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Remember When: Dick Linder

When local racing enthusiasts over the age of fifty discuss great race car drivers the name Dick Linder is mentioned most often. Dick Linder was considered one of the very best of all the drivers to come out of the local area. He falls into the same category as Herb Scott, Buddy O'Connor, Joe Mihalic, Bob Wearing, Lou Blaney, Blackie Watt, Jim Bickerstaff, Sr., and so many more. But the fact is, he would have to be rated very near the top. His career was cut short with a fatal accident in Trenton, New Jersey in 1959 at the age of 35.

Dick's racing career began in California driving midgets after WWII. He spent a few years on the West Coast before coming back home to Brookline, Pennsylvania. His name quickly rose in auto racing right up until his untimely death.

Dick raced at the old Daytona Beach course before the Superspeedway was built. In one race on the old beach course, he started 43rd in the Sportsman Modified race and finished 4th. The next day he raced in the late model race with a very respectable finish. Dick had two seasons of winning 52 features each year accomplished with one race car.

He raced for his livelihood on the local tracks, unheard of in those days. Dick Linder really made his reputation as a great driver while driving the Yellow V-2 Sportsman Coupe for the Palone Brothers of Rices Landing, PA. He was probably the best "traffic" driver of that day. When most drivers would just push and shove their way through the field of cars, Dick would work his way to the front. At the end of the race, the V-2 would not have a scratch on it. The car was so popular that it was used in a Hollywood movie about racing.

When the Pittsburgh Racing Association was formed in 1954, Linder joined since it was the best deal on the local scene. The PRA had the best purses, race tracks, and drivers at that time. In his

second year with the PRA, Dick was its point champion, and he won it by a large point spread over the second place driver.

In 1958, Dick still competed with the PRA, but not on a full scale. He decided he would like to run more sprint, midget, and Indy type cars in addition to the sportsman coupes. Dick had only one thing in mind, to get to the Indy 500. He was very successful driving Ed Lowther's sprint car and midget and was well on his way to his dream of driving in the Indy 500. He had a special talent where he could drive anything with wheels and make it a winner. As he began traveling across the country he met and married his wife, Carol, from Chicago. Carol was carrying their first child when Dick met his untimely death at Trenton.

As a young man, I spent many of my Saturday nights at South Park Speedway. I recall one summer when Linder did not have his car ready and on three consecutive Saturdays he drove three different cars to victory while subbing for the regular driver. Beyerl Miller was a regular competitor in the P.R.A. who raced for the love of the sport. He drove a black and white 1937 Chevy coupe but never visited victory lane. Ed Witzberger, the president of P.R.A., told Miller that if he ever won a feature he would give him \$1,000 dollars. Miller would usually start on the pole and gradually fade early as the race progressed. One Saturday evening the crowd was stunned as the beautiful Chevy coupe of Miller took off and left the competitors in a cloud of dust. When the car stopped in Victory Lane a very concerned Witzberger discovered Dick Linder sitting in the seat with a big smile on his face. Miller received the win the regular prize money but did not get the \$1,000 he hoped for.

Some of Dick's racing skills must have rubbed off on his brother, Gus Linder, who had a great racing career of his own, which lasted up until the 1980's before he retired from the sport. They raced against one another for many years and were both successful in the PRA.

I was at South Park Speedway when the announcement was made that Linder was killed in a racing accident at Trenton, New Jersey; missing his potential dream of racing in the Indy 500 by less than a month. He died in a crash in April 1959. At the time he had a car to try and qualify

for the 500 in May, 1959. In his relatively short lifetime, Dick Linder raced from California to Florida. It didn't matter where he raced or what type car he drove, he was always a winner.

Dick was very professional during his racing career. In the early days when most drivers wore tee shirts and greasy pants, Dick always wore a driver's suit. When the other race cars were bent and banged up, his car was always dent-free and nicely painted.

Many car owners throughout the country had Dick Linder's services as a driver, but on the local scene he drove for three of the most prominent owners in the Pittsburgh area. First, it was the famous Yellow V-2 of the Palone Bros. After that Dick drove the Black #5 for Woody Brougher. The third big name owner was Ed Lowther, for whom Dick drove the yellow and red sprint cars and midgets #2 and 77. A photo of Linder and the famous V-2 is on display at the Heinz History Center Sports Museum in Pittsburgh.

Dick was a very serious driver; to the point that many people thought he was unfriendly and arrogant. But the truth was at the race track he was there to race, and everything else was put aside until after the race was over. In 1957 Woody Brougher fielded two cars #77 & 177 along with team driver Don Dahle. And what a potent team it was. It's been many years since we lost him but whenever the great drivers are mentioned; Dick Linder's name is always among them. 1984 Linder was inducted into the Pittsburgh Circle Track Club Hall of Fame along with Bill Kessler Sr., Bill Steinbach, and Bill Webster, Sr. Dick Linder will always make me "remember when".