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Remember When: Mr. Invitational Bob Wearing Sr.

Short track auto racing history was made on July 7, 1990 when Bob Wearing Sr. scored feature win number 600 and 601. This reporter had the pleasure of interviewing him on the special occasion. For a kid who first got involved in auto racing by selling pop at the old Penn Speedway in Cooperstown, Pennsylvania, Wearing did quite well in the sport. His career began in 1960 at the Butler Speedway, and 30 years later he won his 600th. feature win at Pittsburgh's Pennsylvania Motor Speedway.

There were many speedways and many race cars in between, with many competitive laps, but when the dust settled, it was one fantastic accomplishment. In order to win this many features he needed a lot of blood, sweat and tears put into the various race cars by a dedicated pit crews. All his racing efforts were not successes. Like many other people, Wearing had his share of setbacks, mechanical failures, and races lost due to crashes. Bob Wearing is a careful driver and the accidents that he was involved in were usually someone else's fault. His most serious accident happened in 1979 at Daytona while driving J. Merle Smith's Monza body asphalt modified.

Getting his start in racing was the result of Bob Wearing being the paperboy for Jim Irvine Sr. who was one of the outstanding coupe drivers of the 50's and 60's. Bob started to tag along with Jim when he went racing and eventually became part of the pit crew. One night at Mon Duke Speedway in Murrysville, PA Bob drove the car in a mechanics race. When the feature was about to start Jim, who was scheduled to start in the 22nd position, asked Bob if he would like to drive in the feature. Bob said, "I was falling out of the seat but having a good time".

In 1960 Bob built his own car. He bought a frame and cage from one of the PRA drivers and built the #A1 car for about the same price as a pit pass costs today. Bob said that on his best night in the car he won \$22.

Jim Anderson built a 1955 Chevy to race in the late model division at Heidelberg and South Park and Bob was drafted as the driver. In 1965 Anderson teamed up with a young mechanic named Dunk Pacdozi and they fielded a car #28 for Wearing.

It was just Dunk Pacdozi and Wearing at the beginning of one of the greatest owner driver combinations in short track racing history. Dunk and Bob had known each other from racing together at the local tracks. Pacdozi was a car owner and Frank Choura was his driver. From the mid to late 60's, the Wearing/Pacdozi team won many races and Verne Spencer, the editor of Tri-State Auto Racing News, gave Wearing the title of "Mr. Invitational" and it stuck.

When Heidelberg was first paved in 1967, Bob and Dunk brought their 1957 Chevy dirt car down to-race. They won seven features, finished second twice and crashed once. The second year on asphalt they built a 1962 Chevy. The car did not handle very well but the team did win a few features at the 1/4 mile Hickory Speedway in Pennsylvania.

Dunk then converted the car back over to race dirt. Bob was with Dunk until the late 60's. He then drove for Joe Viglione for a while and in 1970 Bob teamed up with car owner George Leon and driver Herb Scott. The 8-Ball Team of Leon, Scott and Wearing won over 60 features in one year.

In 1971 Bob and Dunk got back together and were a team again up until the late 70's. Bob had to do a great deal to earn the title "Mr. Invitational". In the late 70's and early 80's wherever a high-paying race was held, he was there and usually won. One of the biggest, most prestigious races for late model stock cars is the "Hillbilly 100" held each fall at Pennsboro, West Virginia. Bob not only won this event but he won it four consecutive years, which is a record that will

probably never be broken. He has also won the "Conococheague 100", which was the biggest late model race in the state of Maryland.

During the early 80's, when Bob was racing late model at Clearfield Speedway, he was approached by J. Merle Smith about driving the #72 modified at Lernerville Speedway. Smith's regular driver Clate Husted did not want to make the long trip to Lernerville from his home. Bob's association with Smith was typical of his dealings with all his car owners; win lots of races. Bob and Merle were together for 7 or 8 years. Wearing decided to run the STARS late model circuit and could not race Smith's modified on a regular basis.

Bob and Merle talked it over and decided to put Bob's son in the modified. Many of the skeptics felt that Bob Jr. was riding on his father's coat tails. The first of many modified victories by the second generation driver silenced the critics. .

In 1991 Bob Wearing Jr. won back to back modified and late model features at Lernerville. This has only ever been done once before and it was Bob Wearing Sr. who did it two years earlier and for the same two car owners.

Although he has driven many race cars over his career, his favorite was the Yenko #1 Camaro and Lernerville Speedway was his favorite track. In 1979 Wearing won every late model feature that was run during the season. The most feature wins that Bob ever accumulated in one racing season was 38, but over his long career he averaged approximately 20 wins per year.

In 1970 when Bob was teamed up with Herb Scott they won over 60 features in only one season. To a non-race fan or even a diehard gear head the combined numbers of these two great drivers is over 1100 feature wins and that is mind boggling. It would seem that Bob and Herb must have won every feature race since racing began. It is also interesting to note that when Herb won number 500 at Lernerville, Bob was second in the feature that night.

Bob Wearing and Gator Harris got together when Gator's regular driver Dave Groves got poison ivy. Wearing got in the car and became the regular driver. Bob's 600th victory came in Gator's car. This was a very prestigious moment that many car owners would have loved to share.

The legacy that Bob left us with when he retired is a big part of local racing history and we owe him a debt of gratitude for the many times that he made us “remember when”.