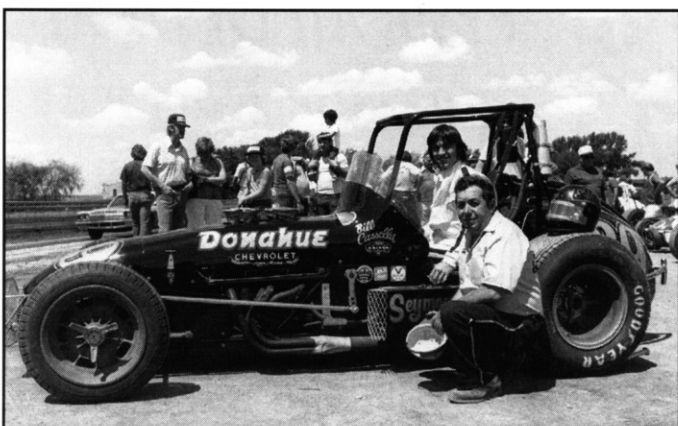


## "BOSTON" LOUIE SEYMOUR

by Pete Zanardi

The multitude of friends he left behind, continue to call him "Boston." And they do it with reverence. "Everybody called him Boston," recalled Billy Cassella, one of the dozens of drivers Louie Seymour of Marlboro, Massachusetts, employed.

Louis A. Seymour was born on January 19, 1927. Writer/Broadcaster Dr. Dick Berggren tabbed him "the man who towed a million miles." He spent decades dragging sprint cars, championship cars, even midgets cars, to United States Auto Club (USAC) events all over the country and, as writer "Bones" Bourcier observed "...to folks at some fairgrounds track in Illinois, anyone from Massachusetts had to be from Boston."



John Mahoney Photo

Almost always all or part of the family (wife Ellie, daughters MaryLou, Celeste and Lois and sons Mike and Bobby) was with him. "It was a huge family thing," recalls Doug Wolfgang, who drove Seymour's champ car a couple of times.

Cassella says he belongs "on a pedestal." The travel became more regional when his sons began driving midgets in the North Eastern Midget Association (NEMA). The sons still maintain a Silver Crown team, called "The Spirit of Boston," and stage a yearly "Boston Louie Memorial" midget race.

If Louie Seymour towed a million miles, it also seems he touched hundreds of lives. "I just like the way he handled himself," continues Wolfgang. "Even his biggest rival, if in fact he had one, had to admire the way he handled himself."

"When you travel like we did you meet a lot of people," explains Bobby. "My father was not a smoker, not a drinker. He didn't hang out with bad people; didn't engage in gossip. He didn't have time. Everybody liked him."

Lee Osborne, whose shop outside of Indianapolis seemed to be a collecting point during the 1970s and '80s, recalls visiting with a dying Seymour. "I always gave Boston a hard time about his accent," Osborne begins. "He took my hand and then said something about the dirt in the third turn at some race track, kind of overdoing it. Then he smiled. Miss Ellie (Seymour's wife) said that might have been the last time he smiled."

Ken Schrader, who won seven Silver Crown races, and a couple of midget races, for the Seymours, reports the first word his daughter Dorothy uttered was "Loo-ee" and it happened

after Seymour spent hours coaching her. "Then he gave her \$100," Schrader reports. "This was before Louie had grandchildren of his own."

Ken and Ann and 11-month old Dorothy joined Louis and Ellie Seymour at the last race at Ascot Park in Gardena, California. "We just wanted to do something special with them," explains Schrader. "We still do go up to Marlboro and blend in as part of the family."

Cassella recalls being flown to a hospital in Pittsburgh with serious injuries and then home to West Virginia after a crash at Winchester, Indiana. "He was with me all the time," he says. "He didn't say much but I remember felling good that he was there."

Seymour, who went with his dad to the "big car" races on the old fairgrounds tracks in New England, was a midget car owner first. Marriage slowed him down some but Mike and Bobby got into quarter-midgets and soon they were running as far away as Indiana.

Somebody suggested, "Why not just buy a sprint car?" Well, actually it was a dirt championship car and the Seymours towed it to Sacramento for Bob Tattersall to drive. Next came the sprint cars and then the legend.

In addition to Cassella, who won 14 sprint car races and the 1976 USAC Silver Crown title, and Wolfgang, the list of drivers includes George Snider, Sheldon Kinser, Bruce Walkup, Joe Saldana, Rich Vogler, Eddie Leavitt, Dave Blaney and Bentley Warren. There were maybe 50 wins – a Silver Crown triumph with Kinser at Williams Grove, many-time Hulman Classic successes at Terre Haute and some impressive Copper Classic statistics with Schrader. There were near misses too – Blaney led 99 of 100 laps of a Silver Crown show at Tampa and was within 10 laps of victory at Milwaukee.

"Both were positive experiences," Blaney says. "Being in Boston's car was always special. They were top of the line." Like most, Blaney remains a family friend.

It was all about family and loyalty. "There were a lot of families around but none from that far away," says Schrader who watched the Seymours before he started driving for them. "Somebody mentions Louie Seymour, it's not racing you think of first, it's the family and the way they looked out for each other."

The Seymour-Osborne relationship began in 1970 in Pennsylvania. The Seymours would stop at Dick "Toby" Tobias' place after running Reading. "We hit it off right from the start," says Osborne whose race car was there as well. The relationship grew and became solid when Osborne opened his own shop in Indiana.

"There were people from all over the place," Osborne says, "running sprints, USAC, the smaller circuits, the outlaws. I always said there should have been a grease fitting there because it was the center of the sprint car universe."

Osborne, who was racing outlaws at the time, recalls Seymour's loyalty. "He was always so loyal to USAC," Osborne says. "We would be nose-to-nose. I told him 'put a wing on it and go make some real money' and he would yell 'when you support an organization, you support it 100 percent.' That's how he felt."

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2004 National Sprint Car Hall of Fame

## "BOSTON" LOUIE SEYMOUR, continued

A 22-year old Cassella didn't know Seymour "from a load of coal" when he showed up at Eldora Speedway to drive the number 29. He crashed but still approached Louie. "I was calling him Mr. Seymour," says Cassella. "I figured I was fired but asked about driving next week anyway. They explained they would take a week off and go through the car and they'd call me. Well, I got the call for Cincinnati and I finished fourth and the relationship began."

Working in a steel plant, he is still there after 37 years, he points out his trips were 400 miles (the distance from Boston-to-Pittsburgh) shorter than the Seymours. He wasn't even aware the Seymours had a champ car before actively looking for a ride in '76. He piled up lots of fourths and fifths in a 22-year old chassis, clinching the title at Syracuse, New York – the closest Seymour ran to home.

He also recalls Louie returning home and he and the boys heading off to Illiana Speedway and crashing the car. "I went out in the backstretch," Cassella says. "My wife had given me a new watch and I scraped it on the wall. It stopped at 11:14 and I could never get it going again."

"We drove all night and actually woke Ozzie up," says Bobby. "The objective was to get it back in shape before Louie returned."

"He shoved it over about 15 inches," recalls Osborne. "We tugged and tugged but never got it all the way back. I think they went out and won three or four in a row. We called it the banana car because of the bow in it."

Cassella captured both halves of twin 50s at Eldora in the fall of 1979. He went home to wait for a call from an Indy car owner in Indianapolis and when it didn't come, he called the Seymours on New Year's Eve and quit. He still believes Louie understood.

Wolfgang actually met the Seymour family at the home of Mike Premici, a friend of both Osborne and Louie who often provided shelter for racers. "I came in the middle of the night and stumbled over two or three people on the living room floor. It was Louis and his guys. We became great friends."

"I hung out with them and worked on the car a lot. I would run off to the Outlaws and they to USAC. But I got a kick out of those guys. They always made me think I was a superstar, in a league higher than they were. I wasn't, but I have fond memories of that relationship."

Schrader, who had already started racing stock cars in NASCAR, hardly needed more pressure when he hooked up with the Seymours. "They had quit running the whole USAC schedule," he explains. "I had always talked to them when I was running USAC but this was really kind of a fluke, a let's go and do this thing." It produced six wins.

"Like everybody else we raced to win," Schrader continues. "If we didn't make it, did it make you miserable and make you want to run away? No! Were you still going to go out and have a real good time with some really fine people? Yes. We had \$1,000 dinners, win or lose, in Phoenix."

Louie Seymour passed away on September 13, 1996.