



Hal Minyard

by Norm Bogan

Harold Edgar "Hal" Minyard was born on January 8, 1925, in South Gate, California, the son of carpenter Sydney and Edith Runyan Minyard.

Hal Minyard began racing midget cars in 1946 at the Bonelli Stadium in Saugus, California. In 1948, Minyard claimed the Southern California Midget Racing

Association (SCMRA) point championship driving for Vern Boone. As a participant during the heyday of the midgets in the late 1940s, Hal was able to race at the famed Gilmore Stadium against legendary racers like Bill Vukovich and Rodger Ward. While campaigning the midgets throughout the 1950s, he posted a third in the United Racing Association (URA) midget points aboard the Bob Bogan midget in 1958 and followed that up with the 1960 Fresno Kearney Bowl championship at the controls of the Ben Humke machine. While Hal's focus was on the midget cars throughout the decade, he would occasionally jump into a sprint car, as his schedule allowed.

In 1949, Minyard and friend John McMurry began development of the 'McHal' helmet after putting an old helmet, dented in an accident, into an oven. As the heat popped out the dent, he found the helmet material had a memory and would revert back to its original configuration. Hal, with his partner, Tom Kewish, applied aircraft and aerospace technology with state-of-the-art materials to create the helmet, which was popular with racers from different disciplines, including motorcycling and Indy car racing. Hal's helmets provided ear and temple protection where none had existed before by their wrap-around, open-face style.

Moving up to the California Racing Association (CRA) sprint cars, Minyard scored ninth in points in 1963. He gained his first CRA feature on April 4, 1964, in a 100-lap race at Ascot Park in Gardena. He drove the ex-Mary Hulman George H.O.W. Special championship car that had been cut down to a sprint car and was owned by Leonard Surdam. Hal went on to amass ten wins driving for Surdam, claiming the CRA championships for himself (driver) and Leonard (owner). This potent team captured four of the five 100-lap events held that season. During the year, the smooth-driving Minyard scored the inaugural feature victory at both the new Santa Maria Speedway and the newly paved Orange Show Speedway.

Following Minyard in the 1964 CRA point standings were Bob Hogle, Ned Spath, Bob Coulter, Paul Jones, Les Crawford, Buddy Lee, Ray Douglas, Jimmy Oskie, and Stan McElrath, respectively. Following Surdam in the car owner points were the Morales Brothers, Kenny Worth, Clarence B. "Pop" Miller, and Marshall Hansen, respectively.

In 1965, the Crestline resident won for three different car owners; Jerry Pittman, Leonard Surdam and the car he raced most of the year, the Lehotsky & Singh Chevy. Four feature wins, including three 100-lappers, carried Hal to his second CRA title. Following Hal in driver points were Paul Jones, Bob Hogle, Duck Fries, Ned Spath, Billy Wilkerson, Don Thomas, Buddy Lee, Jimmy Miller and Dick Atkins, respectively.

Minyard raced in 1966 again at the wheel of the Lehotsky & Singh machine, which had been built by Granvel "Hank" Henry, scoring one win at Ascot Park and ending the season at seventh in CRA points. He also attempted to qualify for the Indianapolis 500 and the Rex Mays Classic at Milwaukee in the Compton Motors-sponsored Rolla Vollstedt Offy. However, for a number of reasons including rain and time constraints, he was unsuccessful in each attempt.

At age 42, Hal won the opening race of the 1967 CRA season at Ascot driving the Chuck Howard Chevy and then relocated to Indianapolis to pursue the United States Auto Club (USAC) trail. Hal also moved his helmet business to Indy.

During the month of May at the Speedway in 1967, a number of drivers used the McHal helmet, but strong competition with the much larger Bell Helmets, plus drivers missing the race, had narrowed Minyard's clients to one, A.J. Foyt, Jr. With victory in the race, McHal was number one and Bell settled for second.

Hal rented a room from Mary K. Hausafus at different times over a twenty-year period. She worked in the office of Bell Helmets during the day, then came home each night and helped Minyard with the McHal helmet being produced in her basement. Hal also built a sprint car in Mary's garage.

In 1971, Minyard secured the Eldora Speedway sprint car point championship at Earl Baltes' high-banked half-mile dirt track in Rossburg, Ohio.

He went to work for the Indianapolis Motor Speedway, employing his building skills to perform many of the maintenance tasks for a number of years. Hal has served motor racing for the past few years as an ambassador of motorsports, transporting fans on the tour buses around the Speedway, sharing his knowledge and memories with those who visited this sacred shrine of speed.

Hal Minyard was short of stature, but sported broad shoulders and big biceps, noted on so many racers before the days of power steering. He was well liked by his fellow competitors and a favorite with the fans. Hal was known as a hard-working, dependable and genuine person. Minyard today, is 83 years old and lives in a house on the Speedway property near Gate 4 off Georgetown Road with his wife, Dawn.

