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Remember When: Harold Smith

Most people in the Tri-State area remember Harold Smith of Dayton, Ohio as a two time Pittsburgh Racing Association Champion but his racing roots are much deeper.

Smith entered nine NASCAR races from 1959 through 1979. In two of those he drove a Studebaker at the new Daytona International Speedway in 1959. In the qualifying race for the Daytona 500, held on February 20, 1959, Harold started at the 22nd position in his 1959 Studebaker Lark. He advanced one position to finish 21st out of the thirty eight entries.

Officials at the brand new Daytona International Speedway mailed out entry blanks for the inaugural Daytona 500, a race that boasted a total purse of \$67,760. The first Daytona 500 was held in February 1959 with fifty five cars taking the green flag. Harold started in 50th position for the race. Well known drivers starting behind Harold included Johnny Allen, Roy Tyner, and Buck Baker. Some of his fellow competitors included Rex White, Junior Johnson, Richard Petty, Johnny Allen, Herman Beam, Tim Flock, and Jack Smith.

Harold entered the Daytona 500 the next year driving a 1960 Plymouth. He started 59th in the field of 68 cars. The Plymouth's engine blew up on lap 94 resulting in a disappointing finish of 49th.

For his MARC Championship run in 1961 he drove car #32 a 1961 Chevrolet owned and prepared by Emerson and Dick Ruebush of Miamisburg, Ohio. Harold won 15 of the 29 races on the circuit including 10 of 11 races run in June and July. Harold ranks seventh among all time MARC/ARCA winners with a total of twenty four victories.

On April Fool's Day 1962, NASCAR-style stock car racing came to Virginia International Raceway. The American Road 250 was the brainchild of NASCAR superstar Curtis Turner. Turner was promoting the race under the sanction of the Midwest Association for Race Cars (MARC). Turner, a NASCAR veteran since that organization was formed in 1949 the hard-driving businessman and racer had recently built Charlotte Motor Speedway. Harold Smith finished 11th in a 1962 Ford and that day Curtis Turner won the race also driving a 1962 Ford.

On March 13, 1966 only three of the thirteen factory backed cars finished the Peach Blossom 500 at the North Carolina Motor Speedway at Rockingham, but they finished 1-2-8: the Plymouth of Paul Goldsmith, the Ford of Cale Yarborough and the Dodge of David Pearson. Independents Bobby Allison, Harold Smith and John Sears finish third, fourth and fifth.

In 1968, Harold raced a 1966 Ford to a 15th place finish at Charlotte. In 1970, he campaigned a 1966 Ford to a 15th place finish at the same track. In 1970, his car was a 1969 Chevrolet for a 33rd place finish at Michigan.

Harold raced for several years in the Midwest Association for Race Cars (MARC). This racing association is now known as the Automobile Racing Club of America (ARCA). Harold won his first MARC race in 1958. He placed 10th in points in 1959, 7th in points in 1960, won the National Championship in 1961, and placed 2nd in points in 1962.

A multitude of stars ran ARCA during the John Marcum years, many having multi-year title accomplishments. Five of those stars won three straight titles including Iggy Katona, Nelson Stacy, Jack Bowsher, Ron Hutcherson, and Dave Dayton. Katona also had two consecutive titles, a feat matched by Benny Parsons, Ramo Stott, Marvin Smith, Bobby Dotter and Lee Raymond. In fact, between 1953 and 1986 there were only fifteen champions. During the '90s, Tim Steele would accomplish the double, while Frank Kimmel did it the past several seasons.

In 1979, Kyle Petty made his ARCA debut with an impressive win at Daytona. Marcum died during the 1981 season, bringing uncertainty concerning the future of the series. But the Marcum family stepped up. Marcum's widow, Mildred, and daughter Suzie Drager hired

longtime officials Bob Loga and Rollo Juckette to continue operations. It was tough going for a while, with only eight races in 1981, but ARCA survived.

In 1968 despite starting two months after the racing season began Harold won the Pittsburgh Racing Association "Driver of the Year" award. He won twelve of the final fourteen races including the 150 lap Tri-State Championship and the Pittsburgh 250 races at the Heidelberg Speedway in Carnegie, Pennsylvania. Jeep Leonardo was Harold's car owner for the 1968 season. He was a two time Pittsburgh Racing Association Champion in 1968 and 1969. Smith competed against some excellent drivers at Heidelberg. The list reads like the "who's who" in racing with competitors like Norm Benning, Jim Bickerstaff, Tom Colella, Jim Cushman, Tony DeLillo, Tony Diano, Don Dibert, Glen Gault, Don Gregory, Kenny Hemphill, Ed Howe, Bill Konczos, Bob James, Bud Middaugh, Joe Mihalic, Bob Senneker, Herb Scott, Carl & Marvin Smith, and Joe Viglione. Smith provided some great racing memories for local racing fans during his tenure at Heidelberg. Harold retired to Florida and died in the 1990's.

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 we welcome your ideas and especially any photos that you can contribute.