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A True Race Fan by Jason Shank (August 2005)

What makes a "True" Race Fan? Some people will say that it's a person that is at the track every week. Some say it's a person that receives racing publications in the mail. It could be a person that puts a few decals on their car of their favorite driver, a person that travels a few hours to get to a racetrack, a person that has a few racing t-shirts, a person that no matter what is going on they are in front of their TV on Sunday afternoons, a person that is at the track so often that every person at the ticket gate knows their name, There are numerous ways to describe a race fan, but how do you describe a "True" Race Fan?

For me, it's pretty easy. A "True" Race fan is a person that will leave a family reunion after about an hour to head to the track, a person that will get to work late every Friday while working third shift because he was at the races, a person that will attend annual awards banquets even though he is not a competitor or sponsor. Oh wait, I got a good one, a person that will skip his own son's graduation because he was making his first trip to Eldora! A person that takes his son all over the east coast for hockey tournaments leave his son at the hockey rink and leaves to find a racetrack, come to think of it that was pretty much how every family vacation was. A person that HAD to have a three-course meal at home but had no problem eating a dust covered hot dog at the racetrack. A person that will not only support his favorite drivers sponsors but will advertise for them with an airbrushed mural of that drivers race car on the tire cover of his vehicle.

What about a person that makes sure they are at the track early enough not only to get a good seat but early enough to enjoy a smooth cigarette and a hot cup of coffee while watching the water truck circle the speedway. Someone that could have funded a small country with all of the money spent at racetracks.

By now I'm sure you readers realize that I know the "True" Race Fan that I am talking about. Just from reading this you may even know who it is. This person was a mainstay at the Lernerville Speedway, Pittsburgh's Pennsylvania Motor Speedway, and Motordrome Speedway when it was dirt. This person was my dad, Jim Shank. Most people know my dad as the guy who drives the van with the Lynn Geisler tire cover. We would go to tracks all over the country and we would always run into someone that would know him or the van.

My dad was a long time Lynn Geisler fan. He followed Lynn from pretty much the beginning of his career. Lynn Geisler has won 104 Late Model feature events at the Lenerville Speedway and I bet my dad only missed three of them. Unfortunately, the three wins that he missed were the

last three. About 3 months ago my father was diagnosed with an inoperable cancerous tumor. The tumor was right next to the optic nerve. It wasn't long after he was diagnosed that the tumor started affecting his vision. The doctor's started with Radiation treatments and Chemotherapy. After a few weeks of treatments we all noticed that my dad was not acting right. The doctors decided to keep him in the hospital. During his stay in the hospital he developed Pneumonia.

A couple of weeks after my father was diagnosed with the illness, his favorite driver Lynn Geisler, won his 102nd feature event at Lernerville Speedway. Lynn dedicated the race to my dad as they were good friends outside of the racetrack Lynn's on-track interview with track announcer Dow Carnahan was pretty emotional. "I've got a fellow that is a real good friend of mine, Jim Shank, who is wheel chair bound and really doing some struggling and (emotional pause) I'd like to donate this race to him. He's probably been to more races than I have. I can't ever remember going anywhere without Jim showing up with his van and his plaque on the back (tire cover). I'm really going to miss him, I know he's struggling."

On June 24th my dad attended his final race. He borrowed a wheel chair from his brother so that he can see the Mid-Atlantic Championship Series (his favorite series) and the All-Star Circuit of Champions Sprint Car Series. He watched Lynn Geisler win his heat, win the dash, sit on the pole and finish fourth in his final appearance at the Lernerville Speedway.

On Saturday morning, July 30th, less than a month after his last race, he passed away peacefully in his sleep.

Something ironic happened the night before my father's passing. Lynn Geisler won his 103rd Late Model feature event at Lernerville. Lynn pulled into victory lane around 11:50pm (give or take a few minutes). At about the same time, my dad, who had been pretty much immobile for about a week, had sat up and attempted to say something to my sister who was staying with him that night. That was the most he moved in over a week. It's funny how it was at about the same time Lynn was pulling into victory lane.

On Wednesday, August 3rd, the day after we laid my father to rest, Lynn won his 104th feature event at Lernerville and again dedicated the race to my father.

So what is a "True" Race Fan? I think that someone that is so dedicated to the sport that if it started to rain on the way to the racetrack he would start calling other racetracks to see where it is not raining. Or someone that everyone would hide from if the races were rained out.

What will I think of when I hear True Race Fan? I will think of my father, and all the time I spent with my father at the racetracks and everywhere else. Nobody can take that time away from me.

From a Race Fan to a True Race Fan...Dad, I love you. I'll make sure that water truck does its job!!!!

