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Remember When: Blackie Watt

William Oliver Watt was born on December 13, 1933, in New Alexandria, Pennsylvania, and grew up like any normal mischievous kid. His dad had a junk yard and Blackie grew up tinkering with cars.

People often wonder how Blackie got his famous nickname. "I received a small allowance in those days and I played poker at the garage to make more money. I usually jumped out of the grease pit and right into the poker game; and when I won the round and took the money, the guys would say here comes those black paws again." The nickname "Blackie" eventually became a household name to thousands of race fans.

In 1958 Blackie drove one of the ugliest race cars in Pennsylvania an old Hudson called "The Flying Purple People Eater. In 1961, Blackie and Joe Pitkavish teamed up to begin a twenty-five year relationship that was almost like a marriage. Blackie had enormous success driving Pitkavish's modifieds. Blackie campaigned the Pitkavish cars locally as well as Langhorne and Syracuse. He was the fastest qualifier at Langhorne in 1961. Blackie was with Pitkavish for over 25 years.

In 1966, Harry Neal, a close friend of Blackie's, bought a 1964 Ford Grand National. They decided to try the NASCAR circuit. The team competed in a total of 19 events and Watt finished in the top ten nine times. The team was financially outclassed but still won a qualifier for the Firecracker 400 while sliding sideways over the finish line in a photo finish beating many of the big-name drivers in the process. The team competed at Rockingham, Atlanta, Bristol, Darlington and Charlotte. The team only competed for one year in NASCAR.

One of the highlights of his career in the 1960's was winning the first Laurel Highlands 101 at Jennerstown. He drove the Don Crownover #101 in 1970 with moderate success in a car that was originally built for asphalt.

One of the hardest fought races ever witnessed at Lernerville saw Blackie, in his Jack Lentz prepared #93, and Herb Scott battle throughout the feature. Blackie and Herb really put on a good show with Blackie eventually getting the win. He continued to run the modified and late model. He won 53 features in 1974 and won the track championship in both divisions at Latrobe Speedway in 1974 and 1975. He accomplished the same feat at Lernerville a few years later. Blackie was such a big winner at Latrobe Speedway that a bounty was placed on him. He even won a stock car drag race at Keystone Raceway.

The worst accident of Blackie's career happened at Motordrome in 1983 when the steering broke on his late model sending Blackie flying out over turn #2, fifty feet in the air. He landed on pit road and sustained a broken back which sidelined him the rest of the season.

The accident left the Pitkavish without a driver. Instead of putting another driver in the modified, Mr. Pitkavish elected to park the car for the rest of the summer. Watt recuperated and successfully campaigned the modified until Pitkavish retired in 1987. Watt's last late model ride was with the Cochran Family #35 and he won the championship at Lernerville. Watt competed at 79 different tracks encompassing 15 states. He modestly said he probably won over 600 features.

Blackie and his lovely wife Lu have three children, Bill, Jr., Dave, and Sherri Lu Ferragine. The proud grandparents still live in New Alexandria, PA.

Blackie's toughest competitors included Clate Husted, Bob Wearing, Herb Scott, Ed Lynch, Ben Buzzard and Buddy O'Connor among others. If you are a race fan and never saw Blackie in action you missed one of the best there ever was. I recently had the opportunity to interview Blackie in Victory Lane at the Lernerville Speedway after an exciting win in the bus races. He is

71 years old and still winning races. Blackie is the reason that many of us will always “remember when”.