

CORY KRUSEMAN - DRIVER

By Richie Murray

Kruseman during his 2006 SCRA championship season with Glenn Crossno.

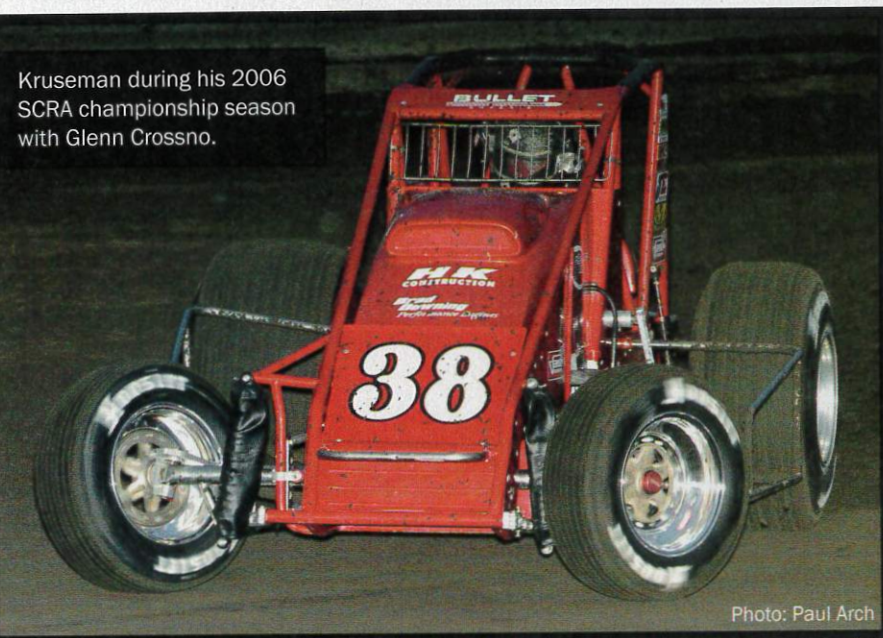


Photo: Paul Arch

CORY KRUSEMAN'S early racing career could be defined by his undaunted desire to overcome significant personal setbacks. Kruseman was of his own mold, and in time, he became one of his era's greatest behind the wheel.

Born on September 20, 1970, Kruseman received his racing initiation from his father, Ron, who was a regular on the National Midget Racing Association Three-Quarter (TQ) circuit and an occasional competitor with the California Racing Association (CRA) Sprint Cars.

However, tragedy struck in 1984 at El Centro, California's Imperial Valley Speedway when Ron was fatally injured during a hot lap session. The Kruseman family promptly retreated from the sport, but the pull proved too strong, and months later, 13-year-old Cory soldiered on, participating in karts for two years at his hometown Ventura Raceway.

By 1989, Cory followed his father's tracks by delving into TQs, garnering 11 victories between 1990-93. He dabbled in higher horsepower machinery in 1992, namely with the USAC Western States Midgets. Along the way, Cory formed a bond with fellow TQ racer Harlan Willis. When Willis jumped to the CRA in 1993, it was Cory who served as Willis' crewman. Later that season, Willis fell ill and tabbed Cory as his replacement. The following

year, the tables had turned, and the one-off shot turned into a full-time deal with Cory as the driver, and an iconic pairing was born.

The knocks were hard initially for the team with the newly formed Sprint Car Racing Association (SCRA) in 1994. One lap into the season opener at Manzanita Speedway, he met the turn three wall, which resulted in a broken shoulder. Six races later, and reloaded with a new chassis, he won his first feature in El Centro, the very same place in which his father lost his life a decade earlier. Cory ultimately finished second in the Rookie points behind J.J. Yeley.

An aspect of the deal was Cory's



Photo: Paul Arch

agreement to not accept any prize money, opting to put everything he earned back into the team. The dividends paid off in 1995 with six SCRA wins, including all four at Santa Maria.

A seminal moment in Cory's career came in late 1995 when he took on a USAC Western States Midgets show at the Cal Expo State Fairgrounds one-mile dirt oval with Andy Bondio's midget. At the start of the semi-feature, Cory bore the brunt of 15 devastating flips down the main straightaway. The aftermath left Cory with a concussion, a shattered forearm that required 200 staples and stitches as well as broken blood vessels in his eyes that left him temporarily blinded.

After four days in intensive care and five months of rehabilitation, Cory returned with a vengeance. Cory won in all 11 full seasons of SCRA competition between 1994-2004, winning 64 features, 57 of them with Willis, as well as the inaugural Non-Wing World Championship in 1999. Kruseman and



The Kruser at Oskaloosa, Iowa, in 2002 - his final year in the Harlan Willis 1.

Photo: Paul Arch



Photos: Paul Arch



Kruseman during his first year in the Tony Stewart Racing USAC sprint car in action at Attica Raceway Park in 2003.

Willis' highwater mark came during their 2002 championship season in which they ruled the roost with 15 victories.

Ultimately, that was the curtain call for Kruseman and Willis. For 2003, Kruseman received an offer to go full-time USAC National Sprint Car racing with owner Tony Stewart. By then, Kruseman had thoroughly demonstrated his prowess nationwide, winning the first of his 15 national features during the 1999 Bloomington round of Indiana Sprint Week for car owner Dave Ellis. In 2002, Kruseman reeled off four wins in the seven-race Hoosier state series for owner Keith Kunz.

Following a frustratingly winless USAC National season with TSR in 2003, Kruseman hit his stride in 2004, finishing third in points with five feature triumphs, including the Tony Hulman Classic at the Terre Haute Action Track as well as his second straight Oval Nationals worth \$30,000 following a last lap pass of Josh Ford at California's Perris Auto Speedway.

Parting ways with TSR, Kruseman returned to the west coast for 2005, but still made his presence felt nationally. That summer, he won three in a seven-day span to score a second Indiana Sprint Week crown with Keith Kunz. The ensuing 2006 season saw Kruseman return to championship form with the USAC CRA Sprint Cars as he won four en route to the title for car owner Glenn Crossno. In all,

Kruseman was the victor of 35 USAC CRA main events between 2004-13.

Kruseman's exploits expand to the midgets as well, collecting Chili Bowl glory in both 2000 and 2004, and even adding a 2011 USAC Western States Midget driving title to his accolades. Kruseman maintained a presence on the west coast scene, introducing his own sprint car driving school in 2000 while owning and operating sprint and midget teams.

Kruseman hung up the helmet in 2016,

giving one last go in the familiar black 45 sprinter during the Turkey Night Grand Prix at Ventura. Fitting, as it was where it all began more than three decades earlier when he was just a teenager. It was where the legend of Cory Kruseman was born and where he capped off a career that made all those who witnessed him race satisfied with delight, and a career that most definitely would've made dad proud to the nth degree. ■

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