



Bruce Bromme Jr.

For the past five decades, Bruce B. Bromme, Jr., has been an integral element in traditional (non-winged) sprint car racing in southern California and throughout the nation.

Bromme has been maintaining one of the most successful and competitive race cars over this period of time and amassing close to 250 feature victories. The Bromme Chassis was so envied that a number of used cars were sold to fellow competitors and, eventually, the chassis was marketed for several years.

Bromme joins his father Bruce, Sr., in the National Sprint Car Hall of Fame. During the years of competition since 1980, Dean Thompson tallied three California Racing Association (CRA) point championships. Lealand McSpadden claimed one Sprint Car Racing Association (SCRA) title, while Richard Griffin added five SCRA titles, as well as three Non-Wing World Championships. Damion Gardner grabbed the 2005 United States Auto Club (USAC)/CRA championship and current driver Mike Spencer garnered three USAC/CRA point crowns over the past three years. That is thirteen point titles in three decades for drivers of sprint cars that were wrenched by Bruce Bromme, Jr. Additionally, Junior has collected seventeen Mechanic of the Year awards during this period.

Bruce Brandon Bromme, Jr., joined the family race team on September 26, 1951, and was destined to be involved in racing nearly from birth. His father constructed a 3/16-midget and instead of installing an engine, he attached a push handle, making it a stroller. The Bromme racing shop was located at their residence, and young Bruce claimed that as soon as he could crawl across the garage floor, he became a member of the team. One of his earliest tasks was to help his father, Bruce, Sr., and his grandfather, Louis, build Offenhauser engines. Bruce's advantage was that his small hands could reach into the cylinders and attach nuts to the block studs.

Soon, Bromme became mobile enough that the push handle on his stroller was replaced with an engine. Bruce, Sr., and a family friend, George "Bud" Thompson, constructed a makeshift race course in a cul de sac near the Bromme residence. Bud's young son, Dean, was the competition and entered in weekly contests at nearby quarter-midget venues. Junior decided that he enjoyed working on the race cars more than driving them and he announced his retirement as a driver at the age of five.

Since leaving high school, Bruce has been employed within the high performance racing component industry. Bromme started sweeping floors at Halibrand Engineering, later worked for Ansen Automotive, Joe Hunt Magnetos and Shaver Engines, while traveling briefly with the Joe Hunt Indy Car team. Junior spent a year working at Hughes Aircraft, where he had a good job

and benefits, but he felt lost in the big company atmosphere.

Due to CRA rules enforced by sign-in official Louis "Rusty" Espinoza, Bruce, Jr., was unable to enter the pits until 1967, when he turned sixteen. His long-time playmate, Dean Thompson, was also moving up to the CRA sprints and soon would be aboard the Bromme racer.

Bruce first gained recognition, when he was named Co-Mechanic of the Year in 1977, an award shared with his father and long time CRA car owner Jack Kindoll. In 1985, Dean announced his retirement after amassing over 100 feature wins, leaving a number of drivers stepping up to take the ride over for the next five years. Mike Sweeney, Jimmy Oskie, John Redican, Norman "Bubby" Jones, Jerry Meyer, Stan Atherton, Wayne Bennet and Billy Boat all handled the driving chores. Boat set the all-time, non-winged sprint car fast-time record of 17.958 on the final night of CRA competition prior to Ascot Park's closing. It was the only official Ascot qualifying lap under eighteen seconds in CRA history.

During the 1992 season, the Bromme team disbanded their operation. Bruce decided to relocate to the central coast town of Templeton, acquiring a former sheep ranch and set up his Bromme Performance Products business in the barn. He began manufacturing formed aluminum racing parts such as oil tanks, crossover pipes, water reservoirs, brackets and rock guards.

As Bruce worked to develop his business and was somewhat removed from the racing world, he was contacted in 1993 by Bob Walker to become the crew chief for Walker's Northern Auto Racing Club (NARC) winged sprint car team. This led to another alliance the following year with longtime central California competitor Gene Manhire. Manhire brought Ron Chaffin and his Madera Produce as an engine sponsor to the program.

Late in 1994, Ron Chaffin met with Bromme with a proposal to bankroll a sprint car team for the 1995 SCRA season, asking Bruce to organize the racing operation. The only requirement was that Ron would select the number (50) and Bromme got to pick the color (red). They also agreed that Bruce wouldn't sell broccoli and Ron would not work on the car. This opened the door to a successful racing team for the past sixteen seasons.

As Bruce began setting up the team, he remembered a driver telling him that he would like to drive the Bromme car before he retired. Lealand McSpadden was named as the pilot for the 1995 season for the new Chaffin/Bromme operation. After posting ten feature wins and claiming the 1995 title, "The Tempe Tornado" announced his retirement at

the final race and was replaced by Richard "The Gasman" Griffin from 1996 through 2003. Griffin opted to retire and spend more time with his family after the '03 season, which meant that the Chaffin/Bromme team had a coveted position opening once again.

In 2004, the non-winged sprinters had switched from SCRA to USAC/CRA. Damion Gardner joined the team and struggled some the first year, but he scored the championship in 2005. After the 2006 season, Gardner elected to move to Indiana with his own team and pursue the USAC national sprint car series title. Mike Spencer was driving for Hal Engstrom in a top-ten car, when he was offered the "Little Red Sucker" for 2007. Spencer scored championships in 2008, '09 and '10 and the team is well-positioned to contend for the title in 2011.

Bruce suffered the losses of his father Bruce B. Bromme, Sr., in 1999, his mother Marjorie (or Marge, as she was known) in 2005, and his wife Pamela in 2006. Persevering throughout his career, Bromme has enjoyed success, both in winning championships and leading the club in fast-qualifier times, nearly every year. Crew members Gary and Mike Tanaka, Eric Kauffman and Mike Spencer, Sr., make up this veteran operation. A younger member, Dillon Hoffman, joined the team at age fourteen and has worked with the team part-time for several years. All of these crew members live in southern California, about 200 miles from the "Bromme Racing Ranch." Thus, special recognition also goes to Bruce's cousin, Tom Werner, who lives nearby and drops by to assist Bromme when he needs a hand at the shop. Tom, a county sheriff's deputy, has duty on Saturday, however, and is unable to witness the race car's on-track performance. Bruce also acknowledged Dave Brame of Outlaw Painting, who painted many of the Bromme race cars and helped in the pits on race nights; Ron Shaver, who has provided engines and other support for many years; and Ed and Kathy Donovan, who have supplied and developed their engine blocks for several decades.

Bruce Bromme's career has progressed a long way since the stroller racer. Routine preparation and attention to detail ensures outstanding performance at each racing event, which translates to top podium positions and ultimately, championships.

By Norm Bogan

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