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## Remember When: Dick Bailey

The Air Force veteran from Grove City, PA began one of the most successful careers in short track racing by accident in 1950. When the Bickel brothers of Grove City were building a 1937 Ford two-door sedan to race at the Butler Speedway, Dick Bailey spent his evenings hanging out at the garage. The driver backed out at the last minute and the Bickel brothers asked Bailey if he wanted to drive the racecar. The first night in the car Bailey got two firsts and a second.

Bailey joined NASCAR in 1950. He met his wife Myrth in 1946 after he returned from the service. They both raced at Sharon Speedway in 1950 along with Dick's sister, Ann Rosner and his brother John. Racing was a family affair even back then. The women raced in a separate class sharing the brothers' cars. Dick and Myrth were married for forty years and had three sons. Myrth died fifteen years ago. His oldest son Rick ran sprint cars for several years. The middle son, Bill, started racing in the semi late division and then moved to the sprint cars. He spent five years racing the sprint cars in Australia during the winter season.

Bill Bailey Jr. has competed with the All Stars, The World of Outlaws, and when time permitted he raced locally at the Pennsylvania and Ohio short tracks. The youngest of the boys, Brian, ran in the six-cylinder class at Lernerville but eventually moved on to be a professional bowler.

In 1951 Bailey built his own car and raced at tracks including Butler, Canfield, Sportsman Park, Erie, Brockway, Blanket Hill, Armstrong County Speedway, and Dayton Speedway. He would flat tow the racecar with his 1950 Lincoln in the days before trailers or fancy car haulers. The schedule often meant racing seven nights a week and twice on Sundays!

Bailey began driving the Vasey's Auto Sales #49 of Parker, PA in 1952. Seven people owned the car and the team won a lot of races. Dick finished second in Pennsylvania and fifth in the nation

in NASCAR points. He won two 50-lap features and twenty-one 25-lap main events. Bailey set the track record at Heidelberg on the quarter mile oval.

His stats in 1952 included 23 feature wins, 43 heats, second 33 times, and third 18 times. Ninety-seven top three finishes in one year is very impressive.

Dick met with Steve Petrovich in 1954 to form a very successful team to compete in the newly created Pittsburgh Racing Association. One of the most unique cars in P.R.A. competition was the "Flying Cigar". The Ford four door sedan was cut down to a coupe. The engine of choice for the car was a 340 cubic inch 1955 Lincoln power plant. Later in the season that year they installed a Desoto engine. The type of motor did not matter as Bailey always found victory lane.

In 1955 a thirteen year old kid named Don Gamble went to Claridge Speedway to see the races and Dick let him sit in the "Flying Cigar" race car. The young kid was hooked and spent the next five decades as an avid racing enthusiast.

The team ran the PRA until 1960 when the coupes were phased out and the Super Modified became the feature division at the local tracks Henry Avolio put Bailey in his #28 Super Modified in 1960.

In 1958 Bailey made arrangements with Bauman Pontiac in Wilkinsburg, PA to go to Pontiac Michigan to buy a new Pontiac. He drove the car home, installed a roll cage, had it lettered, and prepared for a journey to Daytona Beach. He drove the car to Daytona, stripped it of its lights, hubcaps, etc. and raced it on the beach course February 23, 1958. Paul Goldsmith won the race over Curtis Turner that year. Some of the other drivers in the race read like the Hall of Fame with Joe Weatherly, Lee Petty, Fireball Roberts, Cotton Owens, Marvin Panch, Frankie Schneider, Johnny Mackison, Banjo Mathews, Darrell Derringer, Tim Flock, and Speedy Thompson. Dick finished twentieth out of fifty cars. He qualified ninth at 131.339 mph. Thirty five thousand fans watched the final race on the beach.

The 1959 Sportsman Modified 200-mile race at the new speedway was won by Banjo Mathews in a 1956 Ford while Bailey finished 12<sup>th</sup> in the Mariani Brothers 1938 Chevy Coupe. He led the race for three laps. Heidelberg Raceway in Carnegie, PA was the site of the Grand National race in 1959. Bailey put the Beckman Motors 1959 Plymouth on the pole for the race. Jim Reed was the winner on the quarter mile dirt track.

The super modified evolved into sprint cars in 1962 and Bailey moved to the new division. He won the 1967 sprint car championship at the Greater Pittsburgh Speedway in Clinton, PA. Bailey continued in the sprint cars until 1977 when he was injured at the Tri City Speedway in Franklin, PA. Bailey is a regular visitor at the local speedways and still looks like he did when the photo was taken in the 1950's.