

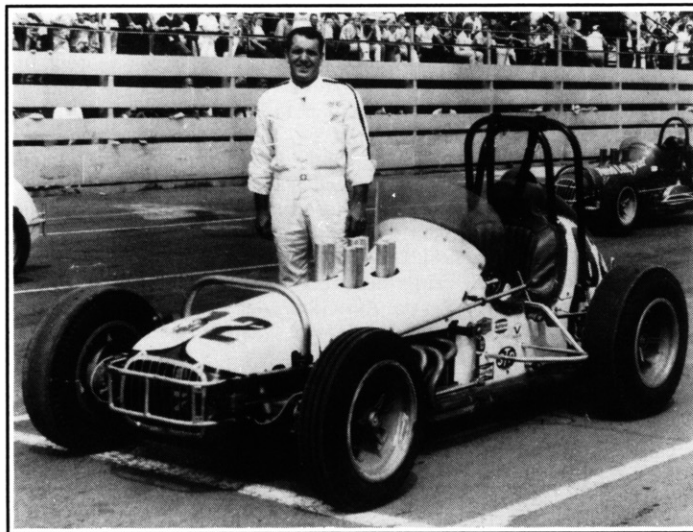
National Sprint Car Hall of Fame & Museum

ROLLIE BEALE

Rolland Beale was born January 16, 1930, and began his racing career in 1950 racing a 1937 Ford Coupe in sportsman events around his native Toledo (OH). He won his first feature in '51 at the Motor City Speedway in Detroit (MI). He graduated to new model stock cars and ran with the Midwest Auto Racing Club (MARC), which was the predecessor to today's Automobile Racing Club of America (ARCA), from 1956-58. By the end of the 1950's he had moved on to supermodifieds, where his exploits became legendary in the Midwest.

In 1961, according to Rollie, "I tried my luck out West and ran with the California Racing Association (CRA). It turned out I didn't have much luck so I returned home. Back in the Midwest, I raced with the International Motor Contest Association (IMCA) for a couple of years (1965-66), finishing fifth in the point standings both times. I was second to Jerry Richert (Sr) for the Winter Nationals at Tampa (FL) in 1966 and later that year won the "Little 500" race at Anderson (IN). That was a rewarding victory because it takes a lot of stamina and preparation by both crew and driver to race 500 laps on a quarter-mile track."

In 1964, Beale made three starts with IMCA, including one in supermodified country at Huntington (WV) where he finished fourth. He also finished second to Larry Dickson in the second annual Williams Grove (PA) National Open. The following year he won one IMCA event at Nashville (TN) and he finished behind IMCA champion Jerry Richert, Jim Moughan, Gordon Woolley and Tom Bigelow in the points aboard the sprinter owned by Ken Lay of Toledo. In 1966, he again followed Richert, Moughan, Bill Puterbaugh and Jerry "Scratch" Daniels. That year he won IMCA races at Tampa (FL), the "Little 500" at Anderson, the Iowa State Fairgrounds in Des Moines and Nashville again. During both of those years he also competed in just one race each year in the United States Auto Club (USAC) sprint car division.



Rollie Beale

(Bruce Craig Collection)

By the next year (1967), it was a new era in USAC racing as veterans such as Roger McCluskey, Mario Andretti, Bobby Unser, A.J. Foyt and Johnny Rutherford began limiting their short track appearances, and Don Branson and Jud Larson were gone forever. First-time feature winners that year included Beale, Daniels, Bob Wente, Mickey Shaw, Billy Vukovich, Mike Mosely, Sam Sessions, Bruce Walkup, Sonny Ates and Bob McCoy. Beale's inaugural USAC triumph came in mid-April at Earl Baltes' Eldora Speedway in Rossburg (OH), a track in which he was intimately familiar. According to Rollie, "I ran supermod-

champion Greg Weld and runner-up Sam Sessions. They were followed by Larry Dickson and Sonny Ates.

1968 saw the development of the "Larry and Gary Show" in USAC sprint car racing with Larry Dickson scoring six straight wins early in the year, and twelve in total, aboard Ray & Sissy Smith's machine. Rookie Gary Bettenhausen notched seven victories with owner Willie Davis. They finished the year 1-2 in points and were followed by Greg Weld, Carl Williams, Bruce Walkup and Beale. Rollie again won at Eldora with owner Kenny Lay in a car built by Don Litten, and at Salem with owner Ray Smith. The win at Salem was special as it was the annual "Joe James-Pat O'Connor Memorial" race. He continued to excel at the high-speed tracks of the upper Midwest, and passed his Indianapolis 500 driver's test that year, too.

Rollie Beale's luck in 1969 soured a bit as he competed in 21 events with USAC, yet could do no better than 11th in points aboard the Ronald Kilman-owned Rodeo Bar Special. And his best finishes of the year were a pair of runner-up performances late in the year to eventual champion Gary Bettenhausen at Winchester (IN) and Sammy Sessions at Salem.

The railroad car repair specialist/inspector rebounded in 1970 with three wins and a third place final ranking, following champion Dickson (10 wins) and bridesmaid Bettenhausen (seven wins). Rounding out the 'top five' were Greg Weld and Karl Busson. Beale's wins in the Ron & Lowell Kilman machine were at New Bremen (OH), Heidelberg (PA) and at the Erie County Fair in Hamburg (NY).

Bettenhausen and Dickson 'flip-flopped' their season-ending rankings in 1971, yet Beale remained steadfast in third with Kilman's Rodeo Bar car. He won twice in his hometown of Toledo, took one at Salem (the "Joe James-Pat O'Connor Memorial" again) and split a 'Twin 50's show late in the year with champion Gary B. Following Beale in the '71 USAC standings were Sammy Sessions and 'the

(Rollie Beale Bio Continued Below)

Comeback Kid' Lee Kunzman. Beale's one-lap qualifying record on September 12th at the Frank Funk-built Winchester Speedway established a new world record average speed for sprint cars at 109.662 miles per hour on a half-mile closed course.

1972 marked the end of an era in USAC sprint car racing as neither Larry Dickson nor Gary Bettenhausen was crowned champion. Instead, Sam Sessions successfully carried the torch over Beale, Kunzman, Dickson and Larry "Boom Boom" Cannon. Beale and Kilman recorded wins at Eldora, New Bremen, Toledo (twice), Terre Haute, Springfield (IL) and the season closer at J.C. Agajanian's Ascot Park in Gardena (CA), yet they could not top Sessions and his owner Mauri Amerling.

The years from 1967 through '72 were satisfying for Beale even though he didn't capture any championships. Says Rollie, "I had a lot of exciting moments during that time. One of the most memorable was when I won a race over A.J. Foyt. It was a close race and A.J. was right behind me at the finish. I found out late that he had asked about me before the race."

Finally, in 1973, the United States Auto Club crowned Rollie Beale champion after a torrid battle all year with Lee Kunzman. Lee won eight races that year in the Spotnails/R.B. Racing Associates machine, including the season opener

and the first of 'Twin 50's at the Eldora finale. Rollie saw the checkered first at Grand Rapids (MI) and Heidelberg, yet he scored second on nine occasions in the Kilman Ward-Chevy prepared by Don Harrell. At Eldora in October, Beale finished seventh in the first 50 driving teammate Duke Cook's sprinter, after flipping his own car in practice. In the second 50, he drove friend Sammy Sessions' car, finishing sixth and wrapping up the title over Kunzman by a narrow 24 point margin. Rounding out the top five in points were Don Nordhorn, Bruce Walkup and Sessions.

Beale wasn't so fortunate in 1974 as he again put the Kilman number one machine in victory circle twice, but he didn't have the consistency to back him up like he did the previous season. His wins came on the pavement at Winchester and the Minnesota State Fair in St. Paul. In the final point standings, he finished seventh behind Duane "Pancho" Carter, Jr., Tom Bigelow, George Snider, Bruce Walkup, Bill Puterbaugh and Billy Casella.

Comebacks were popular in '75 as Larry Dickson won the championship with low-bucker Ernie Ensign and his Torsion Bar sprinter, while Beale claimed second with Lowell Kilman and his Rodeo Bar car. Beale missed four of the first five races of the season with a broken finger suffered on his job as a railroad car repairman. However, he came back with a vengeance and claimed the inaugural main at Findlay (OH) and then fired off wins in June at Eldora, Winchester and the Indianapolis

Raceway Park in neighboring Clermont (IN). Two more wins at Winchester and Eldora came his way later in the year, too. Rounding out the top five were Cassella, Carter, and Bigelow.

Beale teamed with Lloyd Weaver and his Weaver Excavating team during our nation's Bicentennial, yet they could only manage one win in front of their hometown fans in July at Toledo. A sixth in points followed, behind champion Carter, Bigelow, Sheldon Kinser, Dickson and Cassella.

Following a 17th place finish in USAC points and zero wins in 1977, Rollie Beale announced his retirement as a driver after a 27-year career including hundreds of wins. Fortunately, though, he didn't completely retire from the sport as he immediately became Chief Steward for USAC's Sprint Car and Silver Crown (nee Dirt Championship) divisions in 1978. It is a position he still holds today. In 1983, the proud Buckeye was voted into the Hoosier Auto Racing Fans (HARF) Hall of Fame. And Rollie was deservedly named the 1991 recipient of the Ross Hadley Memorial Achievement Award for dedication for USAC.

Rollie and his wife Anna Mae have six children: Bonnie, Gary, Rick, Tim, Barbara and Ronnie. Gary and Ronnie both currently race 360-cubic-inch sprint cars. According to Rollie Beale in 1979, "The most exciting thing in my racing life was winning that 1973 National Sprint title."