

2020 National Sprint Car Hall of Fame Inductee



JEFF SWINDELL

Driver

by Tony Martin

Photo: Paul Arch



Born into a racing family on January 6, 1961, to Sam and Carolyn Swindell, Jeff Swindell was in attendance the first race of that season. Jeff grew up with a full “race mentality” in everything he did. He raced Big Wheels in the living room of the Church his parents bought and turned into their home and garage, and built race tracks in the backyard that went from bicycles to Go-Karts to 50-lappers on the family tractor with a helmet and scarf.

It was no surprise that Jeff moved into a full-sized race car at the age of 15 when family friend BA Norwood showed up with Jeff’s Christmas present: an older B Car that Jeff’s father Sam Swindell had built for him years earlier, and the race was on in 1976.

Jeff qualified in the fast heat for his first race, from the second row he ran over the front row going into the first turn as they checked up and he didn’t, it would be his first time on his head and the end of his first night, but definitely not the end of a lifetime of climbing into a race car. He started winning around home his first year and grew into Victory Lane in Sprint Cars the second and started traveling with the race car in tow.

He competed in the very first World Of Outlaws event at Devils Bowl Speedway in 1978 and while moving forward and looking for a transfer into the feature he got tangled up in someone else’s wreck

which ended his night. The next day while working on the car in the parking lot, a voice rang down from a second story room, “Nice job rookie!” and the guy tossed him a T-Shirt. It

was Doug Wolfgang...a sign to Jeff he was on his way.

Jeff’s parents and older brother Sammy then helped Jeff secure parts with the backing of family friends from Casey Farms to get him on the road more often. He would run Friday nights at Devil’s Bowl in Texas, then Saturday at his hometown track Riverside, then off to Haubstadt (Indiana) or Little Springfield (Illinois) on Sunday. When he could bank enough money, he’d hit the road with brother Sammy and the World of Outlaws until the money would run out and the cycle would start over.

He drove for owners all over the

country and brought several to the WoO trail, including Gil Suiter, Casey Luna, and The Williams Brothers, to name a few, who all became teams that contended for the championship over the years.

In 1984, *Car & Driver Magazine* named Jeff as one of the 10 Best Race Drivers in the world, alongside drivers from Formula One, Indy Car and the ranks of NASCAR.

Swindell won his first WoO show in 1984 at Paragon Speedway in Indiana when he came from mid-pack and passed Steve Kinser on the outside for the win in the B&L Electric machine. He has won Sprint Car races at many tracks around the country including Riverside, Devils Bowl, Haubstadt, Knoxville, Eldora where he performed the very first “Wing Dance”, Chico’s Gold Cup, Skagit’s Dirt Cup, Lernerville’s Don Martin Memorial, Manzanita, Can-



Getting ready to tackle the WoO at Williams Grove in 1984.

Photo: Paul Arch

yon's Slick 50, I-70 Speedway, Hanford and Baylands to name a few!

He's won races with the World Of Outlaws, USAC Sprints and Silver Crown, All Stars, ASCS National Tour, USCS, King of the West, Knoxville Championship Cup, ASCS Midwest, ASCS Frontier and the ASCS Northwest.

He is listed 15th on the WoO's all-time win list with 51 victories. Among them was the first WoO feature win utilizing a Ford Engine with owner Casey Luna and builder Ron Shaver at Colorado National Speedway. He was the series Rookie of the Year in 1981. Jeff was the runner-up in the Knoxville Nationals in 1994 from fourth and again in 1995 when he came out of the B Main while starting 22nd driving the Two Winners 7TW for Tom Wimmer and Bob Kramer, whom Jeff drove the last seven years of his tenure on the WoO trail with. He was also the Knoxville 360 Nationals Champion in 2002.

Jeff ran with the WoO for the most of his full-time racing years from 1978 to 1999. He finished as high as second in the Championship points in 1989 and finished in the top 10 in points 12 times.

Jeff was the Riverside Speedway Sprint Car Champion in 2007 and won the All Star Circuit of Champions race at Riverside that year with a 360 engine, aboard Kevin Davis's 12 car. He won the first ASCS National Tour race with a 360 Ford Engine,



Getting ready for racing at Hagerstown, Maryland, in 1986.

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built by Roush at I-30 Speedway in Arkansas. He was the ASCS Speedweek Champion in 2013 and Sportsman of the Year in 2014. He finished second in points to Jason Johnson that year when it came down to the final event.

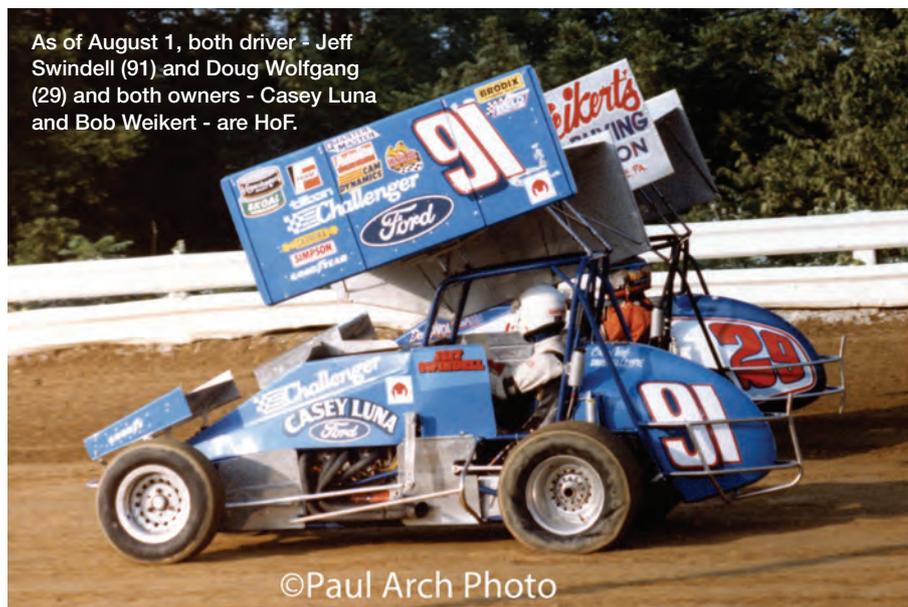
Jeff was introduced to AJ Foyt at Indy in 1986. AJ said "I know who he is," and in their first conversation Jeff asked AJ to sponsor him at the Indy Mile for the WoO race and AJ did so. While hanging out in the garage area the next week, Tim Delrose called AJ and told him that their driver for the Hoosier 100 on Thursday, Gary Bettenhausen was pulled from their car as he had qualified for the Indy 500. AJ told him he had his

driver standing in his garage. Tim didn't want to hire what he called "a wing guy" but the next day Tim met with Jeff and hired him. They started in the rear due to mechanical issues and with no yellows in the race, Jeff drove to the lead and won the race and lapped the bulk of the field. This led to four USAC Silver Crown Victories in the famed Delrose & Holt machine over the years.

In the USAC Silver Crown Series, he has won four of the prestigious races, three on the Indy Mile and one at the Du Quoin Mile. He finished second in championship points in 1988 and he held the track record at the Springfield Mile for six years. Still driving in the mile races Jeff came from 28th to third in 2017 at Springfield and led 68 laps before finishing third at DuQuoin. Jeff's love of "The Big Cars" shines through, he jokingly says they're like racing a bus on ice.

When Jeff got off the road with the World of Outlaws at the end of 1999, he started writing a monthly column for Open Wheel Magazine, which later turned into Sprint Car & Midget Magazine, and continued his column until he recently passed the torch to Brady Bacon, to concentrate on his business.

Swindell took on a different short-term career in the TV booth in 1992, with Mike Joy and Dick Berggren, providing color for the Live Slick 50 Sprint Car Winter Series. That year Jeff, put the first points fund together for the series as he reached out to



As of August 1, both driver - Jeff Swindell (91) and Doug Wolfgang (29) and both owners - Casey Luna and Bob Weikert - are HoF.

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Running the famous Two Winners 7tw at St. Augustine in 1996.

Photo: Paul Arch

as a turning point in safety. He has worked with manufacturers like ButlerBuilt and J&J to improve seats and seat installation.

When Jeff went back on the road in 2013, he got tired of the failures and effort involved in the mechanical tire bleeders that everybody was using. He knew there had to be a way to come up with an electronic version, so he went to work on the problem. After testing many parts, he landed on what he thought would work and after making the first one out of a piece of old exhaust tubing, it actually worked perfectly. After plugging it in the tire for the first time and it worked, he stepped back, sat down, and thought "Holy crap, everybody is going to want this!"

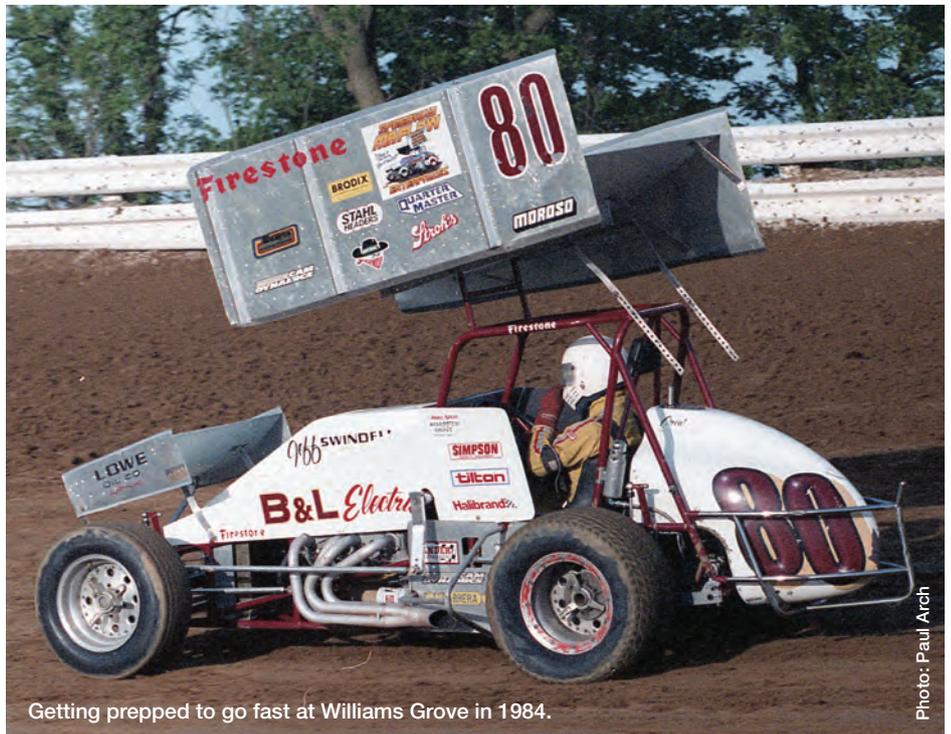
After already going through the patent process once before he knew what he had to do...keep it hidden until he could get the Provisional Patent filed. So while he was getting that done he would park away from everyone in the pits and when nobody was looking he would sneak the bleeder out of the trailer in his uniform, slip it into the right rear and put the cover on so nobody knew it existed while he was testing it. He kept it a secret for six months. The Swindell Bleeder now graces victory lane most nights at the majority of Sprint Car, Midget and micro tracks

all the manufacturers and dealers of Sprint Car parts to pitch in. Although he enjoyed his time in the tv booth, when the next year came around, Jeff was driving for Two Winners, so he reached out to Brad Doty to fill his shoes in the booth, Brad proved to be the right choice as he's turned into the go-to-guy for all major Sprint Car telecasts ever since. Jeff won three of the nine races that year and finished second in points to Steve Kinser as the Championship came down to the last race.

Swindell was Manufacturer of the Year for North American Non-Wing Sprint Car Poll in 2017 with Swindell Bleeders. He grew up with a father that designed and built his own race cars from scratch. His mentality was that there is always a better way. This was instilled in Jeff as his love of racing and design has shown through in many ways over the years. When the old shaker screens used to keep the radiators clean on Sprint Cars would clog up and cause the car to run hot on his Gil's Drilling car while racing in Arizona, he designed the first Air Box, which is now on every Sprint Car today. He designed the first internal wing slider into his Top Flight Wings that Larry Paige built with quick release fittings used on the slider valve to make a quick wing change. A radiator mounted on the engine was a first and the quick release gauge

panel stayed attached to the engine and was removable with two Dzus buttons, which is a staple on Sprint Cars today. He also has the first Patent of the Ignition Timing Tool which makes it easy for anyone to install a magneto or distributor. Engine builders alike rave about this tool as it saves them time when putting the engine back together and not having to adjust the timing once the engine is on the dyno.

After losing friend Dave Bradway Jr at the Dirt Cup, he used it



Getting prepped to go fast at Williams Grove in 1984.

Photo: Paul Arch

across the USA, Canada, Australia and New Zealand.

Swindell is now working on several new projects, mostly race related, and is still racing part time in 410 and 360 Sprints and Silver Crown cars when his bleeder business allows. "Whoever said, 'do what you love and you'll never work a day in your life,' didn't realize you have to love doing it seven days a week, but the joy in accomplishment is the most gratifying thing in life, outside of family," said Swindell.

He has raced other type cars over the years including Winston Cup, Oswego Big Block Supers, Big Block Modifieds, Late Models, Midgets, Modifieds, ARCA, 24 Hours Of Daytona, Street Stocks, Mini Stocks and pretty much anything he could get behind the wheel of.

Jeff married Virginia (Sissy) Ward of a local stock car family in 1982. While Jeff was on the road, Sissy raced a Mini Stock around Memphis for 13 years and won a championship in 2006. They have three children. Britni raced for a few years and now has two children of her own, Annabelle and Gunner. Shelby is now a local 2nd grade teacher, who loves her daytime kids. Asa, their youngest, has been on the road with Jeff since 2011. He started driving a street stock at the age of 12 and is racing a 360 Sprint Car now. Asa also works with Jeff building, repairing bleeders and taking care of customers. 🏆



Photo: Paul Arch

In Pete Grove's 70, 2018 Nationals.

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