

# STEVE SMITH

Steven Kramer Smith was born in Hialeah, Florida, on February 13, 1947, to Kramer and Violet Smith. He had seven sisters, Karole, Sherry, Gail, Kim, Kathryn, Joyce, and the late Karmen, and one brother Kenneth.

As a youth in the late Fifties and early Sixties, he was active in the Miami area street racing with his cousin's souped-up '57 Chevy, along with his friend Richard Lupo. According to Steve, "We used to always do that... drag race. That was a big deal back then. The cops would always be after us. It was kind of an ordeal."

Steve soon married his girlfriend Barb and they had a son, Steven "Stevie" Joseph Smith, in 1966. They later had a daughter Summer.

Around the same time, Richard Lupo had a friend, Bobby Allen, who raced legally at the Hialeah Speedway. Bobby was one of the south Florida racers who hauled north each spring and spent their summers racing in Pennsylvania, New Jersey and Maryland. Said Steve, "Bobby and a couple other guys would always tell me how good the racing was up there. Well, after hearing about it for a couple years, it started bugging me. I wanted to get started racing myself, so I went ahead and moved to Pennsylvania. And they were right; Pennsylvania was the best area in the country for sprint car racing back then. They raced so much and paid so good."



Steve Smith

Bruce Craig Photos

In 1969, his first season living in Hanover, Steve Smith ran his first race at the Lincoln Speedway in New Oxford. "Smith recalls, 'Bob was runnin' Selinsgrove so he let me run one of his cars at Lincoln and I tore it up. We got goin' a little faster and a little faster. I got it over my head and put 'er in the wall. Me and Bob worked on it all the next day and he ran it at Hagerstown that night. I guess he understood. He'd been racin' long enough to know those things happen.'"

Later that year, Steve won his first race at the Susquehanna Speedway aboard a square-framed sprinter which belonged to Allen. That winter, Smith built himself a lighter, round-tube frame. And, with a wife and young family to support, he went to work at AMF in York, which today is better known as Harley-Davidson.

In 1970, Smith met furniture dealer O.J. Myers. According to Steve, "I met him at Lincoln one night and he told me to come talk to him. I put it off because Allen told me you can't pay attention to all those guys that say, 'Come talk to me,' so I didn't pay any attention to him. The next week he came by and said, 'Now, seriously, come see me.' Honestly, I put it off for a couple of weeks before I finally told Bob, 'Let's go. Let's see what he has to

say.' It turned out to be a heckava good deal and I guess I was with him for seven or eight years."

That was the same year that C.H. "Bud" Miller started the All Star Circuit of Champions (ASCoC) with a series of Wednesday night 100-lappers which paid a whopping \$1,000-to-win. It turns out that that All Star schedule would match Steve's career agenda, as it allowed him to travel mid-week and be back in Central Pennsylvania for the weekend races. Recalls Steve, "The sponsors and car owners that I've had over the years have all been local and they never wanted to travel. They wanted to watch their car run, so I'd go out during the week and come home for the weekends. I've really been lucky. I've had nice owners and sponsors for most of my career."

It was during the 1970's, with O.J. Myers as a sponsor, that the "Black Bandit" enjoyed much success at his home track. There were many years that he totaled double-digit wins at Lincoln, including ten in 1971, twelve in '74, sixteen in '76, and eighteen in 1978. His competition that decade were friends and neighbors, including Kenny Weld, Bobby and Joey Allen, Dub and Van May, Steve Siegel and Richard Lupo. Speaking of Lincoln, he has said, "It's very special. I've had my best luck there. Don't ask me why, because I don't even know. And it's just down the road from me, so that makes it even nicer."

He also picked up his first ASCoC victory at the Tri-

in 1980 with Bert Emick's Midwest Outlaw Super Series (MOSS), once in '81 with the MOSS-turned-ASCoC series, and seven times with Bert's club in '82, even placing seventh in points that year. During his career, Steve has won sixteen times with the ASCoC sanctioning body.

Steve also won his third National Open title at Williams Grove in 1981. Said the proud Smith, "Nobody's ever won it four times. Now it's a World of Outlaws race, so that would make a fourth win even that much better because everybody's there."

In 1983, young Stevie started racing with Jeff Creasy of Creasy Signs, who had lettered Steve's car for years. Six years later, Stevie left his Leiby's Mobile Home Sales-sponsored ride for one with long-time owner Al Hamilton. Bob and Don Leiby then offered their sponsorship to the elder Smith.

Following a good start in Florida with a win in the 1989 East Bay Nationals, Steve Smith finally delivered a much-sought-after Williams Grove Speedway point championship for the Leiby's.

Steve remained a workaholic, working from 7 a.m. until 11 p.m. in their new shop. According to his long-time companion and now wife, JoAnn Rife, daughter-in-law of Lincoln Speedway promoter "Hilly" Rife and owner of the Sub Stop on the square in New Oxford, "If I didn't bring him his food, he wouldn't eat."

The 1990's saw the veteran Smith slowing down some, but still reaching victory lane on a regular basis. In fact, 1991 alone brought eleven wins at Lincoln, five at the Grove, four at Susquehanna, and single wins at Jax, Hagerstown and Grandview. Steve's last wins in a sprint car came in 1996, when he beat the All Stars at Lincoln and won a WoO preliminary feature at Hagerstown. However, that was the same year that Smith shifted his priorities towards his talented son's racing efforts. They were preparing for an all-out assault on the WoO circuit for 1997. Said Steve, "You know I never did retire. I wasn't really ready to stop just yet, and I had no plans to. But, you know, it was time to do something else, so here I am."

With the help of Devin DeLuzio and long-time crew members Jim Rabine and Dave Garland, they built their own Black Bandit chassis and Smith Machine And Racing Technology (SMART) racing engines. Finally, it was a dream come true with Stevie as owner/driver and his dad as builder/crew chief. With no sponsor in 1997, they garnered four WoO wins and sixth in points. That effort also attracted the Ingersoll-Rand construction/mining division to the team, and they've been sponsoring the Smiths ever since on the grueling World of Outlaws tour. According to Steve, "All this traveling, it's tough. A lot of people don't realize how tough it is. I didn't realize it myself."

About the guy who says "How ya doin', chief?" to just about everybody, his son says, "He's easy to get along with, but he's just so busy he's not real open with most people. He works real hard at what he does. He's not a partier. He's a real straight guy. And he's fair. He wouldn't let me cheat in go-karts."

Steve's career statistics show an amazing 259 feature wins, including an incredible 150 at Lincoln, 32 at Williams Grove, 28 at Susquehanna, 14 at Hagerstown, five at Wayne County, four each at Port Royal and Reading, three at Grandview, two each at Tri-City and Penn National, and singles at Bedford, Lernerville, East Windsor, Skyline, Savannah, Trail Way, Oakshade WoO, Pittsburgh, Chillicothe, Conneaut, Sharon, Smithton, Selinsgrove, East Bay, Silver Spring, Path Valley, Jax, and Hickory. Says Steve modestly, "Don't forget, we were running three, four nights a week for a long, long time."

Today, wherever he is, Steve enjoys his family, which includes Stevie (and Kendra and their daughter Shaylee), Summer, and his step-children Brandye Berryhill (and driver Aaron and their daughter Presley), and Larry Rife, Jr. (and his son Larry III).

City Speedway in western Pennsylvania in 1973, won the prestigious Williams Grove National Open in 1974 and '76, and tried his hand at United States Auto Club (USAC) dirt championship car racing in 1977.

Around that time, Steve and Barb divorced, with young Stevie and his mother moving back to south Florida. However, it was clear to everyone involved that the youngster wanted to be back with his racing father, so Stevie soon returned north.

1978 was the inaugural year for Ted Johnson's World of Outlaws (WoO), and Steve ruled at the Pigeon Hills oval. In their first-ever appearance at Lincoln in June, they ran a winged/non-winged doubleheader. On the first night, Smith beat Rick Ferkel. He outran Steve Kinser on the second night. And, when the Outlaws returned the next month, Smith won again over Ferkel and Gary Patterson.

After O.J. Myers, Smith teamed with Harry Fletcher, a sprint car owner who had been teamed with Johnny Grum for years. The early and mid-1980's brought more success to Steve, who was known as an accomplished builder of his own sprint cars and engines. The New Oxford resident won three times