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## Remember When: Bob Bentz

Bob Bentz has been a major player in local short track racing for five decades. During his career he has been a pit crew member, a car owner, and a sponsor. His reason for getting involved in racing was the love of competition. It comes as no surprise that his hobby is building racecars.

Bentz recalls starting his racing career the day he returned from his honeymoon in August of 1959 as a crew member for driver Joe Viglione. A life long friendship developed; Bentz and Viglione are still working together forty seven years later. Bentz said that the best part of racing is winning and meeting some truly great people and the love of competition. When asked about the toughest part of racing he replied, "I haven't found one yet."

His most memorable moment in racing came when he was at Daytona with drivers Joe Mihalic and Tommy Gale as a crew member. After Heidelberg closed, Mihalic decided to try his hand at Winston Cup racing. Lou Viglione really gave him a break and let Joe drive his car in the 1974 Daytona 500. Joe raced in NASCAR Winston Cup from 1974 to 1978. Entering Winston Cup racing was just like starting all over again; they didn't know anyone. The first Twin 125 qualifying race was pretty exciting. Joe waited in the lineup before the race not knowing what to expect. He said, "Daytona is not a hard track to drive, but you have to watch yourself because things really happen fast. On the other tracks you have a good chance of getting the car back and straightened out if you get into trouble, but at Daytona, it's a different story."

Bentz worked with Tommy Gale who competed in Winston Cup from 1975 to 1986. Gale's career started in 1961 when he purchased a 1956 Ford stock car from a group of guys in the Southside of Pittsburgh. He ran the local Pittsburgh Racing Association Circuit from 1961 to 1966. Local racing mechanics, Bobby Bentz and Frank Vasko, were very involved with Tommy's

racing activities. In 1966, Tom and a group of friends went to Daytona International Speedway to watch the races. Tom said, "We're going to race here next year." In 1967, he bought a car from Harry Neil of Blairsville. It was the car that Blackie Watt ran at Daytona the previous year.

In 1967 Gale shocked the mostly southern racers on the circuit. With his own trailer inoperative, he loaded his race car up in a semi from his trucking company. All eyes were on his team when he pulled the seemingly way-too-big rig into the pit area. The teams on hand thought that Gale was crazy being the first to transport his car in such a fashion to a race. Looking at today's haulers, Gale was obviously ahead of his time.

Bob was with Mihalic and Gale for many years and afterwards built race cars for his two sons Bob, Jr. and Tom. Bob has recovered from throat cancer and is still building racecars and competing at Motordrome and Jennerstown with drivers Gary Wiltrout and Bobby Henry.

Crew members on the #60 late model team include Bob Kissell, Tom Bentz, Bob Bentz, Jr., Rob Van Fleet, Bob Van Fleet and Mac Macefresh. Some of the tracks where Bob has been a competitor include: Bedford, Blanket Hill, Clearfield, Clinton, Greater Pittsburgh, Heidelberg, Jennerstown, Latrobe, Lernerville, Marion Center, Motordrome, North Hills, Pennsboro, Pittsburgh, Port Royal, Schmuckers, Sharon, South Park, and St. Clairsville. Bob has had multiple championships and victories on the dirt as well as the asphalt. The list of drivers that he has worked with reads like a who's who in short track racing starting with Viglione, and including Tommy Colella, Bob James, Myles Witchey, Norm Benning, Sr., Don Dibert, Richard Mitchell, and Tommy Beck.

Bob Bentz must have a knack for recognizing talent if you consider how many of his drivers have been inducted into the Pittsburgh Circle Track Club Hall of Fame. Inductions include: 1985 Tom Colella, 1986 Joe Mihalic, 1989 Bob James, 1990 Norm Benning, 1998 Tommy Gale, 1999 Joe Viglione, and 2002 Don Dibert.

When asked about the most embarrassing moment in racing Bob responded, "caught cheating" but wouldn't elaborate. Bobby Allison was his favorite competitor in a race at Hickory Speedway in New Castle Pennsylvania.

Bob lives in Elizabeth, PA with his wife Shirley and is the owner of Stan's Transmission in North Versailles, PA. They have three children, Bob, Jr., Tom, and Susie.

Remember When Auto Racing History is available on our website

<http://www.speedwayproductions.biz/> it includes nostalgic photos of pioneers in local auto racing. Go to the webpage and click on articles. There is a large selection of Joe Viglione and Blackie Watt photos on the website. If you have any old photos that you would like included, please send me an email at: [don@speedwayproductions.biz](mailto:don@speedwayproductions.biz) we welcome your ideas and especially any photos that you can contribute.