go-karts.

He began putting automobile racing engines together in 1964, and building super-modifieds and sprint cars in 1969. By '72 he was marketing them professionally under the business name of Stanton Racing Products.

In 1974, Ralph "Junior" Parkinson, Jr., missed the main at the Western States Sprint Car Championship at Stanton's hometown Manzanita Speedway. Phoenix friend Ronnie Shuman drove the Bill Boat-owned Lincoln Thrift sprinter at the '75 Western States show in the first four-bar sprinter that Gary ever built.

One of the first drivers to take a Stanton chassis out of the Southwest and win with it on a regular basis was Rick Ferkel of Ohio. Says Gary, "I owe a lot of my success to Rick. He put me on the map."

In 1976, Shuman finished second driving for Stanton in the prestigious Western States race at Manzy, and they won the Pacific Coast Championship at Ascot Park in Gardena, California. In those days, those two races, along with the Knoxville Nationals, formed the 'triple crown' of sprint car racing.

Fellow Phoenix racer Lealand McSpadden teamed with Stanton in 1977 to finish second at the Knoxville Nationals and third at the Pacific Coast.

In 1978, they scored a second at the Copper World Classic on the paved Phoenix mile, a third at the Tony Hulman Classic at the Terre Haute, Ind., Action Track, a fourth at the Florida Winternationals at East Bay Raceway, and they won a World of Outlaws (WoO) show at Ascot. According to Lealand, "Gary, of course, was and is a car builder. He did some traveling to give exposure to his products. We went to a lot of places and were always fast."

Also in '78, Shuman and Stanton swept the California Racing Association (CRA) weekend at the Imperial Valley Fairgrounds in El Centro, Calif.

1979 was a big year for the "Flying Shoe" and Stanton. Together they won over twenty main events, including the rich Knoxville National Sprint Car Championships, with the Auto Shack Special number 75 sprinter. Gary spent a lot of his time flying back-and-forth from his Phoenix shop to the races. Said Gary, "Between some of the drivers I had like Ronnie Shuman and Lealand McSpadden, we were successful. And I think that our design was part of our success."

1980 was a disappointing season for car owner/mechanic Gary Stanton, but builder Gary Stanton had an outstanding year. Drivers like Jimmy Oskie, Billy Shuman, Fred Linder, Wayne Bennet, Larry Clark, John Redican, Norman "Bubby" Jones, Shane Carson, Eddie Wirth, Wally Pankratz, Rip Williams, Clark Templeman, Duane Feduska and, of course, Ron Shuman were all wheeling Stanton-built machines at that fall's Pacific Coast Championships at J.C. Agajanian's Ascot Park. According to Brad Doty, "He was definitely one of the top (builders), back when I was driving for Bowers Coal. At that time, Gambler, Nance and Stanton were the three biggest builders. He was really big on the West Coast, where his cars won a lot of races."

An underfunded Stanton and Shuman went to Indianapolis in '80 with an ex-Roger Penske/Rick Mears PC6 Indy car, after having finished eleventh with it in the California 500 at the Ontario Motor Speedway earlier that spring. At Indy, they earned the 'Almost Made It Award' as it was their car that was sitting next in line to qualify when the gun went off on the final Sunday of qualifying.

Al Unser, Jr., won the CRA-sanctioned event at El Centro for Gary in 1981 during a period when they partnered and raced mostly in Arizona and California. Said Unser, who quit the ride in May of that year, "Me and Stanton just didn't mesh."

That year Stanton took WoO champion Steve Kinser to Indy, but Steve crashed at over 180 miles per hour on the day before qualifying. Again, Gary had no real budget to rebuild the car for time trials.

In 1981, Gary built his first dirt championship car utilizing the emerging lightweight technology. Said Stanton, "There was a guy out of Dallas, Texas, by the name of Bill King. He owned all the Brake-O stores, and we decided to go into a partnership, to build a dirt car. We hired Steve Kinser to drive, and won the first night out with it at the Don Branson Memorial at Eldora. Then we turned around and won the very next race (the Hulman Hundred) at the Indiana Fairgrounds."

It was during the early '80s that the Bill King/Gary Stanton partnership involved drivers such as Steve Kinser, Rickey Hood, and Doug Wolfgang. These hot-shoes drove the WoO sprint and United States Auto Club (USAC) dirt champ cars, making for one very busy Gary Stanton. Hood won at the Indy Mile, while Wolfgang won at Flemington, N.J. and Denver, Colo., on the USAC trail. In the sprints, Hood captured CRA checkered flags at Manzy, while Wolfie mastered the Jayhawk Nationals and the Gold Cup. Keith Kauffman drove for Gary, too, in 1983. Said Canadian sprint car pilot Lyn McIntosh at the time, "Guys like Doug Howells, Karl Kinser and Gary Stanton in the infield can tell you more about a car than the driver can - they're excellent people".

In the fall of '83, Doty and Stanton agreed to partner the following year. Their season together resulted in five wins at Lernerville, Santa Maria, Williams Grove twice, and Knoxville. 1984 was a time when Gary was extremely busy personally, and professionally with his shop in Phoenix and his team on the road. According to Doty, "He and his fiancée Beth were in love. Gary will admit that racing was secondary to him that summer. He and Beth made it a priority to have fun and enjoy life."

Gary's reorganization of Stanton Racing Products into Challenge Racing

## GARY STANTON, CONTINUED

Enterprises forced him to park his Doty-driven WoO sprinter in mid-1985. His new winged and non-winged Challengers were so successful that he eventually sold the business to Harrold Annett, a friend and fellow supporter of the United Sprint Association (USA). Gary and Beth also moved to a new home in Nicholasville, Ky.

Stanton spent the mid-Eighties back on the road with Ohio racers Dave Blaney and Jac Haudenschild, winning with Bert Emick's All Star Circuit of Champions and Ted Johnson's WoO troops. Stanton's number 40 machines also won many open competition affairs, including the 1987 King's Royal title at Eldora with "Haud" at the wheel. Jeff Gordon also drove for Stanton that year at the Knoxville Nationals, but missed the A-main.

In 1988, Stanton started the year out winning with Wolfgang again, but by mid-year Doty and "Wolfie" swapped rides. However, friend Brad Doty was paralyzed at Eldora in July of that year aboard Gary's sprinter in a terrible first-lap accident at the King's Royal championship.

For a variety of reasons, including Doty's injury and his five-year non-compete agreement with Annett's Challenge chassis business, Gary withdrew from the public spotlight of sprint car racing. However, Stanton used that time to build a thriving engine business, aptly titled Stanton Racing Engines.

Gary Stanton returned to active car owner status in May of 1994 with the debut of his radically-designed dirt championship car at the Indy Mile with driver Jimmy Sills. Sills set quick time and led every lap to win the USAC Silver Crown Series event with Stanton's chassis and engine. That year Stanton and Sills won two more events and captured the series' driver and owner titles.

Stanton partnered with Mopar Performance Parts and, following a year of development in 1995, won two more USAC Silver Crown events and their respective driver and owner point titles with Jimmy Sills in '96.

He also returned as a WoO sprint car owner that year with a new generation Chrysler engine and driver Randy

Hannagan. Following three seasons of development, engine-builder Gary Stanton and the father-son combination of owner/mechanic Karl Kinser and driver Mark Kinser celebrated with Team Mopar's first-ever WoO championship in 1999. They also dominated that year's National Sprint Car Poll awards, with Stanton and Team Mopar's Lee Carducci receiving the "Builder/Manufacturer of the Year" awards.

Since then, Gary continues to develop and build race - and championship-winning chassis, only for himself, and Mopar engines for Silver Crown, sprint, late model, and midget cars. The easy-going, fun-loving engine-builder lives in Nicholasville with wife Beth and 15-year-old son Tory. He has two grown daughters, Jenny and Tammy, still in Phoenix. His son Scott lost his life in an auto accident fourteen years ago.

Brad Doty probably sums up his friend's career best when he says, "Gary Stanton can build or create anything in a shorter time than anybody I've ever seen."