

national sprint car hall of fame

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KNOXVILLE, IOWA

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& MUSEUM
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william "windy" McDonald

by Norm Bogan

William "Windy" McDonald was born in his great grandmother's home outside of Madill, Oklahoma, on March 13, 1934. His family left Marshall County in Oklahoma when he was six years old for Phoenix, Arizona. Eleven people started the journey in the old Buick of his uncle, Leslie "Babe" Jones, with jump seats and a homemade trailer. The Buick failed before they got out of Texas and they had to get a friend to drive his dad's '34 Ford to complete their seven-day journey. Each night, his mom and her sister, Uncle Babe's wife Marie, also known as "Pendy," would fix something to eat and according to young William, "you know what, even gravy made with water tasted pretty good."

Dad and Babe secured jobs working on the Parker Dam project on the Colorado River, where they lived in tents along the river. Returning to Phoenix, his dad was drafted into World War II. After two years, his mother moved them back to Oklahoma City where he attended sixth grade. They made a final return trip to Phoenix in April of 1947.

McDonald started going to South Mountain Speedway in 1951. In August of that year, Manzanita Speedway opened for business. He helped his cousin, Dee Jones, build a jalopy racer from a '34 Ford Sedan and they began racing in October of 1951. Having destroyed the racer about a month later, they built another car and Dee went on to a successful racing career, before retiring in 1973.

Windy graduated from Phoenix Union High School and attended Phoenix College for a year,

make both radio and television commercials to plug the coming events at Manzanita.

In addition to his Manzanita tasks, Windy announced sprint cars at Tucson Speedway on Friday nights, a few special events at Globe-Miami Speedway, and races at the Arizona State Fairgrounds in Phoenix. McDonald announced the Midwinter Fair races at El Centro, California, for a number of years and in the early years at Phoenix International Raceway (PIR) he was the announcer, returning briefly in later years. He left Manzy in 1973 to operate a new facility at Pinal County Fairgrounds in Casa Grande, but struggled with the loss of the financial backer. That, plus the tragic loss of his son, a "budding" track announcer, in an automobile accident at an intersection near the track entrance, devastated Windy and he declined to continue at that venue.

Windy came up with a novel end-of-the-year event, initially referred to as the Western United States Championship. Manzanita promoter R. Keith Hall learned of this proposed race and said, "I'll run it and pay \$10,000."

They met and worked out the details and the first race ran in 1968. Known over the years as the Western World Championship, it joined the Knoxville Nationals in Iowa and the Pacific Coast Open at Ascot Park in Gardena, California, making up the 'Triple Crown' for sprint cars.

The race ran annually at Manzy until the track's closing in 2009. The event then moved to Tucson and later to Canyon Raceway Park in Peoria, Arizona. Many of the national racing heroes have added their names to the event t-shirt. McDonald was the guy who got the teams one last big payday before the long winter break.

In 1986, McDonald realized a burning desire to create the Arizona Auto Racing Hall of Fame. Windy assembled a committee consisting of long-time midget car owner Glenn "Bud" Trainor, Tucson track promoter Bob Huff, former driver Bob Huebner of Tucson, and all-around utility player Landon "Woody" Woodmansee. This group laid out the criteria and rules to determine eligible candidates for the annual induction process.

Local Phoenix automotive supplier Steve Stroud furnished a building at his complex to house the new museum. Soon barns, garages and other protective devices began to yield a nostalgia fan's dream, as vintage race cars were spit-shined and polished for display at the Arizona Open Wheel Racing Museum and Motorsports Hall of Fame.

Family has always been important to McDonald. His mother, Naomi "Sissy" Henson, was born in 1912 in Oklahoma and, in 1929, married Ishmael Sherman McDonald, who was also born in Oklahoma in 1907. She delivered older brother Don in 1930, then William in 1934, and younger sister Peggy Jeanette in 1936. When the family returned to Phoenix in 1941,

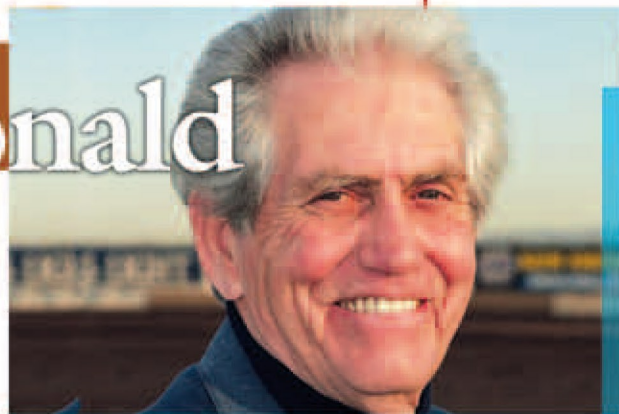


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Sissy went to work in an aircraft factory. William's parents divorced in Parker, but that made him eligible for the draft, so they remarried allowing his mother to collect an allotment from the U.S. Army. The family returned once again to Oklahoma City in 1946 and soon moved back to the Madill area. Windy worked at his grandfather Henson's gas station for one dollar a day. He saved his money and when Mother's Day arrived, he purchased a platform rocker for twenty-one dollars to show how much he loved her and appreciated all the sacrifices that she had made.

Windy's father spent his last year in the army at a Prisoner Of War (POW) camp and declined to share any of his war experiences. His dad opened an automobile garage and hired some of the county's best mechanics. Around that time, his mother and father renewed their divorce action and in April of 1947, his Mom and the kids returned to Phoenix permanently.

Windy married Betty Faulk on July 3, 1954, and their son, Ricky Wayne McDonald, was born on July 5, 1955. Windy's daughter Cynthia Jean was born on March 19, 1958. Cindy has two children, Brittany and Matt.

After a long separation, Windy met Diana Kostelny at a radio station that he had visited. They moved in together in 1979 and married on January 2, 1982. Diana has a son, Robert, whose wife spent 20 years as a U.S. Navy pilot, living in Dickinson, Texas. Diana's two daughters, Mandy and Chrissy, are in their late twenties and both live in San Diego, California.

William "Windy" McDonald was inducted into the Arizona Motorsports Hall of Fame in 1994.

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before starting work at the Reynolds Aluminum Plant in 1952. He was active in the United Steel Workers union and became a member of the Negotiating Committee in 1959 and subsequently served as chairman of the Grievance Committee.

In April, 1957, when promoter George Husky asked if Windy had announcing experience, he fibbed to land a one-week tryout at Manzanita. He continued his day job at Reynolds, until Harry Redkey offered him the public relations position at Manzy, in addition to his announcing chores. An added wrinkle in McDonald's assignment was to

