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Remember When: Gus Linder - The Man in Black

In the late 1940's and early 1950's, the Linder name was one of the biggest in racing in the entire country. This Linder, of course" was the late Dick Linder, 1955 Pittsburgh Racing Association Champion. However, in the early 1950's, another Linder named Gus started to show up in the box scores. The younger of the two brothers, Gus, drove many racecars in his long career.

Some of the other men Gus drove for included Fred and Marion Palone, George Lauderbaugh, Jack Schuster, Larry Jackson, Joe Borandi, Joe Vilsack, Don Dickenson (Don the Carburetor Man), and John Boltey and Mickey Banas.

The first feature winning car Gus drove was the number 57 white Ford coupe owned by Fred Palone, brother of Marion Palone, who owned the famous V-2, which Dick made famous. As the Pittsburgh Racing Association got started in 1954, Gus was picked to drive Larry Jackson's #15 Buick powered Ford coupe, and was very successful with this car. After a few seasons with the Jackson mount, Gus moved into the seat of the Joe Vilsack Buick powered Ford coupe, and he was on his way to making a big name for himself. Linder won the 1959 Tri-State Championship at Heidelberg driving for Vilsack. I first met Gus when I was a teenager and a go-fer at Vilsack's Garage in Hazelwood PA. The team would let me ride in the race car while towing it to the speedway.

As the PRA changed over to late model cars in 1961, Gus Linder felt it was time to make a change. At this time, he joined forces with the late Mickey Banas and his #69 sprint car.

As the sprint cars were popular in Western PA., they were even much more popular in Central PA one of the hot beds of sprint car racing, Mickey and Gus started to travel more and more to

the Central PA area to do their racing. In all reality, Gus was the biggest winner of any Western PA driver to race in Central Pennsylvania. The black Ford powered sprint car started winning at the famed Williams Grove, Lincoln, Port Royal, and Susquehanna Speedways. What made Gus so famous was the 289 cubic inch Ford engine running against an all Chevy powered field of cars.

Mickey Banas could make a Ford a feature winner when it was unheard of in sprint car racing. Then tragically, Mickey died at a very young age of cancer, and this great combination of Mickey, Gus and the Ford were never to be again. As Gus took over the car, he changed it to Chevy power. Gus owned the car and the number and color remained the same until his retirement. He took on Kimes Chevrolet as a sponsor, and he had mediocre success. However, the spirit just wasn't there as it was with Mickey.

Things did not always go smoothly between Gus and Mickey, as Gus would be fired one week and re-hired the next week. It just wouldn't work out for Gus or Mickey if Gus drove for anyone else or Mickey put another driver in the car. The team was together for fourteen years. As rocky as the relationship was, they always ended up back together.

Near the end of Gus' career, his son decided to give driving a try, but he only ran for a few years. Gus just slowly ran less and less until he just quit driving altogether.

Tracks where Gus competed included Ace High, Arden Downs, Blanket Hill, Butler, Canfield, Claridge, Clearfield, Clinton, Daytona, Greater Pittsburgh, Green Valley, Heidelberg, Jennerstown, Langhorne, Lernerville, Lincoln, Mercer, Mon-Duke, Morgantown, Motordrome, Port Royal, Selinsgrove, Sharon, South Park, Tri-City, Uniontown, and Williams Grove.

The man with the black helmet, black driver's suit, and black racecar is no longer on the racing scene, but anyone who saw Gus Linder drive would never forget him. For over thirty years, the "Man in Black" gave his all to the sport of auto racing, and it is only fair that we don't let the fans forget him. Gus was inducted into the PCTC Hall of Fame in 1991 along with Jim Bickerstaff

and Whitey Lauderbaugh. Gus has some of his memorabilia on display at the Heinz History Center Sports Museum in Pittsburgh.