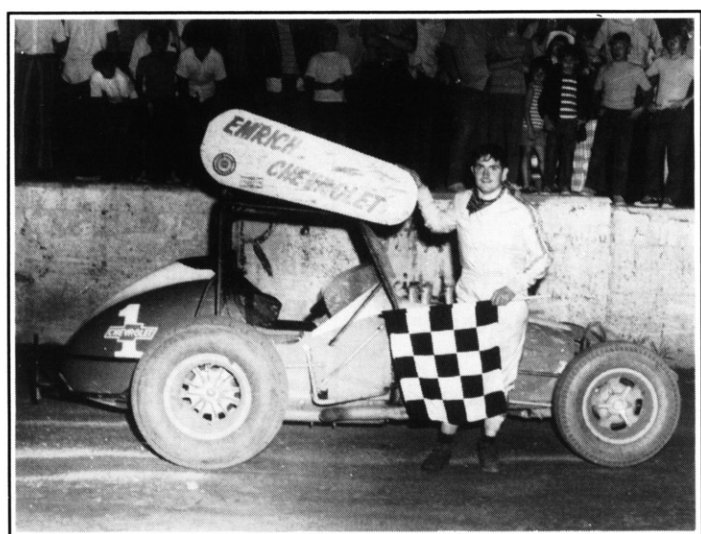


National Sprint Car Hall of Fame & Museum

LYNN PAXTON



(Bruce Craig Collection)

Lynn Paxton was born on January 19, 1944, to parents Melvin and Bernadette Paxton, and he grew up around automobiles and race cars in Mechanicsburg, PA. Melvin owned a garage and motor court on Route 15, only four miles from Roy Richwine's Williams Grove Speedway. It was the place that racers and fans frequented when visiting the famous half-mile. It was also a place where Melvin collected and restored antique cars.

In the 1950's, Paxton's father began leasing his garage to local racers. Lynn helped by washing and cleaning parts, but by race day he was usually left behind because of his age. His day as a driver did arrive, however, in 1961 at the Silver Spring Speedway in his hometown. Lynn was an assistant mechanic for Fred Putney, so when it came time for the mechanic's race and chief mechanic Ree Smith was out of town, Lynn's pestering paid off. He finished second and was hooked. It is interesting to note that Lynn's driving career started just one year after his hero, Tommy Hinnershitz decided to hang up his goggles for good.

After finishing high school, Paxton opened his own business at his father's garage and he purchased a 1947 Ford for competition in the hobby division. He also remained an assistant for the Putney team. At the end of the 1963 season, Lynn made the move to the Class A Sportsman Division. Wanting to move up the ladder in a big way, Paxton towed his Corvette powered sportsman up to the Selinsgrove(PA) Speedway and ran the car against the inject modified on the big half mile. When he broke the rear end in his car and didn't have the money to fix it, Putney's car owner, Harold Hank, who had taken a liking to Lynn stepped in to help him.

Near the end of 1963, Putney was released from the team and Paxton was given the nod. At age 18, Lynn was racing an injected modified "bug" against the likes of Johnny Dubendorf, "Bud" Folkenroth, Frankie Thompson, and Dick "Toby" Tobias. The final race of 1963 was the inaugural Williams Grove National Open, Paxton remembers a young driver from Michigan entering pits. According to Lynn, "Here comes this guy from Hastings, Michigan with this obnoxious looking modified. A big ugly looking thing. We laughed at him. It wasn't as neat looking as our cars and it had a big wooden wing on it. We thought, 'who's this guy with a sliding board on his car and what's he trying to do here?' I thought it was a joke."

Needless to say, winner Gordon Joncock had the last laugh. Victory Lane eluded the Paxton-Hank team in 1964, although Lynn did score some feature wins in the late model class. Near the end of the season, but before the National Open, Lynn lost his ride to fellow driver Milford Wales. However owner Lorenz Alwine offered Paxton his Pontiac powered '34 Ford Coach. That year, many of the Sprint Car drivers entered in the National Open were upset that the slow heavy modified entries were (like Paxton's) were being accepted for the race. United Racing Club(URC) champion Earl Halaquist called promoter Jack Gunn about the situation, but Gunn assured him that the modifies would never make the 100 lap feature. In an ironic turn of events, Paxton bumped Wales from the lineup to make the show and then broke his brakes near the lap 70 mark. Said Lynn, "On lap 70, I'm going into the first turn and the leaders start lapping me. All of a sudden one of the sprint cars comes into the turn and swoops down in front of me. He gets a good line in the corner and then lifts. The driver did not know I was going into the same turn without any brakes. Well, I hit this guy and I can see it to this day. I hit him three times and drove him across the track. I can remember him looking at me with a look on his face saying 'what the heck are you doing?'. Well, I drove him and his sprint car right underneath the fence. The car was a mess, but thank God the driver was okay. Then I realized that the driver was Earl Halaquist and he was running second at the time."

In 1965, Paxton entered the Air National Guard and missed part of the season serving active duty. When he returned, Ree Smith had a brand new CAE chassis with a Holman & Moody engine for Lynn and the sportsmen wars. He won his first modified feature in the car. In fact, he won two in a row at the Grove with it.

In the winter of '67, Paxton teamed with owner Roy "Shorty" Emerich and ran a Kenny Weld chassis with a new Chevy in it. According to Lynn, "We went good in 1968 and '69 and then at the end of '69 we bought a new Floyd Trevis car."

Transplanted Floridian Bobby "Scruffy" Allen joined the Emrich Chevrolet team in '69 and the two drivers blitzed the area speedways for the next five years winning over 200 features between them. Paxton won the abbreviated Hershey(PA) Stadium season championship in 1969, the Bedford(PA) and Hagerstown(MD) championships in '72 along with that year's Hilly Rife promoted Tri-State Spring Crown.

In 1974, Paxton hired Ralph Heintzelman and the duo, still under Emerich colors, concentrated on Jack Gunn's Keystone Auto Racing on Speedway(KARS) circuit. It consisted of Williams Grove, Selinsgrove and the Penn National Speedway in Grantville(PAP). By year's end, Paxton had won the KARS Championship and the Selinsgrove and the Penn National track titles. He had also scored a win at the "Tuscarora 50" at the Port Poyal(PA) Speedway. It was also during that year that Paxton had a real scare. We were at Penn National and my good friend Al Hamilton, who was already an important car owner, was there too. Al came over and said 'How come you never let me drive your car? I've let you drive mine.' So I handed my helmet to Al. Ralphie helped him get in my car and went and hot-lapped that sucker. When they dropped the green flag, I remember someone in the pits yelling, 'Paxton's upside down', and I thought to myself, 'Oh God, Al flipped it.' And that's just what happened. Here was Al Hamilton upside down in "Shorty Emerich's car and if I thought I had lost a ride, it was that night. I really had some explaining to do. "Shorty" wasn't too happy it and I remember that Al paid for the damages. I was worried, but "Shorty" never fired me.

1975 found Emerich in ill health and Paxton began racing full time for Al Hamilton. The team worked well through the end of the year, when Hamilton decided to switch to Don Maxwell built machines. Paxton decided to stay with Heintzelman and the older equipment, so suddenly he was a sprint car owner. Said Lynn, "Then Maynard Boop came around. He came to my shop and said he'd like to get involved. He gave us \$5000 and we listed him as major sponsor/owner. He also gave us his truck to tow with and he paid for travel expenses. We won 15 or 16 races that year and won the championship at the Port."

In 1977, Paxton sold his whole operation to Boop, including the services of Heintzelman, since Maynard wanted to go racing in a big way. Several drivers including Kramer Williamson, Jim Nace, Tobias, Barry Camp and Lynn's long time friend Richard "Mitch" Smith drove for Boop that year. Meanwhile, Paxton ran a Maxwell sprinter for another friend, Bob Benchoff. At the end of '77, Heintzelman called Lynn and they reconnected as the *Boop's Aluminum Casting Special* team for the 1978 season. Again, a good season followed but Lynn knew it was time for another change.

In 1979, Lynn ordered a chassis from noted builders Mike and Charlie Lloyd. He also hired second generation wrench Davey Brown Jr. and contracted with Davey Brown Sr. for engines. Over the next five years, this East Coast 'super team' with different sponsor/owners from Maynard Boop to Al Hamilton would be one of the major forces in sprint car racing. In '79 the 'Pennsylvania Posse' member and 'big block' supporter won 26 events, including three World of Outlaws(WoO) features at Five Mile Point Speedway in Kirkwood, NY, Port Royal and Williams Grove. He also won the Selinsgrove, Williams Grove and KARS point championships.

After the 1979 season, Paxton basically raced a part time schedule, concentrating more on his antique automobile restoring business commitments and his family, which included sister Patsy, wife Barbara and children Brett, Stacie and Brooke. However, he didn't stop winning as in 1980 he posted 21 feature wins including another three against Ted Johnson's tough WoO troops at Selinsgrove, Weedsport(NY) and Rolling Wheels Raceway in Elbridge, NY. He also captured his third KARS title. In 1981 he claimed a win with Bert Emick's All-Star Circuit of Champions(ASCotT) at Port Royal in June and he again won the Williams Grove title.

In 1982, Paxton continued to stay at home in Pennsylvania and race his 1980 Lloyd and '82 Gary Stanton built cars for Maynard Boop. He posted seven wins and 19 top five finishes to earn the Williams Grove track championship. He also earned his first ever Williams Grove National Open championship trophy, which just happened to be the coveted 20th anniversary edition. That same year, Lynn won ten features and the Selinsgrove Speedway title. A handful of appearances at Port Royal brought him two more wins. His \$70,000 season was rounded out by a few special event wins at Penn National and the Hagerstown(MD) Speedway.

Paxton, the 1983 Port Royal titlist, ended his career at age 39 with his second win in the prestigious Williams Grove National Open in 1983, leading every lap and guiding Al Hamilton's number 77 sprinter under the checkered flag. It was his 224th career sprint car feature win, which does not include fourteen late model wins and his sole American Racing Drivers Club(ARDC) midget win.

He does not regret his decision to quit driving as he has been able to spend more time with his family, his business ('buy everything, sell anything'), and his beloved Eastern Museum of Motor Racing (EMMR) at the Latimore Valley Fairgrounds. He also served as race director at both Hagerstown Speedway and Silver Spring Speedway, and is a well respected race car restorer.

Paxton has been extremely active in Dillsburg/York Springs community service and with many racing related groups including the Antique Automobile Club of America(AACA) in Hershey, PA, the National Sprint Car Hall of Fame and Museum in Knoxville, IA and the Williams Grove Old Timers(WGOT).

It is interesting to hear Lynn talk about his hero Tommy Hinnershitz with Bryan Householder of *Trackside Magazine*, "Tommy was my hero, and he's such a good role model. Even today he is. He's as good a guy as you would want to meet. He's a good a good-will ambassador as racing has ever had. Good sportsmanship and fair play have always been his trademark. Tommy was always an aggressive driver, but never to the point where he'd put people out. I feel sorry for the kids today with most of the role models that they have in sports. Most of them today aren't good role models. I'm just glad Tommy was around when I was that age".

Finally, Lynn once told Greg Zyla of *Open Wheel Magazine*, "The legacy I want to leave is that I raced hard and clean and within the rules. If I had to go outside the rules to win, or run into a guy, I didn't want to win the race. I took pride in being a thinker, evaluating track conditions, going where you had to make the car work, and trying new things. I was honest, sometimes too honest. But I wanted to be fair and make racing better. I may disagree with someone, but as long as I feel their motives have the same goal, I respect them. Now I look back at my retirement as best for me. You know, I was never a gypsy. I had roots, a family, and I didn't want to spend my life on the road as a racer. But I want to give something back to racing. Today, I'm involved in a lot of different things and have a lot of time for the family. I guess that's why I'm so involved in all of these other racing related things. I have no regrets whatsoever".

Lynn has also been honored by various Halls of Fame over the years, including the York County Racing Club, Eastern Motorsports Press Association, The Auto Racing Club of Hagerstown, Susquehanna Speedway, and in 1992 by the Pennsylvania Sports Hall of Fame.

According to the 1996 Williams Grove Speedway program, Lynn Paxton continues to lead the modern era (1967-95) sprint car winners list with 43 career victories, followed by Larry "Smokey" Snellbaker(41), Keith Kauffman(39), Kenny Weld(38), Bobby Allen(35), Don Kreitz, Jr. and Steve Smith, Sr.(32), Steve Kinser(30), Richard "Mitch" Smith(27), and Bobby Adamson(24).