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Murdick enjoying 50th season competing in dirt track racing

By John Enrietto Butler Eagle Sports Editor

50 years and counting

And don't expect Carl Murdick to leave dirt track racing anytime soon any time soon - even though he turned 72 June 6, 2009.

"Age doesn't mean a thing," the longtime Butler resident said. "It's all in how you feel and whether you can still be competitive. I feel fine and I'm still holding my own out there.

"I might go a couple more years or this might be it. Who knows? I don't know what I'd do with myself if I did quit."

His son, Modified driver Dave Murdick, can't help him there.

"He doesn't have any other hobbies," the younger Murdick said. "Driving a race car is what my father does."

Carl Murdick's racing history predates Lernerville Speedway. He competed in the first race ever at the Sarver oval and won the Modified points championship there in 1970.

Dave Murdick won consecutive Modified points championships in 2004-05 and sits second and fourth, respectively, in Late Model and Modified points so far this season.

His father is 10th in Modified points in 2009, which is where he finished last year.

"I never encouraged my kids to get into racing," Carl Murdick said. "This is a costly sport and once you get hooked, you get hooked.

"I wasn't going to discourage them, either. It was up to them. They enjoy it like I do."

Gary and Sheila Rankin, Murdick's son-in-law and daughter, race Sprint cars at Lernerville. The entire family operates on a low racing budget.

"I never thought he'd be doing it for this long," Sheila admitted of her father's racing career. "It seems like for each of the last 10 years, he was saying that'd be the last year. 'Once he approached 50 years (of racing), we told him he was too close and he had to go for it.'"

Here is a rundown of Carl Murdick's Modified feature wins from 1968-2009

Sportsman - 24

Lernerville - 12

Mercer - 6

Tri-City - 5

Motordrome 70 - 3

Blanket Hill - 1

North Hills - 1

Crawford County Fairgrounds - 1

Source Walt Wimer W Pa. racing historian

Murdick has a lot of gold paint on his No. 6 car this year, since 50 marks a golden anniversary. His years have been painted blue, black, red, yellow and burgundy over the years.

"I like my car to stand out on the track, so I try to go for a color scheme other guys aren't using," Murdick said.

"We talked to (Lernerville office manager) Linda Fennell about painting gold on the car and she thought it was a good idea," Dave said.

Carl Murdick remains old-school he still builds his own motors - like most drivers did in the 1960's — and uses dated equipment, The tires I get are used and Dad uses them when I'm through with them" Dave Murdick said.

The elder Murdick has had his share of moments on the track. He's garnered 56 feature wins - 12 at Lernerville - and has raced on nearly 50 different tracks. He recalled a day in 1965 when he won his heat race, the Australian Pursuit and his feature at Blanket Hill Speedway

"I also remember leading a 50-lap race after 49 laps - and broke," he said. "There's the good and the bad,"

Murdick still cherishes his 1970 points title at Lernerville - but he cherishes the car even more, 'that car has a lot of history," He said. 'The first race Sheila ran was in that car. I raced it from 1969 to 1982 and my son-in-law bought the car and raced it after that.

The motor from that car is still sitting in a corner of my garage somewhere."

Murdick isn't sure the last time he won a feature at Lernerville, "probably around 1985 or so," he said. "I know I finished fifth in a race last year.'

He received Tri-City Speedway's Lifetime Achievement Award in 2005 and an Outstanding Achievement Award from Mercer Raceway Park in 2002 to commemorate 13 consecutive top 10 point finishes.

And Murdick believes he can still win, even though his car is nine years old, "Everything would have to go my way, from the set-up to the pill draw, hitting the right line, but it can happen," he said, 'Why not? My equipment and car aren't as new as other guys out here, but nobody comes to lose every week."

Murdick and his wife, Sally, have been married 52 years. She may support the sport even more than he does. 'Dad has told me that when he does quit racing, he's not coming to the track anymore" Dave Murdick said "if that's the case, mom told him to plan on spending a lot of Friday nights home alone."

Carl Murdick: 49 and Counting by Brian Spaid

Over the last several years, racers in their teens and twenties have entered motorsports with a vengeance. Even at Tri-City Speedway, teenage drivers now grace the pit area each weekend. Seeking glory on the local tracks and hoping for a chance at the big time, these racers are vibrant and daring in many ways.

Carl Murdick of Butler may not be a young gun, but he is still a strong challenger. At 70, Murdick earned his racing stripes long ago. While some may think a senior citizen racer should be retired to pasture, Murdick dismisses those thoughts.

"I feel most of the drivers out there respect me as a racer," said Murdick hard at work this week in his garage getting his DIRTcar Big Block Modified ready for competition. "There's probably a few that think I ought to move aside and give them a chance. I beat them, so they'd like to see me quit because I make them look bad."

This season will be Murdick's 49th behind the wheel of a race car. In 2009, he will complete 50 years of racing on tracks throughout western Pennsylvania , and his family is already planning a season-long celebration to honor him. There's still another season to go, however, and Murdick is looking forward to it.

"I can't quit," said Murdick. "If I didn't race, I don't know what I'd do. I'm still competitive. I haven't won a feature in a long time, but I've finished second and won heat races. The other racers don't out drive me, they out dollar me."

Murdick's always been a low buck racer. And he's made a success of it since he started racing cars known as Hardtops in 1960. Those six-cylinder racers eventually evolved into the DIRTcar Big Block Modifieds of today.

"I raced all over in the 1960s," recalls Murdick. "Butler , Mercer, Hickory , Tri-City, North Hills, Blanket Hill. Those were just a few of the tracks. Back then, you could race several times a week."

Over the years, Murdick raced at 47 different tracks in the northeastern United States and Canada . He also collected 56 feature wins and many awards. He was a champion at Lernerville Speedway in 1970. He also raced Late Models for nearly a decade earning numerous wins. In 2005, he won Tri-City's Lifetime Achievement Award for five decades of love and dedication to racing.

Murdick's even raced and talked shop with icons in American motorsports. He met famed mechanic Smokey Yunick and racing legend Richard Petty, who are two of his admired heroes in racing. He also competed on the track against current and former NASCAR stars like Bill Elliott, Tony Stewart, Dave Blaney, Neil Bonnett and Bobby Allison.

"There are a lot of memories, that's for sure," noted Murdick. "One of the toughest racers was Lou Blaney. He was always strong and you accomplished something when you beat him. Lou and I raced each other for years. I'm actually surprised that I outlasted him."

When he finally hangs up the helmet, Murdick will also leave a legacy. His son, Dave Murdick, is a top notch DIRTcar Big Block Modified racer in his own right winning two Lernerville titles and the 2001 BRP Modified Tour championship. Daughter Sheila Rankin and her husband, Gary, compete in the Super Sprints with a low dollar operation. Even Murdick's granddaughter, Jo Rankin, is making a name for herself. The former Miss Tri-City Speedway was recently named Ms. DIRT Motorsports 2008.

"The years have passed by fast," added Murdick. "I have no regrets. The only thing that gets me is the cost of everything. It's really hard to keep a car going with the small sponsors that I have. The cost of racing gasoline is \$7 a gallon and the racing purses have not been able to keep up with costs. But racers all race because we love it."

Racing his No. 6 Troyer DIRTcar Big Block Modified built in 2000, Murdick cuts corners where he needs to in order to field car weekly at Lernerville and Tri-City. While some race teams buy the newest products yearly, Murdick learned to save money and work hard on car preparation.

"There are a lot of better handling cars out there that were made in 2007 and 2008. My car's ancient. I'm still capable of getting in there though. The tough thing is my starting positions. Usually, I'm not up front, and any more it's the car that starts up front that wins. There's not more racing anymore, it's chasing."

Retirement is the furthest thing from Murdick's mind for now. This weekend, the veteran leadfoot will be in action once again as he closes in on 50 years of racing. Forget the young guns; the old six-shooters are ready, willing and able to do battle too. And Murdick is leading the charge.

Murdick's car is sponsored by Murdick's Auto Parts and Miano's Welding of Butler.

Note: Carl Murdick was inducted into the Pittsburgh Circle Track Club Hall of Fame in 2007 along with Dick Curry, Jerry Lesnak, Frank Perpetua, and Ted Wise.