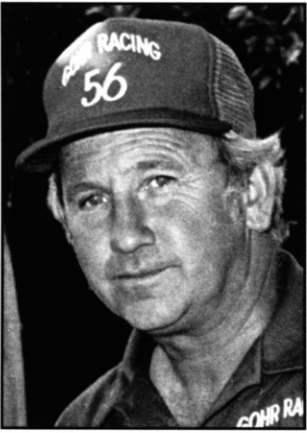


NATIONAL SPRINT CAR HALL of FAME & MUSEUM

GALEN FOX

by Pat Sullivan



Galen Fox John Mahoney Photo

Galen Fox has been across the country and around the world making racing machines go fast, but in so many ways he never strayed from his Bloomington, Indiana roots. Even though he is understated, measured and

nearly invisible at the racetrack, his accomplishments have not gone unnoticed. Along the way, he has guided the careers of many of the undisputed kings of sprint car racing.

Fox grew up within shouting distance from the historic Bloomington Speedway, and although his family was never interested in the speed game, it only took one event to set the hook. "I went over on a Sunday afternoon, when the track was still a half-mile," Fox recalled. "And Bobby Grim was there, driving the Black Deuce."

It wasn't long before Fox got a coupe of his own, but he had one insurmountable problem: he was too young to drive. Thirsty to get involved, he lured a pretty fair country driver by the name of Bob Kinser into the seat of his car. "I first met Bob in 1956 or 1957, just before I went into the Army. He had his own coupe at the time, but he would drive mine when his broke."

In spite of his early stint as a car owner, Fox had no intentions of remaining on the sidelines; his goal was to drive. By 1962, he was touring the tough Indiana circuit of Bloomington, Brownstown, Paragon and Lawrenceburg, and in the 1965 season, he scored 13 feature wins. His success in a stock car provoked hope that he might someday get a chance in a sprinter, and there was a possibility that Earl and Bob Fleetwood would provide the opportunity to realize that dream. Then as fate would have it, his career changed course - and it involved a familiar player.

Bob Kinser had made the transition from coupes to supermodifieds to the first sprint cars to race in central Indiana, and he had a good idea how to get his program going. It involved his one-time car owner Fox, who had already gained a reputation as a skilled engine man. Kinser convinced Lawrence Fox (no relation) to hire the stock car ace and a strong bond was forged that remains to this day. "I ended up working for Lawrence Fox and Bob Kinser from around 1965 through 1969, and I went back in 1971 and 1972," Fox

said. "We won a lot of races, and we had a good relationship. Bob had such great reflexes; he was as good as Steve in his day."

By the winter of 1968, Fox was able to secure a position in Grant King's Indianapolis shops. At the time, King chassis were a force in everything from sprint car racing to Indy, and by 1970, Galen Fox was wrenching a car for popular driver Art Pollard at the most famous address in American motor racing - 16th and Georgetown. It was a long way from his rural Bloomington home.

Nonetheless, there is a part of Fox that has always gravitated to short track racing, and in 1971, he put a sprint car together in King's shop to partner with another member of the famed Kinser clan, Sheldon. "Sheldon and I got along real well; he was real competitive, and he could carry a car," Fox said. "It didn't need to be perfect for him. So many drivers now, the car has to be perfect or they're in trouble."

The road to success was far from linear, but good times were just around the corner for Fox. While working for King, a relationship was forged with New York car owner Dick Hammond of Gohr Distributing, and like all of Fox's associations, this one would also be for the long haul. "Dick was really a fine guy, and he really liked his auto racing," Fox said. "We had a great relationship that started in 1976 and continued until he died in 1996."

Together the Hammond and Fox association, both on the Indy car trail and on the short tracks, campaigned some of the most famed cars in United States Auto Club (USAC) history - the Genesee Beer Wagons. In sprint car competition, the combination of Fox and Sheldon Kinser claimed the 1977 USAC sprint car championship after a year-long battle with Tom Bigelow. It was the culmination of a great partnership between two kindred spirits and an involved owner. Nonetheless, when you are the head mechanic in any racing operation, it often falls on your shoulders to manage the fragile psyches and stubborn habits of the talent. Sheldon Kinser was no different. "He came in the door two or three years after he'd drove for us and I was trying to work on a car," Fox said. "I was cussing and bitching when he comes in and says, 'what's the matter boss?' So I said something about this driver or that driver so he says, 'you ain't never had a driver after I left.' That's the way it was, he had a pretty big ego."

Yet, it only took a moment's reflection and a mental roll call of those drivers who came under his watch before a succinct summary statement was offered: "None of them have been easy."

The association between Fox and Hammond would take another important turn. By 1990, Hammond had decided to

leave Indy car racing, a decision with which Fox concurred. "It got to where you couldn't afford to have good stuff," he said. "So it got to the point that it wasn't fun anymore."

In response, Hammond and Fox decided to do custom engine work under the Foxco Engineering banner so that "we could still run sprint and Silver Crown (dirt championship) cars and keep everybody working."

As the rain drummed on his west-side Indianapolis shop in Avon, his sons, Brad and Steve, worked on the familiar 56 that 1997 USAC Silver Crown champion Dave Darland still races on the trail with Mike Jarvis' Franklin Power Products sponsorship. Brad is a former Bloomington and Lincoln Park Speedway track champion, and Galen is fresh off a pavement testing session with his grandson, Jared, who began his career appropriately enough at Bloomington Speedway. In spite of all the evidence to the contrary, Galen claims to be slowing down.

"I think I will do this for two or three more years" he says while watching traffic stream by on U.S. 36. "If it weren't for the boys, I would have retired by now. We will run the business on a much smaller scale, maybe in Bloomington. But this ground is now worth so much money that it will be sold."

Things in racing so often seem to come full circle. Galen has purchased the "old home place" in Bloomington, and is relocating in an incremental fashion. He can look back and relish the sprint car and Silver Crown championships, and he finished as high as fifth at Indianapolis with Gary Bettenhausen at the controls.

"The couple of times we got bumped from the 500 were probably the biggest disappointments that we had. But just getting there [Indy] and to do the things we have done, I have been overseas and traveled a lot so I think we have had a pretty full life. When I look at some of the pictures and all the awards and stuff, I can't remember how it happened. But we got to do it all."

The rain is beating down even harder as Fox looks across the street at his ranch-style home. It appears hopelessly out of place in the midst of suburban sprawl. This simple piece of property he now realizes is his annuity. So in typical fashion, and in a way consistent with his roots, he turns with a wry smile and says "For what they're paying now, there ought to be plenty to live on down in the hollow."

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