

NATIONAL SPRINT CAR HALL of FAME & MUSEUM

LARRY "SMOKEY" SNELLBAKER

by Jerry Reigle (and Bryan Householder)

This is one career that won't stop at the National Sprint Car Hall of Fame. No. Larry "Smokey" Snellbaker of Dover, PA won't hear of it. He loves the spirit of competition too much.

This is the way racers should be

American Racing Drivers Club (ARDC) midget car feature win to his credit from Selinsgrove, PA in 1975.

Today, the Silver Fox is just as popular, if not more, than he was in the 1970's and '80s when he dominated the sprint car scene throughout central Pennsylvania. Only now, he's the spotlight in the Super

Sportsman division. And he still loves the sprint car industry.

Fans flock to talk, shake hands or get a quick autograph from Snellbaker when he walks through any pit area. A recent trip to Florida Speedweeks in February proved it. He continues to attract a throng of fans when he graces the pit area of Williams Grove or any other dirt track facility. Snellbaker, despite his legend status, has always been known throughout racing circles as a driver who represents the average fan.

Why? Snellbaker never became a full-time driver until he retired two years ago. Until that point, Snellbaker would work his

day job, first as a factory tech tester for the AMF snowmobile company and later as a driver for Preston Trucking, then jaunt off to some local dirt track where he tamed a burly race car.

In each one of us, there's a bit of Snellbaker. Spend eight to 10 hours of a day sweating, then spend another four at the racetrack. "I've always enjoyed being around the fans," Snellbaker said. "This sport is really good, and it has been good to me. I think one of the reasons why is because of the fans. They don't know how important it is when they come up after the races and want to talk about the night or the past."

And there's a lot of history behind Snellbaker. Forget the wins. Forget the championships. Forget the fact he's the oldest driver to sit behind the wheel of a super sportsman. His walk from being a slot car racer with Barry Skelly, Donnie Kraut and John Imerbrink in 1965 to his present status of being in the Hall of Fame is paved in gold.

He drove and won for Jack Imerbrink, Bud Hoffman and Kenny Beck before starting to achieve a greater amount of success and national recognition with Roy Morrall, owner of the number 880 sprinter, in late 1970. Indeed, in addition to the main event checkered, "Smoke" won point championships at Hagerstown in 1971 and '72 and at Port Royal in 1972 and '73.

In 1974, Snellbaker paired with owner Gary Wasson and mechanic Dick

Hench, and together they racked up more wins and track titles, including the 1975 Hagerstown, Penn National, Selinsgrove and Williams Grove point championships. They also earned that year's Keystone Auto Racing on Speedways (KARS) circuit honors with Gary's Motor Mart Trevis Craft.

After racing for Jack Gunnell, Snellbaker partnered with the son/father team of Mike and Charlie "Pappy" Lloyd in '77. It was in the radical low-buck Lloyd house car that Larry gathered more wins, including the prestigious Williams Grove National Open and the Syracuse Super Nationals in 1979, and two World of Outlaws (WoO) mains at the Hagerstown and Penn National race courses in 1978 and '80, respectively. He also claimed the 1977 and '80 Williams Grove track point championships, and the '77 KARS title, with the ex-hydroplane boat racer.

He competed against every imaginable sprint car series across the United States, winning with the United States Auto Club (USAC) at Lakeside Speedway in Kansas City, Kansas, and the All Star Circuit of Champions (ASCoC) in Erie, PA in 1981. He ran the Chief's candy-striped Lloyd-built upright United States Auto Club (USAC) Silver Crown car with rear-engined Indy cars at the Pocono Raceway, finishing thirteenth just behind Jack Hewitt. And he guided the lightweight Lloyd "Pocket Rocket" machine.

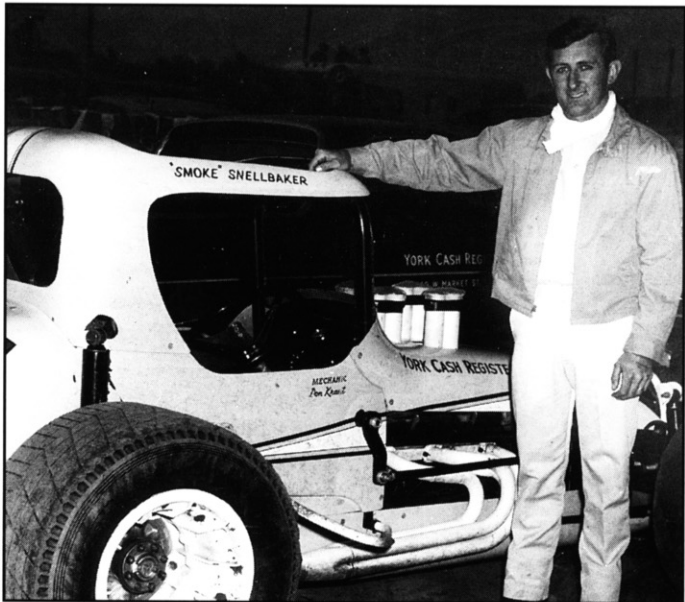
Smoke returned to long-time car owner and friend Roy Morrall in 1983, and together they notched enough sprint car wins to put Smokey over the 150 mark. In '86, Smoke began racing and winning with the more restricted Super Sportsman cars, which he still does today.

Never did Snellbaker, who also raced for legendary Central Pennsylvania sprint car owners Al Hamilton, Bob Weikert and Maynard Boop, think the day would come when he would receive what many perceive as sprint car racing's most honorable award. "We raced back then because we enjoyed it," Snellbaker said. "No, we loved it. We made money, but we really had fun at it."

Racing has certainly changed. Money, to some degree, has uprooted some of that genuine fun that used to permeate the pit area. Competition in the pit area and away from the speedway now equals the competition on the track. Yet some things remain constant. Like Smokey Snellbaker strapping into a sprint car. "As long as I feel good and feel like I'm competitive, I'll keep on racing," Snellbaker said. "I still enjoy it."

Following his induction, we know Snellbaker will be around for years to come, if not forever. Not too bad for someone who was looking for a little fun.

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Larry "Smokey" Snellbaker

Bruce Craig Collection

enshrined in dirt track racing's holy land in Knoxville, Iowa. Snellbaker will be there racing in the Goodyear Masters Classic with Kevin Frey's sprinter.

Snellbaker, 64, still loves competition weekly in the super sportsman class at Silver Spring Speedway and the tour events that comprise the division appearances at race tracks throughout central Pennsylvania. And like any true competitor, he would love one last crack behind the wheel of a 410-cubic-inch sprint car.

Thousands can say the same. More will follow the path Snellbaker has paved.

But only a select few will ever get in. It's reserved for the pioneers, the legends, the trendsetters, the movers, the shakers, and the elite. And now, Smokey Snellbaker is inducted. Damn right, he earned it. "You know when I first started there was nothing like a National Hall of Fame or anything," Snellbaker said on the first afternoon of '02 racing at Silver Spring. "I never thought about something like this when I started."

Snellbaker had a reserved spot the day it was built. "It's quite an honor to be inducted with so many other great people who are already in the Hall," Snellbaker said. "I never really thought of myself to be on their level."

Whether he believed it or not, Snellbaker is on that plateau. Winning more than 150 sprint car events, 31 super sportsman features and being involved as a competitor since 1965 will earn a person such status. Smokey even has an