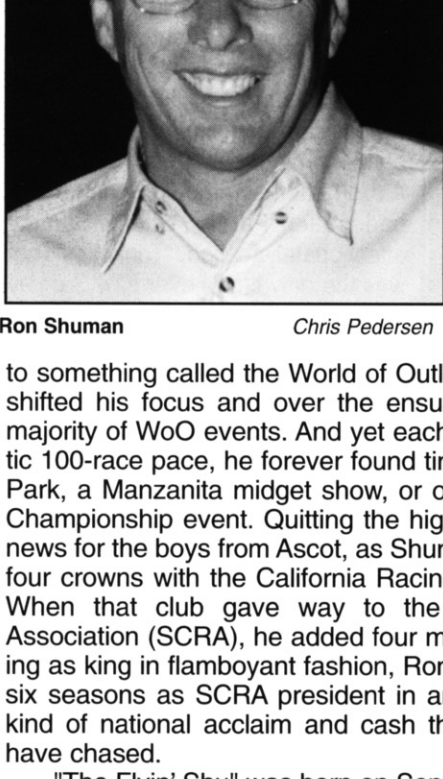


RON SHUMAN

by Kevin Eckert



Ron Shuman

Chris Pedersen

Arizona's Ron Shuman virtually insured his induction to the National Sprint Car Hall of Fame in 1979. That was the summer when he won the Knoxville Nationals, the third trophy in a mythical Triple Crown.

It was a time of transition. The United States Auto Club (USAC) was relinquishing its role as America's premier sprint car circuit

to something called the World of Outlaws (WoO). Shuman shifted his focus and over the ensuing decade, made a majority of WoO events. And yet each year, despite a hectic 100-race pace, he forever found time to slip off to Ascot Park, a Manzanita midget show, or occasional USAC Dirt Championship event. Quitting the highway in '88 was bad news for the boys from Ascot, as Shuman began a string of four crowns with the California Racing Association (CRA). When that club gave way to the Sprint Car Racing Association (SCRA), he added four more titles. Since retiring as king in flamboyant fashion, Ron has served the past six seasons as SCRA president in an effort to create the kind of national acclaim and cash that he himself would have chased.

"The Flyin' Shu" was born on September 15, 1952, five years after brother Billy. At age 16, Ron began riding motorcycles competitively, eventually trying the Mint 400 that left him lying in the desert with a broken back. Soon, he saw the sense in four wheels like Bill, third in the Western World before embarking on the '71 USAC midget circuit. Ron began racing the same super-modified from which Bill, and later Lealand McSpadden, advanced to sprint cars. The younger Shuman followed suit by snaring the state super-mod title and rookie of the year of the Arizona Racing Association (ARA) sprints to close 1972.

Lowell Carsten provided the '73 Speedmart special that made a Manzanita winner of Shuman. They wasted no time towing to the Knoxville Nationals. After all, Billy had been second there a summer before. Ron had a rougher time, taking third in a B-main without transfers. Undaunted, they returned to make the '74 A-main in the middle of a month that amassed seconds at Kansas City and Belleville, and thirds at North Starr and the Nebraska State Fairgrounds. On their hometown Manzanita Speedway, Shuman and Carsten finished fifth in the Western World Championship.

In '75, Shuman shifted to the Lincoln Thrift entry of Bill Boat, beating CRA around Manzy by early June. Ron tried a third Nationals with Boat, missing Knoxville's final but managing to win at Eagle on the way home. Shuman's Western World was the remarkable story of losing Boat's primary car in its preliminary yet, winning anyway beneath the bolt-on cage of Bill's old CAE machine.

At the end of '75, Ron's friend Mike Devin, owner and crew chief of Lloyd Ruby's Indy car, permitted Shuman to practice at Phoenix International Raceway, inflaming his inherent dirt track desire to reach the Indianapolis 500. A few months later, Ron returned to PIR to drive Boat's sprint in the '76 Copper Classic.

Speedway Motors was impressed by his Eagle attack, and summoned Shuman to win there for "Speedy" Bill Smith. For the '76 Nationals however, Ron fostered his early connection to Phoenix car builder Gary Stanton. They finished five spots short of the A. October was brighter, beginning with a sweep of Albuquerque, controversial second-place of an extended Western, and first prize in the Pacific Coast Open at Ascot Park.

Indianapolis still the goal, Shuman stationed himself there in 1977. M.A. Brown, who owned the car in which Norman "Bubby" Jones beat Ron in the Western, fielded USAC 85 that Shuman placed eighth at Eldora and made ABC's "Wide World of Sports" from Terre Haute. Roaming around Gasoline Alley, Ron spent the month of May assisting Arizona's Roger McCluskey, eighth in that year's 500.

To support himself and wife Chris beneath the USAC shield, Shuman expanded to midgets. He was fourth at Huron and first at little Springfield for Gary Gamester, who had given Billy Shuman a job six summers before. Dan Pool's Cosworth Vega vaulted Ron to second at Santa Fe and thirds at Kokomo and Fairmont. He also established a record Cedar Rapids lap for Volkswagen pioneer Doug Caruthers. Shuman also found an old champ car for the '77 Hoosier Hundred before John Slack's "Ozark Bomb" did detonate.

As a sprint star, Shuman moonlighted second in a pair of Wednesdays in Des Moines driving the Ricke/Hill (R&H) Farms 40. That cantilever car was Ron's ride for the '77 Triple Crown consisting of the Knoxville Nationals (prelim winners before settling for sixth), Western World and Pacific Coast, both of which were won by Ron and R&H Farms. In his first Turkey Night Midget Grand Prix at Ascot, Ron was sixth for Gamester.

He opened '78 on the Phoenix mile in the Landry & McNeely "Red Crush" car, a Stanton that Ron used to sweep El Centro's CRA weekend. A second USAC season came with Don Siebert and crew chief Jim McQueen. On dirt, they were third at Eldora, Reading and Flemington. Pavement produced fifth at Salem and third at I-70. Shuman also drove Dan Pool's midget to seconds at Haubstadt and Santa Fe. On the Fourth of July at Reading, Ron made USAC winners of both Siebert and Pool for NBC television.

Card-carrying USAC status did not make Shuman feel as if he should skip the Knoxville Nationals. After its prelim, he chartered a plane to carry McQueen and himself to Salem, where Ron apologized for killing the engine in qualifying. USAC saw it differently, especially after he bounded over the wall to rush back to Iowa. Falling two spots short of the Nationals only flared tension within the enormous Siebert Olds camp. One of their two champ cars had broken on Shuman at Syracuse and Springfield, then coated him with power steering fluid at DuQuoin. He pitted, McQueen told him to tough it out, so Shuman soldiered on. It would be his final act for Siebert, who huddled a team meeting in which Jim released Ron.

Losing the Siebert gig did not immediately run Ron from USAC, as he placed the Pool Cosworth first at Kokomo and

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second at Springfield, joined George Middleton for the Hoosier Hundred in Pizza Hut 55, then recorded third at Eldora in the Smith Speed Shop 14.

Two nights after that Eldora event, Shuman was in Lawton, Oklahoma, with a new series known as the World of Outlaws. It effectively ended his USAC membership, though he did end their '78 season with a third at Ascot in the Agagianian house car.

These new Outlaws raced for real money. Therefore, it was where Shuman lingered. He made his first trip to Florida and was victorious at Volusia and East Bay in the Firestone house car 721. Shuman and Stanton teamed for WoO wins at Houston, West Memphis, Eldora, Hartford, Topeka and Indy's mile, while pinning a point lead on seconds at Tulsa, Champaign, Knoxville, Haubstadt, Granite City, Lima and Skagit.

But when Shuman and Stanton discovered the '79 WoO kings would make \$20,000 less than advertised, they became the outlaw's outlaw. They took the Auto Shack special to Texas for five wins at Dallas, Lawton, Wichita and Belleville, then topped CRA at Manzy and the Mexican border oval at Chula Vista.

Thirteen days after Chris gave birth to Casey Shuman, mother and son were with Ron and Gary in the winner's circle of the '79 Knoxville Nationals. No one had ever claimed the biggest prizes offered by Knoxville, Manzanita and Ascot Park.

Stanton began to expand. He torched together a midget that Shuman used to triumphantly ruffle feathers on Turkey Night. Another side project was an ex-Roger Penske Cosworth that Gary and Ron raced in the spring Ontario 200. It was a shakedown for the 1980 Indianapolis 500, which they missed by a tick of the clock.

In his element, Shuman scorched a dozen sprint car fields at Ascot, Denver, Manzanita, Chula Vista, Dallas and Santa Maria. In champ cars, he finished fourth at DuQuoin for Pizza Hut. In midgets, Ron presented Larry Howard and Ron Weeks a second Turkey Night.

Shuman started the '81 sprint season second at East Bay and Dallas for Speedway Motors. He had been fifth on the Phoenix mile for Larry Howard, who secured Oxman Publishing for a champ car that rallied Ron to fourth at Knoxville and fifth in the Hulman Hundred. Shuman stifled CRA at Manzanita for Bill Krug, won there for Gil Suiter, and polished off Putnamville and Kokomo for Mark Todd. Shuman was also second at the Dirt Cup for Snow Speed Shop.

As Al Unser, Jr., ascended to where Shuman could not, Ron resumed as Gary Stanton's ace by winning at Houston, Dallas, Denver and three Ascot events. He also jockeyed John Siroonian's car to glory at Ascot, Chula Vista and a sweep of the Western World. Capping his calendar was a third straight Turkey Night.

Oklahoma Fixture Company (Ofixco) orange became Shuman's colors in 1982. Ofixco's Lloyd K. Stephens. owned speed boats, dragsters, 100-inch champ cars, a 96-inch dirt car, and the 86-inch sprint cars in which Ron was a regular with the World of Outlaws. He was second at Dallas, West Memphis and Winnipeg, then first at Baylands Raceway Park.

The unfortunate irony of Shuman's first full WoO season was that it was the first one without a single wingless race. To scratch that itch, Ron won for Siroonian at

Ascot, Richard Snell on the Indy mile, Don Urgo at Chula Vista, and for Jack French on a weekend sweep of Putnamville, Lawrenceburg and Kokomo.

Operating Ofixco's Grant King car, Shuman secured third at Eldora and Springfield, fourth at Flemington, and sixth at Denver and the Hoosier Hundred. At the next day's Hut Hundred, he nudged Nick Gojmeric's midget to first-place, then third at an Eldora Four Crown when he was also third for French and achieved the first Silver Crown checkered of his USAC career. At Ascot, he became USAC's first midgeteer since Billy Engelhart in '73 to combine Hut Hundred and Turkey Night wins in a two-month span.

Thanksgiving '82 should have been late enough to determine Ron Shuman as the USAC Silver Crown king. However, the twice-postponed reopening at Nazareth finally ran through slop and December darkness on a rough mile that buckled Ron's rear suspension. When it was red-flagged, Ken Schrader had stolen Shuman's throne.

Upon returning to Nazareth for the '83 USAC opener, Ofixco toled a Stanton sprint in which Shuman handled Hagerstown. On the miles, Shuman was second at Springfield and seventh at DuQuoin. Against the WoO, he was second at Sioux Falls, Eldora, Lincoln, Lemerville, Houston, Oklahoma City, Wichita, Knoxville and Gold Cup, and first at Dallas and Santa Fe.

Without wings, he borrowed Ron Lovell's car to land the Louie Vermeil NARC Classic at Calistoga, was second at the Western and first in the '83 Pacific Coast for Ofixco, then triumphantly closed Ascot for Sam Bailey. Only a flat tire kept Shuman from smoking Turkey Night for the fifth straight holiday.

The 1984 WoO campaign for Shuman and Stephens produced seconds at Paragon, Granite City, Lincoln, Lawton and Oklahoma City before sweeping Santa Fe. Ron tried one of the team's 100-inch winged cars and won Odessa and Knoxville. He steered the King car to second at DuQuoin, their Stanton sprint to weekly wins at Odessa, swept another Western, then started a new string of Turkey Night midget success.

In its first two months of '85, the WoO Ofixco effort peaked third in Houston and second at Odessa, where Gary Sokola staged the first CRA race east of Tucson. Conveniently for Ron, it fell during a WoO schedule break. For CRA, that meant a stinging Odessa defeat. Two days later at Terre Haute, the same fate awaited USAC when a late pass of Larry Rice netted Shuman the Tony Hulman Classic co-sanctioned by CRA.

Beneath wings, Ofixco was second at Cayuga County, Wayne County, Dallas, Milwaukee and Kokomo, and first at Wichita, Eagle and Sedalia prelims, plus sweeps of Santa Fe and Baylands. Shuman ended third with the WoO, and the 600 points between him and the 'King Of The Outlaws' were as close as he would get to the crown worn annually by Steve Kinser.

Though he and crew chief Mark Todd were third again in '86, the fifth and final Ofixco WoO campaign ended quietly. In its first four months, they were no better than fourth until a surprise Oklahoma City win. True to form, better days occurred during gaps in the Outlaw trail when Shuman was second in Denver and Hanford, and first at Baylands for Bailey. The highlight of '86 WoO action was getting second in Ron's 14th straight Knoxville Nationals.

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Home by the Manzy junkyard, he won with Jack Yeley's midget and took the sprint race honoring Albert "Buddy" Taylor. He and Yeley traveled to Tulsa for eighth in the inaugural Chili Bowl. For the Phoenix mile, Tom Klein put Shuman brothers in sprints that made Ron third to runner-up Ken Hamilton and winner Bob Frey.

Despite falling short of Shuman's standard for productivity, the World of Outlaws were too lucrative to leave. Ron eagerly awaited the '87 season with crew chief Ken Woodruff on cars designed by Stanton for the Challenge Chassis Company. Shuman and Woodruff were employed by New Mexico politician Casey Luna, a Ford dealer who demanded Fords to power his sprint cars. Ron fought the weight handicap to seconds at Houston, Crossville, Pevely, Santa Fe and Lebanon Valley. In the mud of a rain-delayed prelim, Shuman unleashed the Ford to finally conquer the historic Williams Grove oval that had frustrated him for seven years.

Frustration was rampant in Luna land. Exploding their last engine, Ron had to borrow Greg Wooley's car to maintain points. He soon gave notice that he had formed a team with Indiana's Gary Runyon. A week later in Milwaukee, Luna terminated Ron before Runyon was ready. Shuman finished fourth at Lemerville and fifth at Lincoln with the Wooley Challenger until the Party Tyme rental rig of Runyon unloaded for eighth at the Knoxville Nationals, sixth at Albuquerque and Denver, then third at Baylands before parking after Syracuse. Gary did send Ron a new Pontiac Challenger that chewed another Turkey Night victory.

Remarkably, Ron was plagued by the creeping self-doubts that strike many racers from time to time, particularly those beaten by Steve Kinser roughly 100 nights a year for six years. Desperate to change his mental state, Shuman saw a hypnotist. Perhaps more significant was Ron's return to his roots as a wingless warrior. Ed Ulyate of Three Day Blinds offered him an Ascot CRA ride that he put in Ascot's victory lane right away. They went to Manzanita and won again, then back to Ascot to go three-for-three.

Ulyate wanted a CRA champion. Shuman was ready, having seen enough truck stops. First, he did fly to Florida to wheel Weikert Livestock to second at Jacksonville and ninth on the state fairgrounds. Three Day Blinds shaded CRA's opening weekend at Manzanita, backed by seconds at Lakeside, Wichita and Hanford, first at Dallas and Baylands, and ten wins at Ascot that included the Don Peabody Classic for the club leader who was presiding over Ron's 1978 USAC sprint season when his plane went down. Shuman used Skip Schuck's midget to also win at Ascot and Hanford.

Three Day Blinds covered a one-year second of a career. Ron's revelation that he would seek a second term as CRA king with Andy Morales raised eyebrows. Only a few months before, Shuman told Andy how he would be forced to wreck his Tamale Wagon to answer encroachment by Mike Sweeney. Although they exchanged angry words in '88, Morales and Shuman became '89 CRA champions by winning once at Hanford, Santa Maria and Yuma, twice in Tucson, and three times at Ascot topped by another Peabody.

Away from CRA, Shuman saddled into two champ cars. He drove for Don Snow at Sacramento, and guided Tim Delrose and Dale Holt's machine to third in the

'89 Hoosier Hundred. He took second in Tucson aboard Larry Howard's midget, then ran seventh in the winged Western for Iowa's Max Rogers.

CRA ended one decade and opened another on asphalt. In three Bakersfield trips to Mesa Marin Raceway, Ron and Andy Morales posted two seconds and a track record. Matching eight wins from '89 equaled another championship and another Peabody for Ron. On two Sundays, Shuman lingered at Ascot to win with Skip Schuck's midget, also schooling local Arizona Midget Racing Association (AMRA) midgets in 1990 at Manzy and Canyon Raceway.

Schuck and Shuman completed a pilgrimage to Tulsa by scooping seventh from the '91 Chili Bowl. Outdoors, they eclipsed El Centro, Yuma and two Manzanita midget wins. A sudden illness to Jac Haudenschild inspired Guy Forbrook to ring Ron for the '91 Knoxville Nationals, which they missed by one B-main position. Shuman never again ran with wings.

Seven scores at El Centro, Chico, Manzy, Kings and Bakersfield brought the '91 CRA title to Shuman and Morales in the first season for Andy without Ascot. Billy Wilkerson provided Ron's ride in 1992, winning five features between Bakersfield, Manzy, and the lone pavement victory of Ron's career at Mesa Marin. Wilkerson was unable to chase CRA to Pennsylvania, signifying the end of Shuman's four-year reign as king. He filled the time taking Schuck's midget to four wins at Manzy, another at Kings, eighth in Ron's first Belleville Nationals, and an unprecedented seventh Turkey Night win, this one at Bakersfield.

The highlight of '92 was Ron and Fred Ede posting a \$24,000 triumph in the Hoosier Hundred. Ede was convinced to send Shuman after the '93 Silver Crown championship. They opened ninth at Phoenix, sixth at Springfield and IRP, third at DuQuoin and the Hoosier Hundred, second in the Hulman Hundred, then first at Eldora. But after qualifying on the pole of Sacramento's season finale, Ron ran seventh to drop the title to Mike Bliss by two points in the slimmest margin in the 23-year history of the series.

The 47th and final season by CRA in '93 totaled four wins by Wilkerson and Shuman at Manzy, Kings and Bakersfield. By the fall, CRA survivors staged three SCRA events, the first serving as the first-ever 410-cubic-inch fight at Ventura Raceway. Solidly behind the resurrection, Ron and Bill racked second at Ventura and victories at El Centro and Bakersfield. Shuman was also second at Chili Bowl and first on Turkey Night.

Back for Chili Bowl '94, Ron parked Skip's midget in the victory lane for his prelim, but retreated to fifth in the final. SCRA continued the tradition of opening on Copper World weekend, when Wilkerson's car sat incomplete. Shuman instead borrowed Jack Yeley's old Gambler and won Manzanita anyway. He led the entire point chase courtesy of 11 wins in 24 starts for Wilkerson. They took four of six from Santa Maria, doubled at Manzanita and El Centro, and hit singles at Ventura, Kings and Mohave Valley Raceway.

As a USAC champ car strategist, SCRA's king was an Ede entry who crossed tenth at Sacramento, seventh at IRP and second in the '94 Hulman Hundred. Schuck and Shuman were Bakersfield winners who made their

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strongest lunge at a Chili Bowl in '95 by finishing first on prelim night, then second in its final.

With Wilkerson stepping down as champion, Skip Schuck parked his midget until Thanksgiving to fund and wrench an SCRA title defense by Shuman. Their Dave Ellis chassis was second from Skagit and San Jose to Santa Maria and Mohave, victor at Ventura and Manzanita, yet surrendered the crown to Ron's rival of 23 years, Tempe neighbor Lealand McSpadden. Shuman paced time trials on nine nights, twice lowering Bakersfield's track record until its concrete wall rendered a slight concussion.

Number two covered Ron's longest and spell into 1996. Unfortunately, the midget the longest dry tail of Ron's career. Highlights for Schuck and Shuman were seconds at Manzy, Kings, twice at Ventura, and six times on the new Perris Auto Speedway until ultimately winning its season finale.

Though he'd have preferred to see son Casey seek a career as a golf pro, the kid chose dad's dangerous game in 1997. Parental concern, exposing second wife Paula to her first emergency ward, and an unfamiliar struggle for victory all contributed to convince Ron to call it a career after '97.

First, there was that nagging Chili Bowl to win. Braving winter weather a ninth time, Shuman joined John Lawson's cast of Manzanita all-stars Billy Boat and Richard Griffin. Boat won. Ron ran eighth.

For his farewell season, Shuman had Schuck hire ex-Ulyate wrench Ray Sheetz to maintain an Ellis that

qualified quickest on a dozen different nights. They opened third at Manzanita and second at Perris and Vegas before winning, appropriately for Ron, at Manzy. His final appearance in the Imperial Valley desert achieved an El Centro checkered flag. In two last 100-milers for Indiana Underground, Shuman finished fourth at DuQuoin before falling out at the Cal Expo.

Ron authored a storybook conclusion to 25 years as a sprint car racer. Needing two Perris positions to finish as four-time champion of SCRA, Shuman passed Richard Griffin and then Cory Kruseman on the last lap!

In retrospect, Ron's tale should have ended there. There was however, one more Turkey Night, this time at Ventura, for which Schuck and Shuman qualified in

Watching his final race from the grandstands does in no way diminish the towering body of work compiled by Ron Shuman from Mesa, Arizona. He won the biggest WoO race at Knoxville. He won the biggest USAC sprint car race at Terre Haute (Hulman Classic), their biggest midget race at Ascot Park (Turkey Night Grand Prix), and their biggest dirt champ car race on the Indy mile (Hoosier Hundred). There was nothing at which the money-racer did not excel. And that includes currently being president of SCRA and founder of the Non-Winged World Championship (NWWC) tour. And anyone who has ever tested him at billiards, golf and/or card playing will attest to that fact as well.