



Bobbie Adamson

When discussing the top drivers in Central Pennsylvania sprint car racing, Bobbie Adamson's name is often missed. But those who have followed the sprint cars in that area know just how important Adamson's career was to the local history.

While a number of great sprint car racers preceded Adamson in this part of the country, he was one of the first real stars of weekly sprint car racing in Central Pennsylvania. Sprint cars have always raced in the area, but it wasn't until 1967 that they became a weekly attraction. Prior to that year, sprint cars were special attractions, thanks to the American Automobile Association (AAA), United States Auto Club (USAC) and the United Racing Club (URC).

Over the winter of 1966-67, Jack Gunn, who promoted races at Williams Grove and Selinsgrove, announced that he would be upgrading his weekly class of cars from the "bugs" to the sprint cars. When Ray Tilley was winning everything in sight in 1966, Adamson, wisely, was one of those who worked to convince Gunn to switch to the sprint cars.

The move fell right into the hands of Bobbie Adamson. He hailed from Coraopolis, in the Pittsburgh area, and had been racing sprint cars there for several years. He often would head east to race with URC, and on more than one occasion his team would stop off to watch the weekly "bug" racing at Williams Grove while on his way to a URC race. When Gunn announced that sprint cars would be a weekly attraction at his tracks, Adamson knew what he was going to do. He was heading east.

Adamson actually started his career in 1958 at the Greater Pittsburgh Speedway. That first year, he competed in the novice "hooligan" class of stock cars with a 1946 Ford coupe. Adamson related that he knew almost from the start that the "hooligan" cars weren't his style. There was too much beating and banging. In 1959, he moved into a sprint car and began racing around the Western Pennsylvania, Ohio and West Virginia circuit. Wins came quickly at places like Sharon, Debo, and Skyline in Ohio, Greater Pittsburgh and Blanket Hill in Pennsylvania, and I-79 in West Virginia. And those are just the victories from that area that have been confirmed. There were many more wins at other area tracks as well.

Adamson had several rides in that era, eventually finding a home with the famed McMillan number 5, a car he said was great on the smaller tracks but wasn't really a car for the bigger half-mile ovals. Adamson notes that he always preferred bigger tracks and longer races. In the mid-sixties, Adamson hooked up with car owner Wilbur Hawthorne and his Floyd Trevis-built number 35. He won plenty of Western Pennsylvania races and even a point title with Hawthorne.

But, when Gunn opened up Central Pennsylvania to the sprint cars, Hawthorne and Adamson committed to traveling east to race weekly. It turned out to be a great decision. In 1967, Adamson won 12 races and the point title at Williams Grove. The 100-lap Williams Grove National Open at the end of the Eastern season was Adamson's twelfth Grove win of the season. He also won seven races and the point title at Selinsgrove.

Add in a Port Royal win, and a pair of wins with the International Motor Contest Association (IMCA) at the Allentown Fairgrounds and it was a great season.

But there was one more race that season. The Hawthorne team hauled the number 35 west, all the way to the Pacific Ocean, while Adamson boarded an airplane to join them at Ascot Park. The team towed right up to the arrival gate to pick up an amazed Adamson at the airport. Adamson was amazed because it was his first time in California and he had just seen his first mini-skirt. From that point on it was the California racers who were amazed.

Adamson remembers that Ascot didn't have a drivers meeting that day, and the first time he got on the track he was black-flagged. When he asked why, he was told that he was going too fast in warm ups. Then came time trials, and again Adamson was black-flagged. Officials explained that, at Ascot, time trials were one lap at a time. Adamson had equaled the track record on his first lap, but was black-flagged when he tried to take his second lap. The procedure was to rejoin the line and take the second lap later. Adamson was told he would get his second lap last in line. Having equaled the track record the first time out, Adamson felt like he could set a new record on his second lap, but then the track started to slow down. Most cars were well off their fast time on their second lap. When Adamson went out last, he still wanted a new track record but he didn't get it. The best he could do was to match the time of his first lap-exactly.

Adamson recalled that when he came to the pits after his second timed lap, a young driver pitted nearby said, "they just gave you that time because you came from so far away." But another driver, Ascot great Bob Hogle, told that driver to watch what he was saying. Adamson relates that none of the West Coast drivers were very welcoming. The show continued and, in the "Fast Dash," Adamson charged from last to first on the first lap and led all the way. Then he went out and dominated the 100-lap feature. Adamson had scored a clean sweep at Ascot Park's Pacific Coast Nationals the very first time he had ever seen the track.

As Bobbie Adamson took his spot in the payoff line, all the usual post-race chatter stopped. No one said a word, no congrats, not anything. To break the ice, Adamson said, "if someone knows where to get it, I'll buy the beer." That seemed to change everything, and Hogle told everyone who would listen, "I've never been beat so bad in all my life."

Adamson stuck with Hawthorne for another season, and it began with a drubbing of the IMCA racers at the Tampa Fairgrounds. Adamson remembers winning three of the five races and finishing second in the other two. Back in Central

Pennsylvania, Adamson won six times at Williams Grove, including his second National Open, and twice at Selinsgrove. He also scored his first win at Susquehanna, and won in Western Pennsylvania at Latrobe and Jennerstown. At the latter facility, Adamson once held the track record for the old quarter-mile oval and the enlarged half-mile track at the same time.

Early in the 1969 season, Adamson and Hawthorne parted ways, and Adamson found a new ride with an owner named Al Hamilton. That association lasted until early in 1973. During that time span, Adamson won another 36 races, including ten at Selinsgrove in 1972. He also won several more IMCA races in Tampa, and added Hagerstown and Tri-City to his ledger. The Tri-City win was one of three during the first season of the original All Star Circuit of Champions (ASCOC) series in 1970. Adamson also took a few rides in Ken Brenn's midget cars. In his first midget run, he won at the Bloomsburg Fairgrounds. The next time out in the midget he won at Reading, but in his third try, this time at Williams Grove, the throttle stuck, and he crashed hard.

Adamson's last win came at Tampa during the 1973 Winternationals. It wasn't much later that he parted ways with Hamilton. He took just a few rides after that. What was probably his last ride came with

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Jim Siedel and Ted Brewer and their Yankee/Rebel number 98 machine. Adamson remembers that team had been having heating problems with their car, and he and Lee Osborne made some changes to the car. Adamson drove from last to win the consolation race, but the car overheated again and he was unable to start the feature. That would be his last ride.

While records of many of Adamson's early wins have been lost, 84 career sprint car feature wins have been confirmed and there have to be many more. Bobbie and his wife Nancy have now moved to Florida, where he recently built a light airplane. The plane is a VansCraft RV12. The Adamson's have four children, daughter Dawn and sons Jeffrey, Kevin and Brett. There are also 11 grandchildren and two great grandchildren.

By Bryan Householder
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