

BOBBY MARSHALL - DRIVER

By Tony Martin

THERE WAS NO WAY Bobby Marshall was going to avoid being bitten by the racing bug. One of his earliest memories was his curiosity about his grandfather's supermodified in the garage of his Austin home. His father also wrenched and campaigned a race car. His destiny was then, and always, racing. "The Texas Marshall" proved himself behind the wheel and his dedication to racing continued after vacating the seat as he spent countless hours promoting the sport after hanging up his helmet.

His father Bob told him that he could get behind the wheel after graduation if he helped with dad's race car. In 1972, a Jim McElreath-built sprinter was purchased from Shady McWorter and it was off to the Sportsdrome in Grand Prairie, Texas. Bobby captured his first heat race on the dirt ¼ miler before getting upside down.

Undeterred and ready for more, Marshall headed to Ft Smith, Arkansas for asphalt action, which he did for the rest of his career. He drove, and won, in 100" supermodifieds and sprint cars on dirt and asphalt - generally in his family-owned cars. After his successful first year, he was named the Texas Sprint Car Association Rookie of the Year.

The Marshalls and McElreaths (Jim and James) formed a cadre of marauding speedsters, seeking out competition across the land. Jim wanted the youngsters to get as much pavement experience as possible with Indianapolis the goal. James and Bobby raced regularly across Texas, Oklahoma, and along the Gulf coast with the Houston Super-Modified Racing Association. The paved ovals at Jackson, Mississippi; Mobile, Alabama; and Pensacola, Florida were among their stops. Bobby was game to hit the road as he sought to learn by experience in a variety of machines on different surfaces. One trait remained constant and that was his ability to smoothly run the course. He charged to the front, mostly with his low-budget family operation. Much of his racing was done in cars powered by engines his father assembled, not the high-dollar, name-brand motors. There were exceptions during his career, such as a period with John Singer supplying the horses and also, while being sponsored by drag racer, Raymond Beadle, Wesmar Engines were generally used.

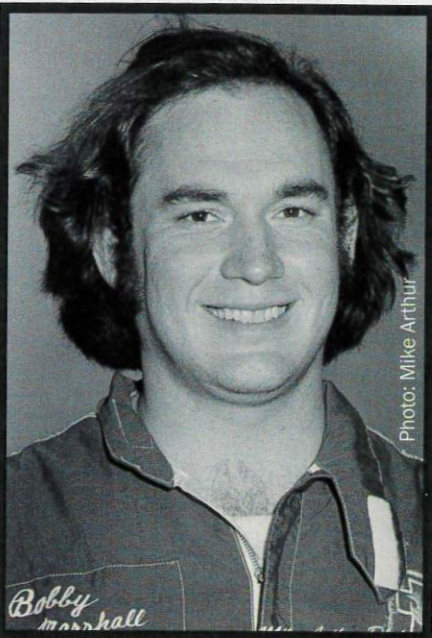
Hall of Famer Shane Carson remembers when Marshall first came to Oklahoma City. "I'm like wow! Who is this guy from Texas? He was really fast! We became friends and all the racers looked up to him. He was a real role model and was always willing to help. You really had to be on your game to run with him. The Marshall home was always a must-stop when we raced at Devil's Bowl. He and his dad had all the stuff and advice for working on the cars and there was always good barbeque."

The 1976 season was a banner year for Marshall. He won the first of two Winter Nationals at Devil's Bowl and he was tabbed to drive Bill Smith's Speedway Motors car, winning four of the six races they entered. It was here he first worked with fellow inductee Tommy Sanders. A bounty was put on Bobby after he won the first four features at West Memphis. Unfortunately, he was injured in a Haubstadt Speedway crash and that nixed the extra prize.

The next year saw Sanders come onboard the Marshall team bandwagon. They built a new car and Tommy lived with the Marshalls while serving as crew chief. He had a serious crash in the car while racing at home against the Outlaws and sat out the remainder of the season. His dad continued to put the car on track and won with Norman Martin and Danny Smith. Smith's victory came at Knoxville in the "Race of States", a race Bobby won in 1982.

The World of Outlaws first race was held at the Devil's Bowl in '78 and Marshall was an entry, having been asked to join by Ted Johnson. Bobby won preliminary races with the Outlaws and has two Knoxville wins to his credit, but his most noted event came during the 1980 Nationals when he finished second, nearly overtaking Steve Kinser in the closing laps on a hot August afternoon. Saturday night's event was fogged out so the race was held on Sunday afternoon that suited Marshall's smooth style and throttle control. No need for a monster engine, just save the tires and go. He came within four car lengths of depriving Steve Kinser of his first Nationals title.

Bobby loved sprint car racing but his priorities were always God and family. In 1985, he pondered the loss of friend James McElreath (to whom his sister, Toni, was engaged) and debilitating injuries to his mentor, Jan Opperman, and he decided it was time to quit racing and help with the family RV business and spend time with his young



daughter, Allison. Marshall's racing legacy lives on as his she now has a management and marketing service working with numerous NASCAR teams and drivers. Her husband Ryan has been the crew chief with NASCAR teams and now serves as the competition director for SRX.

He never turned his back on racing. From his Mooresville, North Carolina, home, where he relocated to in 2015 to be close to grandchildren, Kendall and Colt, he toiled at the computer sending out volumes of photos and stories of open wheel racing and his faith. In a unique combination of his passions, he was proud to tell about being baptized in Montana's Bull River by Jan Opperman.

Though he raced just 13 years, Marshall tallied 108 wins in 19 different states before settling into a more quiet life. ■



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