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Remember When: Dave Rupp

Kittanning, Pennsylvania is not a big town but over the years it has produced some successful racecar drivers. Kevin Schaeffer, Lernerville Sprint Car Champion, as well as former Late Model and Modified driver, Ben Bussard and his cousin Dave Rupp the subject of this story.

Dave Rupp's driving career started as a bulk milk truck driver. This experience probably made wheeling his Street Stock around the local short tracks an easy task. His current employment is a mechanic at Rupp's Auto Service. His experience in racing included driving as well as being a car owner. Dave's career lasted from 1974 until 1984. He felt the best part of racing was the people involved in the sport and the toughest part was when friends passed away. He was very close to his cousin, Ben Bussard who left us much too soon.

Dave's most memorable moment in racing came one night at Hummingbird Speedway when he won the Semi Late Feature in his car and the Late Model Feature in Jim Valasek's #11. The most embarrassing moment involved a night at Lernerville when the rear leaf spring broke coming out of turn two and he ended up upside down over the back stretch. His reasons for getting involved in racing were because of too many street wrecks and the influence of Ben Bussard who worked for Dave's father.

To look at Dave you might find it hard to believe that his hobby was golf. His favorite competitor that he raced against was always the one that was behind him. He said he would always like to be compared to Ben Bussard, one of the cleanest and nicest drivers ever to strap on a helmet. We asked him the question, "What do people assume when they meet you?" his answer, "they think that I am sane". Some of his car owners during his career included Herb Saxman and Jim Valasek.

His pit crew included Ben and Andy Bussard, Bob Stewart, Herb Saxman, John Deluca, Wick Rearick, Butch Painter, Carl Schaeffer, Mike Bellas, and Frank Bleggi.

Tracks where the team competed included Butler , Clearfield , Hummingbird, Latrobe, Lernerville, Marion Center , Mercer, Morgantown , Schmucker's, and Sportsman's Speedway .

Championships and special events on his win list are Marion Center Speedway, 1974 Claimer Division Point Champion in his rookie year. He followed that up in 1975 with the Lernerville Claiming Division Championship. In 2003, Dave was inducted into the Armstrong County Sports Hall of Fame for Stock Car Racing. He also finished second in the balloting for Walt Wimer's Western Pennsylvania Rookie of the Year title. Jim Kelly won the top honors that year.

Dave's sponsors over the years included, Schaeffer's Exxon, Zimmerman Auto Wrecking, Ben Rupp's Auto Service, Armstrong Beer, J. R. Kennedy Funeral Home, Green Acres Tavern, The Tire Corral, and Luchetti Auto Wrecking.

When it was time to letter their first car, Dave's fiancée Judy along with Ben Bussard's wife Dorothy were having trouble deciding on a number. They needed something that was easy to paint but felt the number one would be inappropriate since it would be Dave's first time at the track. Eleven and seventeen were already taken so they decided on seventy-one.

One of my funniest memories of Dave and his crew was one evening when several of the racers stopped at the Golden Goblet in Plum Boro for some liquid refreshments and food. Dave and his crew wrapped up the evening with a pretty good rendition of the song Amie by Pure Prairie League long before Karaoke was popular.

Try to visualize this hard nosed bad ass race car driver singing "Amie, what you wanna do? I think I could stay with you for a while, maybe longer if I do, don't you think the time is right for us to find all the things we thought weren't proper could be right in time?" I am not sure if he sounded good because he could sing or because we all had too much liquid refreshment but it was great fun.

During his career Dave was very successful on the racetrack while enjoying the competition and the people involved with his team. He and his wife Judy participated in the recent Nostalgia Night at Lernerville Speedway. It was really great to see them after a twenty-three year hiatus from the Sarver Oval. Just another reason for all of us to “remember when”.