

NATIONAL SPRINT CAR HALL OF FAME



RICHARD HOFFMAN

BY MIKE GARREPY

The name Hoffman Auto Racing and, later, Dynamics, Inc., has been synonymous with United States Auto Club (USAC) racing for better than three decades.

As co-owner, Richard Hoffman has provided both financial and mechanical support to the family's racing dynasty that started in 1969 with the late Ronald "Doc" Dawson wheeling their number 78 USAC sprint car. Working alongside his father Gus, Richard has helped oversee the family's racing business as it competed in USAC's Championship Car Division, Gold Crown Division, Silver Crown Division and Sprint Car Division. Nine times the Milford, Ohio-based team owner (along with his father and son Rob) has been honored as USAC's champion sprint car owner and twice drivers made their initial Indianapolis 500 starts with Richard Hoffman as their car owner.

Born to parents Jeannette (Fussinger) and August "Gus" Hoffman on September 2, 1942, in Cincinnati, Richard and his siblings were raised on the family's 200-acre farm in Milford, Ohio, that his father bought at a Sheriff's sale. The elder Hoffman first became involved in racing in 1929, as he and a couple of friends fielded a dirt track racer at unsanctioned races from Falmouth, Kentucky, to Greenville, Ohio.

By the time Richard was ten, he and his father were regular attendees at the nearby Cincinnati Race Bowl. It was there that Gus became acquainted with Bill "Bud" Weaver, a local body shop owner from Dayton, Ohio, and the owner of black Kurtis-Kraft midget that was wrenched by Clarence "Mutt" Anderson.

After a crash at the Cincinnati Race Bowl, Weaver put the midget car up for sale. A few days later Gus made the trek to Dayton and struck a deal to buy the damaged ride. The Hoffman's ran the midget in the 1954, '55 and '56 seasons with drivers Andy Linden and Eddie Sachs behind the wheel at the West 16th Street Speedway in Indianapolis, the Cincinnati Race Bowl and the Jeffersonville Speedrome in Indiana. It was at this point that Richard landed his first job on a race car – keeping it clean and polished.

At the end of the 1956 season, Gus bought an Eddie Kuzma-built sprint car, with its stout 220-cubic-inch Offy, with which Duane "Pappy" Carter won the 1950 Mid-West American Automobile Association (AAA) championship and Troy Ruttman took the same championship the following year. Richard remembers, "The car was somewhat obsolete when dad bought it. So we brought it to Charlie Peck in Elsmere, Kentucky, about 35 miles from the farm. My dad would take me over to Charlie's shop each evening, provided I had my homework done, where I was given menial tasks of stripping paint and the like."

Initially Anderson kept the Park Lumber-sponsored car at his Xenia, Ohio, shop where he did all the maintenance work, but later the sprinter was brought to the Hoffman farm, where 17-year-old Richard was put in charge of keeping it race-ready. He recalls, "While still Offy-powered, we won the USAC race at Salem (June 18, 1961) with Jim Hemmings. Over the years the car underwent several modifications such as laying down the Offy engine 18-degrees to the left and relocating the oil tank to the left rear behind the axle. When the car was crashed at New Bremen, Ohio, we converted the front suspension from cross-spring to parallel torsion bars similar to the black number 7 midget".

Despite Elmer George, Don Branson and Rex Easton wheeling the sprint car, it became less-and-less competitive. This was due to crashes and modifications that did not work out and it was eventually sold. Richard adds, "I convinced my dad that we should build our own car. We somehow happened upon some drawings of a four-bar sprint car, presumably of A.J. Watson design, in the early '60s. I drew out the design on some plywood and we (my dad and I) bent the tubing using a torch and some tubing filled with sand. After several attempts, we fit the four main tubes to the template made of plywood. That was the beginning of us building our own sprint cars."

After attending Xavier University in Cincinnati on a part-time basis for several years, Richard graduated in 1967 with a Bachelor of Science degree in Physics. Two years later, "Dickie" was made co-owner of Hoffman Auto Racing by his father, also known as "Old Timer." One of Richard's first acts was to hire Dawson for USAC runs at Dayton, Eldora and New Bremen. The following year, 1970, the number was changed to '30' and Al Smith was hired the team's primary driver.

After less than spectacular results in 1969 and '70, Richard again made a change in drivers for the 1971 season by hiring 34-year-old Danville, Illinois, native Larry "Boom Boom" Cannon. Racing only on dirt, they picked up wins at Cincinnati May 2 and at Reading July 31, giving Richard his first wins as a car owner. The chemistry between Cannon and Hoffman was such that the Illinois barber would be his driver of choice for the next six years, including their initial attempt at making the Indianapolis 500.

The following year, 1972, Hoffman again changed the number of their USAC sprinter, this time to '72' and christened it "the Fireside Realty and Builders Special" and picked up their only win at Ascot Park in Gardena, California.

With Cannon agreeing to pull double duty in 1973, Richard decided to run two USAC divisions – championship cars and sprint cars with Pep Gas Treatment providing sponsorship on both. After buying the champ car in early April, Richard and engine builder Glenn Hall worked frantically to get everything together for the 500, but fell short of time.

The car did make four starts in 1973, but not in the Indianapolis 500. For 1974, Hoffman again decided to tackle the championship car division, with Cannon putting their ride from the previous year into the '500' field with a speed of 173.963. Starting 33rd, he took the checkered in 24th, after dropping out with transmission problems, but earning \$15,429 for his first-ever Indianapolis start.

As for the sprinter, their first race was July 13 at Eldora with a seventh place finish and the next day at New Bremen on asphalt with a fourth. Later in the season, on October 6, they won the second of two 50-lap features at Eldora with the car number 59.

1975 was a tough year for Richard as Cannon failed to put their car into the 500, and then crashed hard later in the month during a sprint car race, taking him out until late in the season. The following year, 1976, Cannon made the field for the Indianapolis 500 for the second time in the Hoffman number 69, finishing 17th in the rain-shortened event.

After the 1977 USAC season opener at Eldora, Cannon was released from the team and Richard hired Jerry Grant for that year's Indy car effort. However Grant destroyed the 1972 Eagle during a grinding practice crash, ending his efforts to make the starting field.

1977 was also the year that Dynamics, Inc., appeared on both the Indy and sprint cars. It was formed by Richard and Gus as a separate entity for both financial and legal reasons and, to this day, their race cars are listed as being owned by Dynamics, Inc., but aptly doing business as Hoffman Auto Racing.

Starting in 1978, Joe Saldana made the first of seven championship car starts in the number 69 Dynamics entry, including his first-ever at the Indianapolis Motor Speedway. But the Sprint car was run just once that season earning only three USAC points. Though he would keep their champ car efforts alive through '84, Richard would not run the sprint car again until '87 with driver Kerry Norris.

With Richard's efforts again as car owner, Saldana made the '500' starting field in 1979, this time in an Offy-powered Eagle, finishing 16th and earning \$24,467.

USAC now referred to their champ car series as the Gold Crown Series. Jerry Sneva, brother to Tom, was hired for the 1982 Indianapolis 500, but he crashed out. With the team sitting out the '83 season, Richard made one more attempt to get his car into the starting field for the '500' in 1984, with driver Daniel William "Spike" Gehlhausen. With a 31st place finish for their efforts, Dynamics, Inc., walked away from all of racing, not returning until '87.

For 1987 and '88, several drivers rotated thru the Richard Hoffman-owned sprint car, including native Iowan Rocky Lee Hodges and Hoosiers Kerry Norris, Andy Hillenburg and Kevin "Pup" Huntley.

Thus, in summary, Gus Hoffman had one USAC national sprint car win with Jim Hemmings in 1961, and Dick had four wins with Larry "Boom Boom" Cannon in 1971 through '74.

It was not until 1989 that the team hit its stride, though, with the hiring of midget car ace Rich Vogler. Together they had 19 USAC national sprint car starts, winning four times on asphalt (Winchester, Indiana; Clermont, Indiana, twice; and Marne, Michigan) and once on dirt (Moberly, Missouri) and earning \$29,730. Richard supplied two motors to Vogler: a V-8 Chevrolet and a V-6 Buick, the first-ever in USAC sprint car competition. In turn, Vogler gave Richard his first-ever USAC car owner championship.

For 1990, Rich Vogler had eleven sprint car starts, with earnings totaling \$17,510. Tragically, the 40-year-old driver crashed to his death while leading an ESPN-televised race from Salem, Indiana, on July 21, 1990. Rich Vogler was credited with the win in the Dynamics number 1 machine.

While devastated by the loss, Richard and entire Dynamics, Inc., team pressed forward, hiring Steve Butler to run the next race at Winchester, Indiana. Recalling his time with the Hoffman's, Butler said, "I mostly worked with Richard – he was the manager, Rob was the technical guy and Gus was the inspirational figure. He (Gus) wasn't really involved in the day-to-day decision-making but he was always there rattling everyone to go racing."

In his first season with Hoffman, Butler had thirteen starts with two wins (Odessa, Missouri, and Winchester, Indiana). In 1991, Richard provided a new pavement sprinter, built by his son Rob and Kurt Stemmer. Steve Butler earned wins four times (Clermont, Indiana; Salem, Indiana, twice; and Lebanon, Missouri) and six fast times, and Richard Hoffman finished third in the final owner point standings.

Steve Butler had one win in June of 1992 in the Dynamics number 69 machine at the Winchester, Indiana, track. Richard then hired Robbie Stanley, a young gasser from Brownsburg, Indiana. Stanley had earned the 1988 All Star Circuit of Champions (ASCoC) point title, along with the 1991 USAC sprint car championship. Robbie won five times in 1993 (Rossburg, Ohio; Winchester, Indiana, three; and Terre Haute, Indiana) and once more in 1994 (Winchester, Indiana).

Stanley helped deliver consecutive championship laurels to the Hoffman's in 1992 and '93, but tragically the three-time USAC driver champion lost his life when he crashed on the front stretch at Winchester Speedway on May 26, 1994.

After Stanley's death, Cary Faas won once for Richard at Portsmouth, Ohio, in 1994, and Kenny Irwin, Jr., won four times in 1995 (Winchester, Indiana; Salem, Indiana; Clermont, Indiana; and Kansas City, Kansas).

For the 1996 and '97 seasons, Richard hired Dave Darland for dirt and Andy Michner for pavement. Jim Mahoney supported the asphalt program in 1996, as did Pat Abold in '97. Together, they all brought sprint car owner championships to the Hoffman's in 1996 and '97. Michner won four times in 1996 (Phoenix, Arizona, mile; Clermont, Indiana, twice; and Winchester, Indiana); once in 1997 at Winchester, Indiana; and Darland won once in '97 at Putnamville, Indiana.

Dave Darland won four times in 1998 (Rossburg, Ohio; Lawrenceburg, Indiana, twice; and Putnamville, Indiana). Dave Darland captured the 1999 USAC national sprint car championship for himself and Richard Hoffman with wins at Putnamville, Indiana; Salem, Indiana; Franklin, Pennsylvania; and Rossburg, Ohio). He won three more times in 2000 (Rossburg, Ohio; Toledo, Ohio; and Cedar Rapids, Iowa).

In 2001, Brian Tyler won twice on pavement, at Toledo, Ohio, and Clermont, Indiana. Tracy Hines also won a USAC "special event" sprint car race at Farmer City, Illinois, in August of 2001.

Tracy Hines delivered another USAC sprint car point title for himself and Hoffman in 2002, winning at Anderson, Indiana; Nazareth, Pennsylvania; and Haubstadt, Indiana. In '03, Hines won at Fremont, Ohio; Fountain, Colorado; and Terre Haute, Indiana.

In 2004, Hines (Gas City, Indiana, and Nazareth, Pennsylvania) and Jon Stanbrough (Lawrenceburg, Indiana) helped deliver another USAC national owner's title to Richard Hoffman.

In 2005, Hoffman had wins with Tracy Hines (Anderson, Indiana, and Bloomington, Indiana), Brian Tyler (Salem, Indiana) and Jerry Coons, Jr. (Phoenix, Arizona, dirt).

In 2006, Coons, Jr. (Eldon, Missouri, and Rossburg, Ohio) and Hines (Columbus, Ohio, and Rossburg, Ohio) had four more wins. In 2007, it was Coons, Jr. (Phoenix, Arizona, dirt twice; and Boswell, Indiana) and Daron Clayton (Gas City, Indiana) bringing home the checkered flags.

Jerry Coons, Jr., won the 2008 USAC national sprint car series championship for himself and Richard Hoffman's Dynamics, Inc., team while winning at Bloomington, Indiana; Boswell, Indiana; and on the big track at Richmond, Virginia.

Coons, Jr., won twice in 2009 (both at Rossburg, Ohio) and twice in 2010 (Terre Haute, Indiana, and Lawrenceburg, Indiana). Up-and-comer Kyle Larson won twice in 2011 at Oskaloosa, Iowa, and again at Rossburg, Ohio, for Richard Hoffman. In 2012, three wins came with drivers Darren Hagen (Ocala, Florida), Kyle Larson (Oskaloosa, Iowa), and Brady Bacon (West Memphis, Arkansas).

Under Richard Hoffman's leadership, with help from father Gus and son Rob, their time in USAC competition has resulted in, as of June 1, 2013, an unprecedented 81 national sprint car wins, nine national sprint car owner championships (1989, '92, '93, '96, '97, '99, 2002, '04, '08), seven Silver Crown wins, more national wins (88) and championships (9) than any other team in USAC sprint car history; and an incredible seventeen 'top 3' finishes in USAC national sprint car series owner points since 1989.

Richard manages the budget for the year to assure that the team fulfills all of its commitments to the sponsors and the drivers. After consulting with the team, Richard makes the final decision on the selection of the driver. He also has taken over the responsibility for the body shop, as he has become a skilled painter and graphics designer.

Richard owns the Remax Results Plus real estate company in Milford, Ohio. He has been involved in residential and commercial real estate development for many years. Richard and his wife Linda live in Loveland, Ohio, with their four-legged 'children,' Cooper and Lexus. The Hoffman's enjoy a good bottle of wine and love to travel. Richard has two sons, Rob and Chris, and five grandchildren. Richard enjoys riding his Harley-Davidson motorcycle.

In 2013, Richard Hoffman and his family continue to race in USAC sprint car competition with young Brady Bacon of Oklahoma behind the wheel of their Mean Green/Lykins Oil-sponsored Hoffman Racing number 69 machine.



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