

CLARENCE "MUTT" ANDERSON

by Justin Zoch

When one spends their lifetime rubbing elbows with legends, it is very likely they themselves will become one. When one peruses the photos on the wall and the restored racers parked in Clarence Anderson's shop in Xenia, Ohio, it's easy to see the man guiding the tour is a legend himself.



Clarence "Mutt" Anderson

Anderson Family Collection

Clarence Anderson was born on June 20, 1915, but he would shortly thereafter be called "Mutt", a moniker that would stick with him permanently. Early in life, he labored in the family slaughterhouse but savored his free time so that he could pursue motorcycle racing. However, a friend named Clarence Belt convinced him that roadsters and sprint cars were a safer option and Anderson was soon sitting in his first sprint car.

Throughout 1937, '38 and '39, Anderson raced his car throughout the Midwest and found success, but he was also involved in a serious accident in Hammond, Indiana. Around the same time, a friendship developed between himself and fellow racer Everett Saylor. They were two kindred spirits who took pride in their profession and were careful to present themselves neatly and cleanly in an era when cleanliness wasn't foremost.

Saylor and Anderson raced several years together and had great success. Tragically, Everett Saylor lost his life racing in Cape Girardeau, Missouri, in 1942. Anderson has meticulously restored Saylor's Floyd "Pop" Dreyer-built number 4 and still visits his grave once a year to clean the tombstone.

Anderson spent the decade of the 1940's racing with some of the best in the country at famous speedways including Langhorne, Williams Grove and some of Anderson's favorites, the high-banked tracks of Dayton, Salem and Winchester. In 1947, Anderson entered his car, the first Kurtis-Kraft championship car, in the Indy 500 and, after practicing the car himself, was convinced by friend Wilbur Shaw to step aside and allow Travis "Spider" Webb to drive. However, the duo missed the race and Anderson never again owned a car in the 500.

Shortly thereafter, Anderson acquired a Kurtis-Kraft midget and began competing at the Cincinnati Race Bowl, the old 16th Street Speedway, Anderson and other race tracks, with such legendary drivers as Troy Ruttman,

Mike Nazaruk, Andy Linden, Eddie Sachs and Leroy Warriner. After running the midget for many years and earning national prominence, Anderson teamed in the Fifties with owner Lee Elkins and driver Mike Nazaruk to again tackle the tough sprint car circuit.

As the 1960's dawned, Clarence Anderson purchased the Konstant Hot

sprint car and, with sponsorship from H&H Machine Tool, quickly found legends lining up to get a ride in his car. A.J. Foyt, Johnny Rutherford, Bobby Unser and Billy Vukovich were just some of the high-profile racers who drove for Mutt in the Sixties. But, when Roger McCluskey climbed in the car at the midpoint of the decade, Anderson had found his perfect match. McCluskey and Anderson developed a deep friendship and had great success together. In 1966, Anderson, whose traveling had been tethered by the family business, and McCluskey ran the full United States Auto Club (USAC) sprint car tour. Following a season with nine wins and 22 (out of 24) 'top four' finishes, Anderson had his first USAC championship. The duo would continue together until McCluskey retired from driving sprint cars in the late 1960's.

The Seventies would see Anderson's nearly 40-year career in racing come to an end as he spent his final active time in the sport performing engine duties on Andy Granatelli's championship car. Anderson learned engine technology from legendary California engine-builder Clay Smith and he had a reputation for being very keen with powerplants. Granatelli often referred to Anderson as "the best damn dirt guy in America." After he left Granatelli's team, Anderson became USAC's technical officer and was well respected by the competitors. "They all kidded me that they knew I could catch them cheating because they said I had been cheating all those years," Anderson laughed.

Since leaving the sport, Anderson has spent his time restoring his old racers and tinkering in his shop. His original shop, as well as thousands of photos and artifacts, were lost in the severe Xenia tornado in 1974. Anderson still attends several vintage and old-timer meets every year and spends time with his two boys, Phil and Mike. He is also teaching his grandson Kirk the ins-and-outs of restoring and repairing Offenhauser engines.