



Wally Campbell

Wallace Campbell was born on July 16, 1926, in Red Bank, N.J., one of eight children of Charles and Mary Campbell.

Orphaned as a youngster, Wally grew up in Allentown, N.J., just a few miles outside of Trenton, with his twin brother Bruce in the home of Gus and Irene Feltman.

In 1939, he got his first taste of racing as he won the Soap-Box Derby race in Trenton. As a youngster, he was able to go to such tracks as Trenton Fairgrounds; Langhorne, Penna.; Reading, Penna.; and Mount Holly, N.J. In 1943, tragedy struck as Bruce was killed while the twins were riding on a motorcycle.

Even though Wally was built rather small, he won varsity letters in baseball and basketball. But, after his sophomore year in high school, he left and went to work in a lumber mill. He worked there until he enlisted in the U.S. Navy at age seventeen for a three-year tour of duty. Following training in Newport, R.I.; New London, Conn.; Chicago and Richmond, Va.; Wally spent World War II in the Pacific Theater. The boyish-looking 5'6" lad with the easy smile also won the 126-pound Navy boxing crown.

Wally Campbell returned home in 1946 and joined the American Racing Drivers Club (ARDC), which was a midget car racing sanctioning body founded in 1939 by Bill Schindler and others. Wally finished third in his first ARDC race at the Mahanoy City, Penna., track. The diminutive racer also started having fun as a motorcycle stunt man with the Joie Chitwood Thrill Show.

However, Wally soon turned his attention to the increasingly popular jalopies or stock cars. He began his stock car career at Flemington, New Jersey, in 1947, but flipped in his first race. Despite the inauspicious start, he was soon winning, and winning big, in stock cars.

Campbell took the crown of the brand-new Trenton-based American Stock Car Racing Association (ASCRA), in 1947, and also won titles with ASCRA in 1949 and '50. He finished sixth in points in 1948. Starting in 1949, "Crash" Campbell had successfully teamed with car owner Wally Marks of Trenton, and they were the prime rivals of the fabled Frankie Schneider-John Bolander team. Wally also won the United Stock Car Racing Association (USCRA) 200-lap event at Thompson, Conn., in 1949.

Campbell, still teamed with Marks, switched to NASCAR's modified stock car division, and Wally earned the prestigious NASCAR National Modified Stock Car Champion title in 1951 over Bill Pfister and Elzie Wylie "Buck" Baker, respectively.

NASCAR started its own open-wheel championship division in 1952. One of the first to sign up for the new Speedway Division circuit was Wally Campbell, who had recently turned his attention to open-wheel cars in general, and the United Racing Club (URC) in specific. Wally

purchased a two-year-old Hiram Hillegass-built sprint car and set about preparing it for NASCAR's championship trail. The NASCAR circuit differed from that of the American Automobile Association (AAA) in that stock-block engines were mandated so Campbell installed a six-cylinder Nash power-plant in his car.

The first event was one-mile time trial on the sand at Daytona Beach, Florida, during the traditional stock car speed week. Wally qualified a disappointing fifth behind "Buck" Baker, Edward Glenn "Fireball" Roberts, Jack Smith and Sam Waldrop.

Campbell discarded the Nash in favor of a Mercury V-8 for the first race of the season at Darlington, but the Merc proved problematic with heating issues. This was partially solved by installing a huge truck radiator in the car for the 200-mile race. Campbell led several laps but dropped out shortly after halfway with engine problems. More heating problems at Martinsville, Virginia, for round two caused Campbell to drop out after just 20 laps of racing.

By the third race of the year at Rochester, New York, Wally had figured out the overheating situation and he qualified a solid fifth on the grid. He then found himself in victory lane at the end of the 100-mile grind for his first victory of the season. Campbell was victorious again at Charlotte, North Carolina, and all of a sudden he was in the title hunt.

At Lakewood Speedway in Atlanta, Campbell nabbed the pole and finished third. He scored his second straight pole at Heidelberg, Pennsylvania, but his title hopes were dealt a severe blow when he dropped out early in the race with a blown engine. In the season's last race at Langhorne, Campbell and Tom Cherry kept the crowd on its feet with a spirited duel in which Cherry ultimately prevailed.

Wally's second-place ranking at the end of the season behind "Buck" Baker was remarkable when one considers that he finished 16th or worse in three of the seven races. However, when his car stayed under him, he wound up with two wins and a runner-up placing.

Campbell won the first NASCAR Speedway race of 1953 on June 12 at Greensboro, North Carolina, but the circuit was disbanded by the end of the month because of short fields.

Once the NASCAR Speedway Division folded, Wally headed to the AAA Eastern Circuit. Campbell ran a few races with his Mercury-powered Hillegass before being noticed by Offy-powered sprint car owner Frank Curtis, who was no relation to California midget and champ car builder Frank Curtis, at Bedford, Penna., in August.

The announcer for the Sam Nunis-promoted AAA races was a young reporter by the name of

Chris Economaki and so enamored was he of Campbell's car control, the future editor of *National Speed Sport News* gave Wally the moniker of "Crazy Wheels."

"Crazy Wheels" Campbell didn't disappoint Economaki nor Curtis, scoring late season victories at Morristown, N.J.; Reading; Charlotte and Raleigh, North Carolina, and finishing fourth in the 1953 AAA Eastern standings behind Joe Sostilio, Tommy Hinnershitz and Ernie McCoy, respectively. He was named the AAA "Rookie of the Year" for his efforts. Campbell also won an AAA Midwestern race at St. Paul, Minnesota, for Frank Curtis.

By the end of 1953, Wally Campbell had competed in eleven NASCAR Grand National Series events, including five in 1951.

In keeping with his dream of racing full-time in open-wheel competition, culminating in his participation in the Indianapolis 500, Campbell kept his heavy foot and fast reflexes active in the winter of 1953-54 by competing in three-quarter midget car races in the Teaneck Armory in New Jersey.

Sam Traylor hired Wally Campbell for the 1954 season and Wally was hot right out of the box, winning twice at Williams Grove and once at Altamont, New York. Campbell, who worked at Tindall's Auto Service when he wasn't racing, also had a ride for AAA championship car races, finishing fifth in his first one at Langhorne.

Campbell had a ride for the 1954 Indy 500, first with Charlie Marant and then with Pete Salemi, but Wally was basically told by AAA stewards to "get more experience and come back next year." With that in mind, Wally made a trip out to Salem, Indiana, with car owner Ted Nyquist, to practice his asphalt-driving technique. The AAA Eastern point leader was doing very well in the test session, on the day before the scheduled AAA Midwestern race, when suddenly his car shot for the outside fence in the corner of the ultra-fast pavement track. Wally Campbell was killed instantly when his car hit and then plunged, nose-first, over the rail of the high-banked oval on July 17, 1954, just one day after his 28th birthday.

Wallace Campbell was laid to rest on July 21, 1954, in the Allentown, N.J., cemetery. His pallbearers were Tommy Hinnershitz, Fred "Jiggs" Peters, Lou Johnson, Bill Holcomb, ASCRA's Bill Streeter and Johnny Thomson. Campbell was survived by his wife Theresa Adams Campbell, whom he married in 1951, and his daughters, Kathleen and Shirley. Today they live in Yardley, Pennsylvania.

By Bob Mays

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