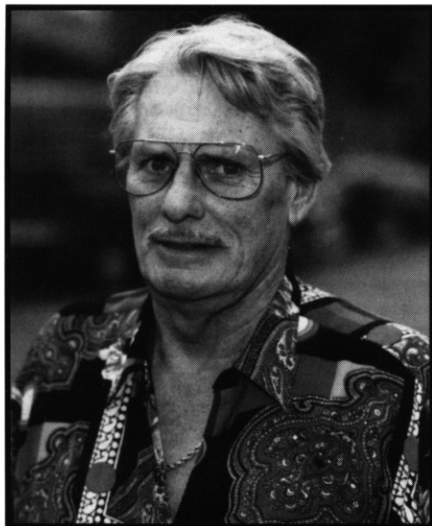


TED JOHNSON



Ted Johnson (Jim Cooper Photo)

Ted Johnson was born on February 5, 1934, in Beloit, (Wisc.). Growing up around Madison, he attended midget auto races as a teenager at the Angell Park Speedway in nearby Sun Prairie. In fact, he and friend Bill Horstmeyer both tried their hands at midget racing, although Ted's behind-the-wheel stint was a short-lived adventure. Unfortunately, Bill was killed in a United States Auto Club (USAC) dirt championship car crash at Springfield (Ill.) on August 22, 1964.

Johnson, who moved to Wichita Falls (Tex.), worked full-time as a travelling china importer and salesman. It was then, in the early 1970's, that he got enthused about sprint car racing after seeing a show at the Riverside Speedway in West Memphis (Ark.). It was a time when USAC was in it's prime, and their midget and sprint car divisions offered strict rules and demanded conformity and allegiance from owners and drivers on the trail to Indy. It was also a time when the traditional International Motor Contest Association (IMCA) fair dates in the Midwest were replaced by open competition, "run what you brung" shows at quarter-mile bull rings. Out East, C.H. "Bud" Miller had even organized the All Star Circuit of Champions in 1970 and '73, featuring drivers such as Ralph Quarteron, Bobby Allen, Jan Opperman, Rick Ferkel, Lee Osborne and Kenny Weld.

Ted Johnson, a gambler by nature and now an avid sprint car fan, made several attempts to promote big-

money, non-sanctioned races. Events were scheduled in the heart of the southland, like West Memphis, Mesquite (Tex.), Phenix City (Ala.) and Shreveport (La.). According to Ferkel, "The races were all flops at the box office, but Ted was such a big fan, I really think he did it just so he could see all the top guys racin' with each other.

The chain-smoking Johnson then started a short-lived race club called "The Racers" in 1974. As self-appointed agent, Johnson arranged deal money for several drivers, including Norman "Bubby" Jones, Ferkel, Larry Kirkpatrick and others. He also sold a few t-shirts, a form of souvenir that was quickly gaining popularity around the country with dirt track sprint car fans. After years informally consulting with people like Kirkpatrick, Jones, Opperman, LaVern Nance, John Kalb of Mecom-Kalb Firestone, "Scruffy" Bobby Allen, Dub May, Doug Wolfgang and Ferkel in the pits at Eldora or in the Arizona Barn at Knoxville, Ted Johnson founded the "World of Outlaws" in Florida in February of 1978. It was a catchy name that the newspapers, drivers, fans and promoters responded to in a big way.

And the concept was simple: drivers will pay ten dollars apiece as a membership fee to an organization that will only sanction sprint car races at tracks, in which the promoters pay \$2,000 or more to win, with a point fund to be paid to the "King of the Outlaws" and the other member drivers at the end of the season.

The first official WoO points race was held at friend Lanny Edwards' Devil's Bowl Speedway in Mesquite (Tex.) on March 18, 1978, and the 50-lapper was won by \$10-WoO-member Jimmy Boyd of Sacramento (Calif.). Kenny Woodruff owned and wrenched the non-winged Bob Trostle-built sprinter. And veteran publicist Bill Hill handled the track's media chores for that event, although it should be noted that the term "World of Outlaws" was never used in any pre-race or post-race publicity.

Noted videographer Jerry Clum arranged a meeting between Ted and legendary Eldora Speedway promoter Earl Baltes. And, after Earl agreed to pay Boyd and Woodruff \$500 in appearance money, races number two and three were scheduled for April 16 and 30. Allen and Ferkel won the successful events, respectively, and Ted Johnson and his World of Outlaws were off and running and they haven't stopped yet.

Steve Kinser, who had never met Johnson prior to their meeting in Mesquite, claimed the inaugural 41-race WoO point championship in 1978 over Ferkel, Allen, Doug Wolfgang and Jack Hewitt. While all were real racers before Ted put his "deal" in place, there is no question that his series is responsible for

elevating the careers of several sprint car superstars, including the "big three" in the 1980's and '90s of 14-time WoO champion Steve Kinser, 3-time champion Sammy Swindell, and the recently-retired Doug Wolfgang. Other champion drivers whose names will be forever linked with the famous 'four abreast salute' are Bobby Davis (Jr.), Dave Blaney, Mark Kinser, Ferkel, Lee James, Jeff Swindell, Shane Carson, Ron Shuman, Brad Doty, Allen, Jac Haudenschild, Tim Green, Joe Gaerte, Stevie Smith and Andy Hillenburg.

Indeed, their success in WoO competition and its visibility (thanks to publicity people like Bill Hill, Gary Guehler, and Richard Day) has afforded past champions Steve Kinser, Sammy Swindell, Dave Blaney and Mark Kinser the opportunities to explore other forms of major league motorsports such as the National Association for Stock Car Auto Racing (NASCAR), International Race of Champions (IROC) and the Indy Racing League (IRL). Conversely, drivers from NASCAR and Championship Auto Racing Teams (CART), such as Jeff Gordon, Kenny Schrader and Al Unser (Jr.) speak highly of their experiences in WoO racing, no matter how brief they were.

The hyper-active Johnson has worked hard in twenty years with promoters in order for the purses of WoO events to have increased substantially since 1978, with the single-day purse increasing from a total of \$8,815 to \$40,840. The winner's payout has increased from the minimum \$2,000-to-win in 1978 to the minimum \$7,000-to-win today. And the top World of Outlaws purse, \$660,000 total and \$100,000-to-win the Amoco Knoxville National Championships, continues to climb each year, thanks to the Marion County Fair Association.

In addition to the Ralph Capitani's Knoxville Nationals, the World of Outlaws still sanctions such annual championship events as Lanny Edwards' Devil's Bowl Spring & Winter Nationals, Earl Baltes' Eldora King's Royal, the late Don Martin's Lernerville Silver Cup, John Padjen's Chico Gold Cup Race of Champions, the late Jack Gunn's Williams Grove National Open, and Keith Hall's Manzanita Western World Championships. In all, the 20th anniversary season in 1998 will feature 72 events over 102 race dates at 47 facilities in 25 states and the WoO will pay out more than \$10 million in purses, contingencies and point fund awards.

At times in its 20-year history, the WoO series has been compared to a three-ring circus, with Ted and his directors of competition, Beryl Christian, Bobby Watson, Rick Ferkel and Bobby Jackson, as the ring leaders. That comparison, issued by "T.J." himself, probably isn't too far off, when one considers where

(Ted Johnson Bio Continues Below)

he has taken his 'regulars' in search of money and glory: from Winnipeg (Manitoba, Canada) to Ciudad Juarez (Mexico), from the Suncoast Dome to Devil's Bowl, from the asphalt of Lakeside Speedway to the oiled dirt of Butler Motor Speedway, from the bright MUSCO lights of the Marion County Fairgrounds to Smedley's Speedway in West Virginia, and from the Syracuse Mile to Little Springfield. During late '88 and all of 1989, the presence of the United Sprint Association (USA) brought rumors that Ted might be folding his tents. It didn't happen; in fact, it forced him to dig in and pitch his tents a little higher.

And although Ted Johnson wasn't the first to bring television to sprint car racing, as USAC's "Hulman Classic" was televised on ABC's "Wide World of Sports" for years, he certainly did increase its coverage. TNN: The Nashville Network, currently a marketing partner with Ted and the WoO, has covered the Knoxville Nationals since 1987 on a tape-delayed basis on its "American Sports Cavalcade" program, and offered it live since 1995 on its "Motor Madness" show. Eleven Pennzoil World of Outlaws Series events in 1998 will be televised on TNN.

During its twenty-year history, the World of Outlaws has truly changed the face of sprint car racing. Heavy, non-winged cars evolved into lightweight, high-tech radio-controlled winged machines that are seen by hundreds of thousands of people worldwide today. When Johnson said the WoO would run winged sprint car races exclusively in 1984, his decision was based on extending the lives of the cars themselves. It was later determined that winged sprinters were safer than their non-winged counterparts. The advent of the 25- square-foot top wing also enhanced the marketability of the division as the

cars resembled 'flying billboards'. Today, Ted Johnson is considering a minimum weight rule and chassis tubing thickness rule for the WoO in effort to control costs and increase safety.

Ted Johnson, and his directors of marketing Bob Baker (Jr.) and Dave Bowman, have worked diligently over the years to bring major corporate sponsors into sprint car racing. Among those who have played a large part in the WoO success story are U.S. Tobacco, Anheuser-Busch, Stroh Brewing, Allied-Signal, Goodyear Tire & Rubber, Smith Kline Beecham, Ecowater Systems, Pennzoil, and Channellock.

Through his efforts with the World of Outlaws, Ted Johnson is primarily responsible for the increasing growth and prosperity of sprint car racing in the last two decades. Today, the Pennzoil World of Outlaws Series staff in Plano (Tex.) includes Ted as president, his wife Stacy as vice-president, his son-in-law Carlton Reimers as director of administration, Richard Day as director of public relations, and Bobby Jackson as director of competition. Ted has three grown children from an earlier marriage: WoO secretary Lesa Reimers, Lori Wood and Ricky Johnson.

Ted Johnson, who was treated for lymphoma and low-grade leukemia in 1979 and lost a cancerous lung late last year, has been named sprint car racing's most powerful leader for the past eight consecutive years, according to the National Sprint Car Poll's voting panel of manufacturers, promoters, officials and media members. He has also shared the National Sprint Car Poll's "Outstanding Contribution to the Sport Award" in 1995 with peers Ralph Capitani, Mark Kuchan and Dave Bowman.

High praise for Ted and possibly the best prophecy for the World of Outlaws once came from an unlikely source. In 1978, when Ted needed all the support he could get, Keystone Auto Racing Speedways (KARS) promoter Jack Gunn was reluctant to jump aboard Ted's bandwagon. Yet, one year later, when asked about the fledgling WoO, Gunn responded, "It's not bad. It gives a guy who wants to travel a chance to travel. There are things I like about it. There are things I don't like about it, but it's been successful in it's first year. A fella from Ohio, 'Bud' Miller had the same idea a couple of years ago and it fell flat on it's face. I think the timing was right last year. Our generation today accepted the term 'outlaw'. Ted got a nucleus of good drivers in there like Ferkel, Wolfgang and Allen that don't mind traveling. And I think he's done a real good job with it in his first year. I'm hoping he can keep it going, because we had a void in sprint car racing. USAC had been confined to the Midwest and I think that had left somewhat of a void in the sprint car ranks. I personally admire the guy, because it's not an easy job. He has to do a lot of travelling, and make an awful lot of phone calls and so forth. He has to spend a lot of time with it and he has. I'm criticized for a lot of things I do and Ted Johnson is, too, and I know he's got a lot of problems. If he can keep this thing going the way it is, he's gonna have a good thing."

But possibly the highest praise for Ted comes from long-time friend Rick Ferkel, who was once an official with Ted's ill-fated WoO American Late Model Association in 1988. Said Rick, "Ted has done more for sprint car racing than anybody in the whole world. Jack Gunn laid the groundwork with what he did in Pennsylvania and Ted took it from there. Ted Johnson is the reason we're running for the purses we are today."