national sprint car hall of fame

JEFF BLOOM

BY DAVID SINK

Jeffrey Allen Bloom was born on August 1, 1949, to parents Ned A. and Norma I. Bloom in Elkhart, Indiana.

Jeff began his racing career in 1967, racing super-modifieds on Indiana asphalt at South Bend on Fridays, New Paris on Saturdays, and Plymouth on Sundays. Bloom's father, Ned, insisted Bloom start the first several events from the tail of the field.

"Dad made me start the first ten races or so at the tail. This wasn't the track's rule. He just wanted me to start at the tail until I showed him I could pass cars," explained Bloom. "Dad just thought that was best. We had a six cylinder and everyone else had a V-8. Once I started passing cars, then he let me start in my regular starting positions."

Bloom is a second generation driver as his father raced several years before him. "Dad retired from racing in 1959, because he was diagnosed with cancer and only had six months to live. But, he lived up until about twenty years ago, I guess. He only ran about eleven or twelve years total."

Although Bloom didn't win a race that initial season, he figured things out quickly and won a whopping eight super-modified races in 1968.

Prior to the 1972 season, longtime hunting and fishing buddy, Ray Wright, suggested Bloom build a sprint car. Ray was a former super-modified driver who had retired a few years earlier. "Ray told me I needed to build a sprint car, so I could run the Little 500. Plus, the sprint car races paid a lot more money."

In late 1971, Bloom began construction of a new sprint car out of a box-tube modified. The car would ultimately be known as the famed "Ole Yeller."

Bloom instantly took to sprint car racing with the new car when the 1972 season arrived. Bloom participated primarily with the American Speed Association (ASA) that season. Jeff wound up fifth in the year-end point standings, after claiming two feature events and 'Rookie of the Year' honors. In addition, he won his first of three Little 500 events that season as a rookie at the high-banked quarter-mile Anderson Speedway in Indiana.

In 1973, Bloom would venture into the world of stock car racing for the next several seasons. "A guy (Herb Kirtz) who lived in Elkhart, Indiana, where I was living at the time, asked me if I wanted to run his stock car. Herb was a former driver who got hooked up with another guy and they built a stock car. That first season I won eight races for them. I won at places like Indianapolis Raceway Park and a 300-lap NASCAR-sanctioned event at Hartford, Michigan."

When the 1975 season rolled around, Bloom and his father purchased a super-speedway car from Henry "Smokey" Yunick with intentions of competing with the United States Auto Club (USAC) and Automobile Racing Club of America (ARCA) super-speedway divisions. During his brief stint with the stock cars, Bloom won a handful of events at places like Salem Speedway in Indiana and the Minnesota State Fairgrounds in Saint Paul. In addition, he competed against some of the sport's best, including A.J. Foyt, Jr., and David Pearson amongst others.

In Bloom's forty-six-year racing career, he incredibly has never won a championship. "I've never really run for a championship to tell you the truth," explains Bloom. "I've had to run my racing operation out of my own pocket. I've just basically run where the money was. Winning races means more than championships to me. You win as much in one race as you can in point fund money with some of these series being their champion."

Bloom could have been a champion had things worked out differently. In 2007, an error in the final standings revealed that Bloom should have been the Auto Value Super Sprints (AVSS) champion. Another competitor had been awarded the title. Bloom is fifth on the all-time AVSS win list with nineteen career feature victories. Bloom refers to his career without a championship as "unofficially."

Bloom finished second in the inaugural Must See Racing Xtreme Sprint Series (MSRXSS) championship to Troy DeCaire in 2010.

The Little 500 is a 500-lap sprint car race held annually in Anderson, Indiana, each Memorial Day weekend since 1949. It is a race that Bloom has thrived in, to say the least. He has won this prestigious event on three separate occasions (1972, '77, and '91), which places him fourth on the all-time win list behind Eric Gordon (9 wins), Bob Frey (5) and Tom Cherry (4), and tied with Jim Childers (3) and Darl Harrison (3).

He has thirty-six career Little 500 starts (eleven more than anyone else), one pole position (in 2001), nine 'top five' finishes (second only to Eric Gordon with 14), twelve 'top ten' finishes (second only to Eric Gordon with 15), 348 career laps led, and a total of 8,551 laps completed (second only to Eric Gordon with 8,903).

A statistic that Bloom points out that many may not be aware of? "I've won that race three different times living in three different cities," laughs Bloom. Jeff lived in Elkhart, Indiana, when he won with his own car in 1972, in Kalamazoo, Michigan, when he won for Lyle Roberts in '77, and in Bangor, Michigan, when he drove his own car to the '91 win.

Although the vast majority of Bloom's career has been on the asphalt, he did play around on the dirt a bit when pavement sprint car events dwindled in the 1980's. "I started running a lot of USAC Silver Crown stuff in the 1980's," Bloom states. "I ran second to Jack Hewitt at Springfield, Illinois. I was running second to Doug Wolfgang at the Florida State Fairgrounds in Tampa and caught him with a few laps to go before my magneto took a dump and I ended up somewhere about fifth or sixth."

Bloom also remembers a long-ago second place finish to Steve Kinser at the legendary Eldora Speedway.

In 2003, Bloom attempted to compete in the Eldora "Mopar Million" for Bob Stroud. It was a non-winged sprint car event with a $1,000,000 total purse and it was arguably the most prestigious non-winged sprint car event to date. After qualifying sixth out of 150 cars in the second round of qualifying, Bloom found himself running second in his heat race with an A-main transfer in the works. "I was in second place a half a lap ahead of third place. Something broke on the car and turned me into the wall. I would have made the 'A' main," a disappointed Bloom explained.

Bloom takes pride in the fact that he has been his own set-up man throughout his career. He credits his father for this. "When I started racing, my dad would suggest something and say this is what I think you should do. I'd change it and get back into the car and feel it. That's what helped me learn more than anything. He made me understand that you have to apply it to learn it. You need to find it out for yourself."

Friendships have been made by Bloom at the track over the years, but he doesn't necessarily go out of his way to make friends. "I've never tried to be real best buddies with these guys I race with. I've witnessed twenty-eight guys lose their lives while at the track while I was there. I'll go out and eat with the guys after the races but that's about it."

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Looking back at his career, there isn't one particular event that stands out. "I've won in so many things. So many different races and types of cars. All my Little 500 wins are special. The last one (1991), in particular, was special because I ran 475 laps with just front brakes. In my 1977 win, I won on seven cylinders after breaking a push rod. My 1990 Tony Hulman Classic win at Indianapolis Raceway Park was special because I beat Bob Frey and Jeff Gordon and it was on ESPN."

His Tony Hulman Classic win in 1990 was one of three USAC national sprint car wins in his career, which also included a Joe James/Pat O'Connor Memorial win at Salem Speedway in 1976. His lone USAC Silver Crown victory came at IRP in Clermont, Indiana, in 1987.

In 1981, USAC was struggling to get cars for their upcoming Gold Crown (Indy car) event at Pocono Raceway in Long Pond, Pennsylvania, due to a split and the emergence of Championship Auto Racing Teams (CART). Pocono Raceway is a 2.5-mile oval located in the Pocono Mountains of Pennsylvania. Several USAC Silver Crown drivers were invited to help fill the field for the event. Jeff Bloom was called upon by car owners Ray and Cissy Smith to drive their car in the event.

"The Smith's called me because I had big-track experience running the bigger high-speed joints when I ran the stock car stuff," explains Bloom. "It was a fun experience. When they dropped the green flag, I immediately passed three or four of the slower rear-engine Indy cars right off the bat. I was, by far, the fastest Silver Crown car. I got all the way up to fifth place before the engine blew. A.J. Foyt won the race and averaged 185 mph. I was the fastest Silver Crown Car and averaged 160 mph. At the end of the race, he and I were on the podium doing interviews. That was pretty fun."

Officially, Bloom is credited with starting twenty-third and finishing nineteenth in the 1981 Pocono 500, earning $4,610.

Bloom is an inductee of the Little 500 Hall of Fame (1996), the Michigan Motorsports Hall of Fame (2000), and the Michiana Vintage Racers Hall of Fame (2008).

Jeff was severely burned on August 25, 2012, in a fiery MSRXSS sprint car crash at the Berlin Raceway in Marne, Michigan. He suffered third-degree burns on his right arm and hands, as well as second-degree burns on the right side of his body, including his torso, hip and calf. The avid deer hunter is still an active driver with the MSRXSS winged sprint car tour, as well as with other asphalt series like Hoosier Outlaw Super Sprints (HOSS) and United States Speed Association (USSA).

Since May 5, 1973, Jeff has been married to Linda Marie Bloom, daughter of MARC Times Racing News publishers Dick and Pat Beebe, and the Bloom's have three daughters, Patty (Matt) Bucken, Amie (Jeremy) Bewley and Jennifer (Jason) Streit.