



national sprint car hall of fame

ANDY LINDEN

BY NORM BOGAN

Andrew Logan Linden was born April 5, 1922, in Brownsville, Pennsylvania, to parents James B. and Mary Sackres Linden. Andy's older sister was Elizabeth Colcord.

While a young child, the family moved to southern California, settling in the South Bay area of Los Angeles. James worked on the pipeline.

In the 1930's, Mary re-married, wedding Ernest Rhodes, who worked in playground maintenance for the city of Los Angeles.

Andy resided in L.A. for most of his life, with a brief residency in Speedway, Indiana, while pursuing a career in auto racing.

Linden grew up in awe of the California car culture of the thirties and, at the age of fifteen, a neighbor gave him an old Willys Overland, which didn't run. Andy and a friend began the reclamation project, while Grandpa, impressed with the boys' enthusiasm, became their financial sponsor. Soon, the car was running and Andy obtained his driving permit. Although this car was no longer being manufactured, many of the parts had been substituted, usually with some type of performance enhancement.

At age seventeen, working as a gas station attendant, Linden was lured to the dry lakes of the Mojave desert with his innovative machine, eyeing a new land speed record and hoping it might provide him with a passage to Gilmore Stadium and Carrell Speedway, competing with the midgets and hot rods/roadsters. But, Andy got sidetracked by World War II and a tour in the U.S. Navy.

Post-war racing began with the California Roadster Association (CRA), finishing fifth in the 1946 points. In 1947, Linden amassed ten wins, half at Huntington Beach, with others at Bakersfield, Carrell, Rose Bowl, Bonelli and Fresno. He finished fourth in points. In June, he ran his first American Automobile Association (AAA) championship car race at Langhorne, Pennsylvania.

Soon, trips throughout California in 1948 for AAA Pacific sprint and midget car shows kept him in the hunt, with Andy placing fifteenth in points. Linden's year ended at the Arizona State Fairgrounds at an AAA sprint car show, when his car caught fire after just 26 laps.

In 1949 and '50, Andy competed in several AAA sprint car shows at Carrell Speedway. He eventually won the 1950 Pacific Coast AAA Sprint Car Championship. He also placed fifth in a 1952 AAA stock car show at Carrell Speedway.

Andy Linden made the jump to Indianapolis in 1950, but was unable to qualify the car for the show. From 1951 through '57, Andy competed in each of the Indianapolis 500's. He also raced a dirt champ car on the National Championship Trail, entering 74 events from 1950 through '57.

Andy qualified in the middle of the front row at Indy in 1952. While posting no wins, Linden's best Indy 500 finish was a fourth in 1951. During the period of 1950 through '60, the Indianapolis 500 was listed as an FIA event and gained World Championship points, as well as AAA and later USAC points. Linden is credited with five World Championship points during his Indy career.

Returning to racing after WWII, Andy had a reputation as a tough guy and was known to show his discontent with another competitor by waving his fist at him. This 5'8", 200-pound young man acquired boxing skills during his time in the Navy.

In 1951 at Syracuse, New York, Andy crashed, came out of the car and found himself lying in the middle of the track. AAA officials failed to stop the race, leaving cars on the track at green flag speed when someone ran over Andy's leg, fracturing it. Henry Banks, a competitor in the race, pulled up to the flagman and inquired if maybe they should wave the caution flag. AAA sent the ambulance onto the track in the wrong direction, causing four of the leaders to crash trying to avoid a collision with the emergency vehicle.

At Indianapolis in 1953, Andy crashed in turn on the third lap, caught fire and was transported to the Infield Care Center with second-degree burns. Linden promised the medics that if they would release him, he would console his wife and sit back to enjoy the race. Soon, Chuck Stevenson, filling in for Jerry Hoyt, asked Andy to take over the driving chores. This lasted twelve laps before the racecar overheated and he exited the show. After parking the Hoyt car, Rodger Ward's crew wanted Andy to fill in for their driver on a day of record temperatures on the Speedway. Andy was last seen turning another 29 circuits in Ward's car before turning it over to J. Carlyle "Duke" Dinsmore to finish the race. At the end of the day, Linden had driven three different cars for a total of 44 laps, had an early crash, spent a short respite in the Care Center, and then returned to the racing wars. His performance earned Linden the label of "Asbestos Andy."

Linden was employed as a race driver, so he was always looking for a ride on an off-night to collect some grocery money. He ran with AAA in both midgets and sprint cars in the Pacific, Midwest and Eastern regions. He also continued to compete each year at Indy, living in Indiana during the racing season so that he could secure regular rides.

When AAA was phased out and the United States Auto Club (USAC) was created in 1956, Andy became a formidable driver in their championship points. Linden ran five of thirteen USAC sprint car races, scoring a victory at Montgomery, Alabama, and he wound up eleventh in Midwest driver points for car owner Lee Elkins. Linden also collected two USAC Midwest midget car victories.

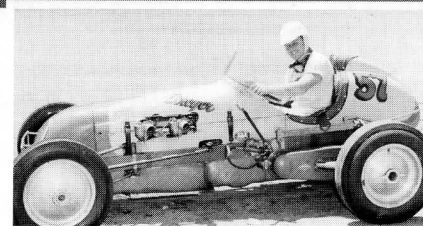


PHOTO CREDIT: MILES MCSHANE

Andy began 1957 with a bang as he raced midgets in late February and early March, winning four main events and claiming the Tangerine Trophy for the Florida Region championship. Later, Linden impressed fans and competitors with an outstanding run at Dayton Speedway in Ohio, dominating the USAC Midwest sprint car series event. In May, he swept another Midwest sprint car program at Winchester, Indiana. Later, he started twelfth in the Indy 500 and he completed all 200 laps for a fifth place finish.

In 1957, the Indy cars journeyed to Monza, Italy. The Americans flew to Paris and then motored on to Monza. The race format consisted of three sixty-three-lap heats conducted on the high-banked 2.64-mile paved oval. Linden finished the first heat in third place, scored ninth in the second heat after falling out with a cracked frame, and he was not able to run the third heat.

The Monza experience was bookended by two Midwest midget car victories at the Indianapolis Speedrome in June and July. In August, Andy scored a USAC Midwest sprint car feature win at Terre Haute, Indiana. With the Midwest season winding down, Linden returned to his California base to take advantage of another payday before going dark for the winter.

Andy had only one son, Ernest, who lives in Phoenix. However Ernie had little contact with his father over the years. One step-son, Johnny, witnessed more of Andy's racing exploits, but he was tragically lost in Vietnam.

On November 3, 1957, J.C. Agajanian booked a USAC Pacific midget car race at the Clovis Speedway in California. During the event, Linden's midget caught a rut, sending him airborne, then falling back to the track, where he struck his head on the guard rail and suffered critical head injuries. Andy Linden ended his racing career at age 35, but lived another three decades. Although confined to a wheelchair, he regained his memory and motor skills, and was eventually able to drive locally in his own car. Linden's talent was noted by his fellow drivers and car owners. If his car fell out of a race, they would often seek him out to drive their race car in relief. At his funeral, following his death in Gardena, California, on February 11, 1987, a number of his former competitors were there to pay their respects. 1957 Indy 500 winner Sam Hanks delivered the eulogy.

Andrew Logan "Andy" Linden is buried in Inglewood Park Cemetery in Inglewood, California.

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