

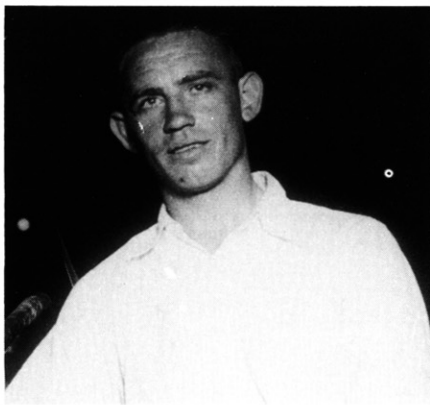
NATIONAL SPRINT CAR HALL of FAME & MUSEUM

ARTHUR SPARKS

Art Sparks, car builder and innovative engineer par excellence, began his career in the Roaring Twenties as a movie stuntman. He progressed, first as a driver and then (with partner Paul Weirick) as a builder, from California's dirt bullrings and Legion Ascot to the heady atmosphere of Indianapolis. His initial race car was built from a Model T flathead. Among his first drivers on the dirt were the legendary Bill Spence, Arvol Brunmier and Hartwell "Stubby" Stubblefield, plus three future Indy winners - Wilbur Shaw, Lou Schneider and Bill Cummings.

Sparks and Weirick had ordered a new Clyde Adams creation to house their new modified Miller motor. There were so many of Art's modifications that the engine was called a Sparks by most people, since its relationship to a conventional Miller was in exterior appearance only. Maybe not at first, but within a season or two on the dirt tracks, the car would earn

the nickname 'Poison Lil' and be piloted by such stars as Kelly Petillo and Al Gordon.



Arthur Sparks
Bruce Craig Collection

Art was vocal in his concern for driver/owner-related issues in the sport, particularly safety, and he was frequently at odds with Art Pillsbury and the AAA Contest Board.

At the Brickyard, Sparks cars had fastest qualifying times for five straight years; three of them were new track records. Later, his six-cylinder en-

gines pioneered superchargers and lightweight materials. Sparks' patented ForgedTrue pistons powered the winners (and most others) at Indy for 12 years in a row during the reign of the Offy roadsters. Also popular were valve springs of his design, in U.S. racing and Formula One as well.

When the turbo era arrived, Sparks gained lots of attention when he returned the mighty Offy to the Indy front row. Gordon Johncock drove his DGS (Drake-Goossen-Sparks) Offy to the National Championship in 1976 and came close to gaining his second Indy win.

Sparks felt that new rules imposing manifold pressure limits gave too much advantage to the Cosworth engines, and realized the Offy days had ended. "It was time," he said, "for both of us to take a rest." Sparks and the Offy had competed steadily for 50 years. Sparks is survived by his wife Thelma and sons Jack and Arthur.