

NATIONAL SPRINT CAR HALL of FAME & MUSEUM

HIRAM HILLEGASS

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Although the identity of Hiram C. Hillegass may not have been known to thousands of race fans crowding eastern and midwestern speedways in the 1940's and 50's, his talents were responsible for more victories that any one driver could ever hope to achieve. Simply put, he built the cars and they drove to victory, and, in doing so, he joined the likes of Harry A. Miller, Frank Kurtis and others in that select fraternity of legendary race car fabricators.

Hiram started his career in sheet metal work for the Mack Manufacturing Corporation in 1910. He built his first race car in 1919. However, it wasn't until he was working in the experimental department for the Carrier Corporation in Syracuse (N.Y.) from 1935 until '41, did Hiram begin to produce a significant number of race cars. He was one of the first race car fabricators in the nation to utilize the concept of standardization of design and componentry. Hiram was capable of fulfilling the overwhelming demand for midget race cars during the "midget craze" of the pre-War and immediate post-War eras. Following his move to Allentown (Penna.) in the 1940's, Hiram's shop at 2435 South 4th Street (on

Route 309) became a mecca for those in the racing fraternity. Especially those who were seeking the precision and excellence of a hand-crafted 'big car' or midget that was capable of withstanding the enormous strains imposed upon the car by the sometimes less-than-perfect racing surfaces of the eastern and midwestern tracks. With the help of his longtime assistant Raymond Drumheller, Hiram produced cars that were equal to the task.

In the 1950's, Hiram began to emphasize sprint car production and the now-famous "Hillegass tube frame" sprinter became a standard of excellence throughout the nation. Drivers such as Tommy Hinnershitz, Deb Snyder and many other legends of the sport swore by their Hillegass sprint cars and drove them to victory time and time again. The cars not only won, but they lasted forever. Many Hillegass cars competed successfully for more than twenty years. The fact that cars such as Hinnershitz's "Miracle Power Special", Len Duncan's "Sacks Hal", and the "Dutch" Culp Offy and many others still survive and have been lovingly restored by their owners is a tribute to the craftsmanship of both Hiram Hillegass and Ray Drumheller. Hiram died in 1960.



Hiram Hillegass

(Bruce Craig Photos)

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