



Gary Wright

Gary Wright is a quiet man. For all he has accomplished in his impressive racing career, it is doubtful he has ever self-proclaimed how talented he truly is.

Gary has collected feature wins all over the countryside and he has also garnered respect from his competitors and made many fans and friends.

Gary has over 400 career feature wins to his credit. He has won nine consecutive championships with the National Championship Racing Association (NCRA; 1993-2001) with 80 career wins. He has more American Sprint Car Series (ASCS) wins than anyone else in series history and is a four-time ASCS champion (2004-'07) with at least 127 career ASCS National wins. He has 29 All Star Circuit of Champions (ASCoC) wins and five World of Outlaws (WoO) feature wins. A true outlaw and diverse racer, Gary has earned feature wins on all four of these sprint car racing circuits in one season... in three separate years.

Gary G. Wright was born on December 19, 1958. His dad Grady, a racer, and his mom Yvonne took Gary to races in the Arkansas-Louisiana-Texas (Ark-La-Tex) region when he was just four months old. Soon Gary would be wheeling a go-kart around the home-made course in the Wright backyard.

His driving career began in 1975 when a then-16-year-old Gary first started racing in the "run-whatcha-brung" late model stock car division at Ashdown, Arkansas. "When I first started out, I drove my dad Grady's car on Friday night. He drove it on Saturday night. My fourth week out, I won my feature. My uncle Tony Wright, a former racer, convinced my dad to let me race the car full-time since I was doing so well, and he did," Gary said.

In 1977, Gary started racing open-wheel modifieds or "skinny cars," as they called them. He learned a very valuable lesson in 1979. His Uncle Tony took him to the bank and helped him get a loan for a new Smiley's modified car. "I learned first-hand how important racing with good equipment is. If you don't have good equipment, even the best drivers are going to struggle. Buying that car was a pivotal point in my early career. We started winning right away with the new car. People started to notice us. Our success in that modified opened a lot of doors for us," he said.

In the early 1980s, Gary saw a lot of success in his racing career in three divisions. "There was more money in modified racing than in sprint car racing, back then. I quit my job at an ammunition plant and went racing full-time since I could make more money racing than working at the Red River Army Depot plant. I've been racing full-time since 1980," Gary said.

By 1981, the East Texas racer got his first good 410-cubic-inch sprint car opportunity in Florida. He said it was a learning experience. "I was racing 'Junior' Hefflin's LaVern Nance-built sprint car. It was an old and heavy car and we didn't have much help. We did pretty well at East Bay and Volusia. I enjoyed racing the sprint car but I wasn't ready to give up racing my modified, yet. I was still making pretty good money with the modified and was unsure about my sprint car racing future," he said.

In 1985, Gary was steadily racing in three divisions. He has fond memories of one "pretty special weekend" in '85 where he won in all three divisions. He won in the modified on Friday night at

the Stateline Speedway in Texarkana, Ark., then drove to the Boot Hill Speedway in Shreveport, La., where he won the late model feature on Saturday. On Sunday, he drove to Fort Worth where he won the sprint car feature.

Car owner Jim Wingfield traded a diesel truck for Craig Keel's 1987 Shaver-powered Challenger sprint car and asked Gary to drive for him the following season. Gary said that number 5 sprint car was probably the best sprint car that he ever drove. By 1988, Gary was racing his modified, the sprint car weekly at Devil's Bowl, and he had started to follow the NCRA circuit. "I felt competitive racing with the NCRA group. Our equipment was just as good as anyone's out there and I got along well with C. Ray Hall. That was when we started winning more money with the sprint car and I started phasing out our modified racing. From 1989 on, it was all pretty much just sprint car racing for us," Gary said.

Gary dominated the competition on the NCRA series. He raced with them from 1988-2004. He collected 80 wins and nine consecutive NCRA championships (1993-2001). Gary's team, with Ron "Scooby" Burkett, traveled the NCRA circuit with his longtime friend and fellow competitor Terry Gray. "We'd be out there two to three weeks at a time with the NCRA and pick up other shows with the All Stars or World of Outlaws. Then we'd go home and regroup and then do it all over again. We didn't make a tremendous amount of money, back then, but I liked racing with C. Ray's group," he said.

"We've never been a big dollar team. I haven't raced as much with the Outlaws as I would have liked to due to not having a lot of money. One night I was racing at Tulsa and Doug Wolfgang came by the trailer and told me he'd been watching me. He said I was good enough to be out on the road racing with them. Doug saying that to me made all the difference in the world. I thought if Doug Wolfgang thinks I'm good enough to race with the Outlaws, it must be true. Those words from Doug have always stayed with me," Gary said.

Gary won his first WoO race at Haubstadt, Indiana, on May 10, 1992. He said getting his first win with the Outlaws took the proverbial monkey off his back. He said he felt he'd finally made it in sprint car racing after that night.

During the American winter of 1994, Gary made his first racing tour of Australia, with the nickname "The Texan" on his top wing. Over the course of the tour, more Texas symbolism was added to the wing. By the time Gary Wright returned from 'the Land Down Under,' his new nickname of "The Texan" had stuck with the Australian and American sprint car racing media.

In June of 1994, Gary partnered with Bill White and they created the well-known Action Rent-to-Own number 9 winged 410-cubic-inch sprint car team. "We only had '410' motors at that time when Emmett Hahn called me up in 1994. He told me Brian Shearer was looking for a driver for his '360' team to run the ASCS Speed Week. I thought, why not?" Gary said.

"Our first night out, we ran out of fuel. Our second night out, we were fourth, and we won on

our third night out. We won the Speed Week championship and Brian told me that was the most money he'd ever made in racing," Gary said.

Gary teamed up with Brian and Jack Shearer for some ASCS races during the 1996-97 seasons while still racing his own "410" with the NCRA. Over the next few years, Gary raced a "410" with the NCRA, filling in open nights with the All Stars and Outlaws or did some "360" racing with the ASCS series. He said he got along well with then All Star Circuit of Champions president Bert Emick and then WoO president Ted Johnson, and he felt fortunate to race with both series whenever possible.

Gary barely got a team put together in time for Florida and the 1998 season. He said for a team that was basically thrown together, they had a very successful year. They ran the entire NCRA circuit and won 33 of the 66 races they competed in.

Gary went full-time racing with the ASCS Series in 2003. "I started racing 360s with ASCS out of necessity," Gary said. "The '410' racing had all but disappeared in the South, by then. Unless I wanted to drive a long distance every week to race, and I didn't, then I knew I had to get a '360' deal put together. It's amazing what Emmett has done with this ASCS deal. Seventy percent of the sprint cars racing today in the U.S. are 360s racing under ASCS rules. Emmett's hard work has really paid off."

Gary drove the number 9x sprinter for Scott Brown during the 2009-10 season. He said Scott was a great car owner but they just couldn't get anything going with the team. This year, 2011, he started out driving the Donnie Cooper sprinter, but now has settled back in with his own number 9 Richwood Construction-sponsored Maxim car in ASCS national and regional competition.

This true "Outlaw" has raced modifieds, late models, "410" and "360" sprint cars, midget cars, and a NASCAR stock car. He has competed in a midget at the Chili Bowl ten times and has made the A-main five times. Gary and Bill White teamed up on the number 64 Action Rent-to-Own stock car with NASCAR and the Automobile Racing Club of America (ARCA) in the late Eighties and early Nineties. Gary said he wishes he'd given the NASCAR stint more effort as they were racing in the top ten at Pocono, when the rear end broke taking them out of the race. He said if he regrets anything in his career, he wishes he'd given that opportunity more time. The four-time winner of the Short Track Nationals in Little Rock, Arkansas, and the Knoxville "360" Nationals in Iowa also won the North American 360 Sprint Car Poll "Driver of the Year" award in 2003, '04, '05 and '07.

Gary Wright from Hooks, Texas, is proof that it's the quiet ones you have to keep your eyes on. This soft-spoken man, off the track, has always been a fierce competitor, on the track. Today he still enjoys sprint car racing and spending time with his daughters Chelsea and Lauren, who has twins Adley and Isla with her sprint car racing husband Nick Smith.

By Kathy Bell
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