

national sprint car hall of fame

NATIONAL SPRINT CAR HALL OF FAME

KNOXVILLE, IOWA



scott Gerkin

by Kevin Oldham

Born January 17, 1958, Scott Gerkin grew up five miles east of Mitchell in the tiny town of Lawrenceport, and became acquainted with auto racing in his pre-teen years through an uncle and a friend's father who were regular Brownstown stock car competitors. Tearing lawnmower engines apart and tinkering with his 1965 Chevelle long before he was of legal driving age, after being formally instructed in auto mechanics by Larry Kinser, he graduated from Mitchell High School in 1976. A younger brother of Karl, Larry was ultimately responsible for Scott's initiation to the Kinser clan and sprint car craziness. A never-ending desire for figuring out how to do things with his own hands led him to become a literal jack of all trades. Although he never envisioned making a living from racing, Gerkin made the most of being in the right place, at the right time, and around the right people, creating a fulfilling 42-year career that continues to this day.

Post high school, Scott started working in a body shop and while on his way home he would often stop by Dizz Wilson's garage, gaining an introduction to sprint car maintenance. Traveling with Dizz and his wide assortment of drivers that included Dick Gaines, he even earned some seat time for Haubstadt hot laps. Discussing those formative years, Gerkin recalled, "For an 18-year-old kid, I was just trying to learn about the cars. I knew nothing about quick-change rear ends and fuel injection. If he wanted something done and I didn't know how to do it, I'd ask him to show me. I always loved learning new things."

With Wilson beginning to wind down, the newly-married mechanic extended his education with Mitchell car owner Ronnie McClain and chauffeur Bernie Graybeal. Soon thereafter, a significant turning point came after joining Richard Briscoe's squad for the 1981 season. Armed with ex-Karl Kinser ammunition, Briscoe, Gerkin, and new driver Chuck Amati registered double-digit victories, sharing the same enthusiasm for collecting larger paychecks from surrounding states. Doing bodywork at his dad's house when time allowed, Scott was now fully entrenched in the sprint scene as he stepped up his game to keep Richard's cars and engines in tip-top shape. Randy Kinser was in the saddle for 1982 and 1983 and the team's winning ways continued, recording 15 conquests which included a pair of All Star outings.

With his racing fuse fully lit, Karl Kinser's 1984 offer to take an extremely green Mark Kinser on the road with the World of Outlaws was impossible to turn down. Pulling an open trailer with a crew cab pickup, they ran about half of the races and had an absolute blast despite limited spares, a huge learning curve, and endless workload. After winning his first career feature at Knoxville in the final weeks of the season, Mark shared rookie of the year honors with Greg Wooley. Mark and Scott landed in victory lane at Lanier in March of '85 and secured sixth in points, but would part ways midway through 1986. Gerkin then took his tools to Gohr Racing, home of the famed Genesee Beer Wagons owned by Dick Hammond and operated by Galen Fox. Working alongside Galen's son Steve, Scott immediately clicked with a motivated Kenny Jacobs, winning an Eldora Nationals prelim in just their third outing. Competitive from coast to coast in their year and a half engagement, Gerkin and Jacobs tallied 14 triumphs that also included eight All Star scores, two USAC winged wars, a Western World prelim, and the Hoosier Hundred. Like a sponge, Scott soaked up the experience of constructing earth-shattering engines alongside Fox and Chuck Snyder, testing different combinations on a dynamometer for the first time.

That knowledge was immediately employed when yet another call came from Karl Kinser. Just like Fox, he wanted complete control of his engine program, asking Gerkin to head up the effort. Often toiling in Oolitic while the team was traveling, when Scott and Karl worked in tandem they were perfect partners, bouncing ideas off one another in their relentless pursuit to cut weight and create more horsepower. He often fulfilled Kinser's request that each engine be better than the last, thus allowing Steve Kinser to completely dominate the era from 1988 to 1994 when he laid claim to eight championships (6 WoO and 2 USA), five Knoxville Nationals, two Kings Royals, and nearly 250 feature victories. Recounting his biggest lesson learned from working with the master, Scott stated, "Compared to everyone else, Karl's work ethic was unreal. He showed me that you win most of your races in the shop. All the work you do to be prepared is where you win races."

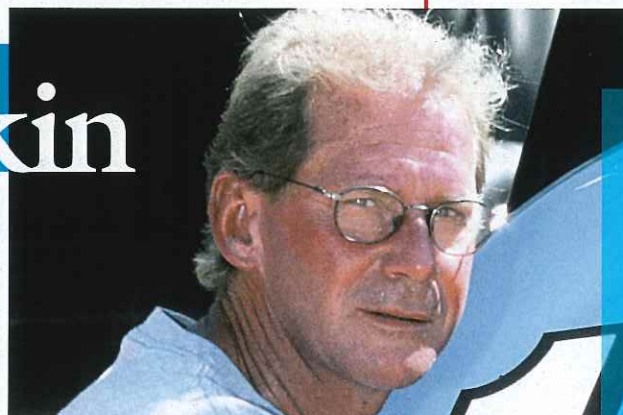


PHOTO CREDIT: BILL TAYLOR

Fast forward to the spring of 1995 and a life-changing conversation involved an unhappy Steve Kinser, who was aborting his NASCAR career and wanted Gerkin to lead the charge in constructing his new sprint car operation. Despite becoming very close with Karl, Scott said the decision was simple. "I knew it was a golden opportunity. Steve Kinser is the greatest sprint car driver that's ever been and for him to want me to go with him, it was really a big deal. I was very proud that he would ask me. I was ready for it, I loved it, and I had learned a lot about the engines and cars. For me, there was never a question. When he called, I was in."

After thrashing for a month and a half to accumulate equipment and assemble engines with Randy Kinser, he had the team ready to roll by early May. Winning in their fourth outing, by season's end they had amassed 18 feature victories which included the Historical Big One, Knoxville Nationals, and Syracuse. Finally stepping out of the shadows of greatness, 1995 serves as Gerkin's biggest accomplishment and most memorable season.

Although they managed to collect another Kings Royal in 1997, the next two World of Outlaws assaults were struggles, ending the year fourth and third in points. Midway through 1998, Kinser hired noted crew chief Guy Forbrook but didn't want to lose Gerkin, who willingly chose to step aside. Departing for a road construction gig with former Kinser Racing ally Joe Houk, after a couple of months he returned to focus on engines while the team took its first title. Back on the road with the King in 1999, Scott would proudly wear his first WoO crown as a full-time crew chief after the 2000 season. Steve Kinser Racing truly hit its stride from 2002 to 2005 and with the aid of capable crew members Jamie Coates and Ian Swanger, they copped four consecutive World of Outlaws championships, two more Kings Royals, one more Knoxville Nationals, and another 88 A-mains. Gerkin/Kinser power also accounted for Kraig Kinser's 2005 Knoxville Nationals triumph.

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The adage of what goes up must come down rang true after Steve and Scott joined the rival National Sprint Tour for 2006. In what would become season filled with heavy hearts, Scott lost his father in March while NST captain Fred Brownfield unexpectedly died after an on-track incident in June. Wanting to see the series succeed, Kinser became part owner and juggled driving, promoting, and administration duties. Even though SKR team driver Tim Kaeding led the series with 14 wins, the added distractions took their toll on both Kinser and Gerkin. Steve could only capture five victories, ending the exhausting campaign second in points to Danny Lasoski.

After the NST folded, the two team principals returned to the Outlaw trail for 2007. Although they were still winning races on a regular basis, the impact of that draining 2006 season was still evident as 20-win championship seasons were no longer the norm. When funding became scarce, they agreed to join Tony Stewart's empire for 2010, immediately responding with another Kings Royal, a solid third in points, and Crew Chief of the Year honors for Gerkin. The bittersweet Salute to the King Tour of 2014 would serve as the final farewell for this dynamic duo and at the season-ending awards banquet, the respected wrench was honored with the Ted Johnson Memorial Award for Outstanding Contribution to Sprint Car Racing, always willing to promote the sport to strangers in motel parking lots and provide honest advice to up-and-coming mechanics.

Despite knowing that he had reached the end of the road, he agreed to assist longtime friend Jason Sides in the early months of 2015.

However, by the time the calendar had flipped to June, he was ready to head home for the final time. Realizing that his priorities had changed, he sorely missed the quality time spent with his wife (Sharon) and two daughters (Sarah and Samantha). Later that year, the next chapter of his life began when accepting a position at One Way Technologies in Washington, Indiana, a new company formed from a merger between Weld Tech and Jones Engineering. Although the thrills of building racing engines across multiple disciplines may not be the same as winning Knoxville from 14th, he maintains his life-long lust for learning, works reasonable hours, and gets to see his wife every night.

Summarizing his highly-satisfying journey, Scott reflected, "It was just so much fun. I got to spend 30 years doing what I loved to do. Thinking about all the people I hung out with and learned from, not to mention all the friends I made, it has truly been an amazing ride. But what's even more amazing is that my wife has somehow stuck with me through all of this. It really doesn't get any better than that."

Fully aware of the impact that his mentors had on the entire sprint car landscape and his own career, Gerkin is honored to have his name spoken in the same breath. Extremely passionate and emotional regarding his memories and accomplishments, he offered a final reminder of what attracted him to the sport and helped him stay so long. "There is a certain amount of pride in carrying on their tradition. I knew all those guys and grew up around them. So, when I came through the pit gate, naturally I wanted to be the best there. I wanted to kick their tails. You walk with a certain amount of pride when you're doing that. That's why you do it. It's not about hanging with your buddies and drinking beer. It's about winning races."

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