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Remember When: Vic George

Many of the fans who went to the tracks like Heidelberg, South Park Fairgrounds, Green Valley, Jennerstown and Motordrome, Mon-Duke and Mercer will remember Vic George. The retired heavy equipment operator of Hopewell Township is still an occasional spectator at the local speedways.

George's driving career began in the early 1950's as a favor to his younger sister Betty. She drove a 1939 Ford in competition. Betty asked Vic to drive her car and he started last in the feature race and won.

He began a short-lived career as owner/driver by purchasing a 1940 Ford at the Auto Pound in Pittsburgh. The George Family raced together for several years with Vic driving the number 8; brother Tommy ran a number 7, while his sister Betty raced the number 6. One of the speedways that they raced at was Kane Road Speedway in Aliquippa.

In 1955, Vic began driving for Bob Lucci of Center Township. It was the beginning of working arrangement that included car preparation during the week to go racing on weekends. He drove the 1937 Chevy coupe number 82 that Sam Zarnick of Aliquippa bought from local racing legend Buddy O'Connor. The new car allowed the team to extend their travels to Jennerstown, Windber Speedway, and Debo Park in Steubenville, Ohio.

George won the 1959 Mid-Season Championship at Green Valley driving Bob Lucci's number V-3. Around this time, tracks began posting what they would pay for a feature win prior to race day; before that drivers never knew what they would get.

During the fifties and sixties, George balanced working his full-time job with his racing career. Vic and his wife Cecile and their growing family of daughter Elizabeth, and four boys, Jim, Bob, David and Scott would come to races whenever possible.

George won over 100 feature events in his career, which made it easy for him to find a ride. In 1968, he and Grover Faulk of Hopewell began an association that would produce over 100 heat races and 50 features.

Faulk had a 1931 Chevy coupe that the crew of Paul Brougher, Butch Zanath and George's brothers John and Tom built during the winter. The crew replaced the small block 350 cubic inch engine with a 427 cubic inch big block Chevy.

George was track champion at Mercer in the Sportsman division in 1970 with seven feature wins. He was second in points that year at the track at Butler Fairgrounds with four feature wins. George had a total of seven championships at Mercer and four at Butler.

His success at the two tracks continued until 1975 when he decided to retire from racing. Retirement only lasted one season; he returned to drive for Russ King of Bristolville, Ohio, for a few more years. Vic George of Hopewell Township climbed through the driver's side window of a racecar for the last time at Mercer in 1979.

One of his favorite memories was a race he did not win, a 150-lap feature event at Heidelberg. George had lapped all the cars including Herb Scott's, second place machine. With ten laps to go his engine started to sputter, realizing he was running out of gas, he pulled into the pits. The crew dumped as much gas on the ground as in the car but he made it out just as Scott was coming around to regain his lost lap and take the win.

Vic was presented with the "Living Legends Award" at the 2003 Mercer Raceway Banquet. The presentation was very special because the staff at the speedway had the Grover Faulk number 65 on display. Joyce Woolsey, Russ Woolsey's widow, Vic's wife Ceil and Vic were all recognized during the festivities. I had the pleasure of observing the presentation and it was very well done.

His career passed through three different decades and many changes in the sport he loves. Some of his fellow competitors still race in the Pittsburgh Circle Track Senior Series, but a heart attack several years ago prevented George from racing with them. Vic is an occasional visitor at the speedways and old timer's activities. He is one of the local racing pioneers that help us to "Remember When"