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## Remember When: Dirt Henry - Race Car Owner

In 1960 Dirt Henry's friend Bill Miller, asphalt racer Rick Miner's father, and Dirt went up to the Uniontown Speedway. They liked what they saw and decided to build a racecar. It was a 1950 Chevrolet 2 door coupe. Bill put roll bars in it and made some other changes in the car and they were in business. The car was numbered 800 being Henry's business is located at 800 Snyder Street in Connellsville Pa. They won their share of races with very little investment. The following year they had a 1955 Chevrolet then a 1956 Chevrolet. Willy Maraugh and Earl "Shorty" Detweiler were the drivers for a couple of years.

In 1964 they bought a 1961 Chevrolet from Jim Reed in Peekskill, New York found through an ad in the National Speed Sport News. Reed ran in the 1961 Daytona 500 and finished 6th. He ran quite a few NASCAR races then changed the car over to a dirt car. In 1964, Reed was the dirt track champion. Henry called him on the phone and purchased the car for \$1,500. Dirt said "I then thought to myself the Tri-State 150 at Heidelberg is in six weeks and pays \$1500 to win, if we can win that race I will own a free race car". They got Kenny Lowe a Goodyear tire tester from Akron, Ohio to drive the car. Lowe started towards the rear of the field and at lap 50 he was running a very strong third and told Dirt he could have passed the two front runners anytime but on lap 75 Dirt's dream of owning a free racecar came to an end as the rear-end broke in the car and his longtime friend Bob Kimmel looked at him with his usual smile and said "you really didn't think you were going to win this race did you?" "My reply was I guess not. We ran this car for awhile then went back to 57 Chevy's with Johnny Orbin as the driver".

One Sunday the crew took the car to Pennsboro and Dirt decided not to go. On Monday morning, Bill Miller said that he fired Johnny Orbin and hired a new driver. Dirt said, "who is the new driver?" Bill replied Gary Henry. Well Gary was 15 or 16 and had a lot of seat time driving

used cars and trucks on back roads and some of the farmlands near the used car lot. He probably started driving when he was 9 or 10. Gary's decision to drive a racecar was not revealed to his mother Cleo. Miller in the meantime told the announcers at various local tracks where Gary's mom may show up to use a fictitious name. One Saturday night at Schmuckers Speedway the cars came out on to the track and the announcer said "in car 15 is Gary Henry of Connellsville". Cleo took a fit and said "No Way". Dirt told mom to settle down he won't get hurt. Gary turned out to be a very good driver winning several track championships.

In 1981 Dirt's youngest son Bobby decided that he and his friend Randy Loughman were building a four cylinder car to run in the Super Compact division at Motordrome Speedway. When Dirt asked him what brand of a car they were building? Bobby responded by saying a Chevrolet Vega. "I told him those Vegas were not very good cars when they came out of the factory. Well they put a full season in without much success. That winter I purchased Bobby a Mustang racecar". The team competed at tracks such as Clearfield, Motordrome and PPMS. The team was very successful winning on asphalt and dirt. In 1987 Bobby tried to move from Super Compacts to Late Models but this was a big leap so he went to the Semi-Lates in 1988. This was the start of the two year DIRT 1 era. This magnificent car won 47 feature races in 1988 & 1989. "They tell me that you would need to be careful in victory lane with this car, as you may have been hit with a rock while having your photo taken". Randy Loughman turned out to be the crew chief for Bobby on dirt also driving the DIRT 1 car himself to numerous feature wins

Motordrome Speedway was sold and asphalt was laid down in 1990. One of the co-owners Bob Arsenberger told Dirt to buy an asphalt racecar because it was less upkeep and when you took the car home, it looked just like it did before you took it to the track you don't even have to wash it. "Boy was I fooled. He forgot to tell me quite a few things about the expenses of owning such as tires, shocks, 50 different springs, and the concrete walls seem very hard". After the 2004 season, they sold one of the two asphalt cars and Bobby was asked to drive for the Gary Wiltrout racing team on Friday nights at Motordrome and Bentz Motorsports on Saturday nights at Jennerstown in 2005.

Bobby Henry is probably one of the smartest, cleanest drivers in this area and is easy on equipment. He has thus far accumulated 105 Feature wins in his career. Dirt said "I would like to thank my other two sons Rick and Jeff for helping Bobby since the start of his racing career in 1981 and for not asking, hey dad when is it my turn to race. All four brothers ran in an enduro race at Motordrome back in 1984 and all four at one time or another during the 300 lap event led the race. That was surely something I will always remember".

I have had the pleasure of knowing Dirt Henry for over twenty five years. I raced with Gary and Bobby and spent many a night in the pits with Rick and Jeff. You will not find a nicer group of people in motorsports today. Donald "Dirt" Henry and his wife Cleo also have a daughter Sharon. One can only imagine what it was like for Sharon growing up with four brothers.

There have been numerous nights when I had a chance to sit in the stands with Dirt and listen to his funny stories and jokes. My favorite is the time he told me "I came home real late one night, took off my shoes, and was tip toeing into the house when my wife sat straight up in bed and said where the hell have you been? My reply was dear I was out looking for a nice place to take you to dinner tomorrow. Cleo just rolled her eyes and went back to sleep". Dirt has a wonderful sense of humor which is very important if you own a race car.