

NATIONAL SPRINT CAR HALL of FAME & MUSEUM

LEO GOOSSEN

Leo William Goossen was born in 1895 in Kalamazoo (Michigan) of Dutch immigrant parents. The Goossen family later moved to Flint (Mich.) where Leo got halfway through high school before his family's finances forced him to go to work.

Goossen went to work running the blueprint machine in the engineering department of the Buick Motor Division of General Motors. While at Buick, Leo continued his education at night school and soon was promoted to the drawing board as a draftsman.

After catching the eye of Buick's chief engineer E.A. de Waters, Goossen moved to Chattanooga (Tenn.) to work closely on design projects with Walter E. Marr. In January 1919, after a tubercular spot was detected on one of Leo's lungs, he was forced to move to the desert Southwest.

Following a short stint as a cow-hand near Silver City (New Mexico), the recuperating Goossen headed for Los Angeles and found employment with racing car and engine expert Harry A. Miller at the Miller Carburetor Company. Obviously his letter of recommendation from Walter P. Chrysler, then General Manager of Buick, helped him land the job. Clearly, though, his skill and engineering judgment allowed him to become Miller's chief designer/draftsman.

While with the impractical and visionary Miller, the shy and functional Goossen provided a perfect balance. His most noted designs included: Miller 183 c.i. formula straight 8 (1922); Miller 112 c.i. formula straight 8 (1923);

adaptation of supercharging to Miller engines (1924); Miller 91 c.i. formula straight 8 (1926); Miller 4-cylinder 151 c.i. marine engine (1926); Miller front-drive chassis and transmission (1927); Miller 4-cylinder 200 c.i. (1930); Miller 308 c.i. V-8 (1932); Miller four-wheel-drive chassis (1932); and Hartz-Miller 183 straight 8 (1932).

During that period, Goossen's car and engine designs were utilized by such champions as Pete DePaolo, Gus Schrader, Elbert "Babe" Stapp, Francis Quinn, Frank Lockhart, Ira Vail, Tommy Milton, Harry Hartz, Chet Gardner, Al Gordon, Bryan Saulpaugh, Louis Meyer, Sig Haugdahl, Charles "Dutch" Baumann, Ernie Triplett, Fred Frame and many, many others. Goossen's genius was his ability to design within someone else's framework of ideas.



Leo Goossen (Bruce Craig Collection)

Because of Harry A. Miller's deal in 1929, Goossen worked briefly for Schofield Manufacturing Company, where he laid out a DOHC conversion for the Model A Ford (mar-

keted as Cragar). He later rejoined Harry A. Miller, Inc., in the early Thirties, however, times were tough due to the Great Depression and his wife Vera's ill health. Vera died in February, 1935, not long after their daughter Marilyn was born in 1933.

On July 8, 1933, Miller's Los Angeles-based dynasty collapsed with involuntary bankruptcy, leaving unpaid debts to his many workers, including chief designer Goossen and shop foreman Fred Offenhauser.

Goossen began working for himself out of his home, although he did do free-lance work for Offenhauser after Fred acquired most of Miller's equipment and founded Offenhauser Engineering Company. Goossen's protege Everett Stevenson followed the downhearted Miller to the East Coast.

Goossen's noted designs during this period included Offy midget motor (1934); Thorne Six engine and chassis (1937); Lencki straight 6 engine (1938); Novi supercharged V-8 engine (1940); and Novi front-drive chassis (1946). He also did U.S. Army aircraft work during World War II.

In 1946, at age 68, Offenhauser sold his business to Louis Meyer and Dale Drake. Goossen then worked for Meyer-Drake as Chief Engineer. The "Offy" lived its greatest glory under Meyer-Drake, winning every Indy 500 from 1947 and 1965.

After '65, Goossen continued living in his modest home in L.A. and working at Drake

Engineering & Sales. In fact, he was working on the Drake-Goossen-Sparks (DGS) engine in 1974 when he died. Drake Engineering closed for good in December of 1979.