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Remember When: Jack Sodeman

Jack Sodeman's first job was a truck driver but for over 40 years he logged a lot of miles driving sprint cars and big block modifieds. His career started in motorcycles which he ran until he was 24 years old. A serious crash and a broken jaw put him out of contention for a while. During the recovery process Pete DePresco, a welder from Garland Welding in Youngstown Ohio that had done work for Jack, as well as race car builder, Floyd Trevis tried to convince Sodeman to try his luck in the sprint cars. Pete said, "they are just like the bikes but have a roll cage and are a lot safer. Pete convinced Jack to go with him to an Invitational at Mercer Raceway where he introduced Sodeman to Vic Eicher. Eicher had an old sprint car that was formerly driven by Herb Buck, and Sodeman thought it was pretty neat soon they started running as a team. The car did not have fuel injection; only three carburetors that ran on gasoline. Sodeman spent a few years in the car learning the trade.

The next ride came from car owner Bert Weibel. They were together for a year until Jack landed in the Nick Lupe car, formerly driven by Ralph Quarterston. Lupe was from Youngstown, Jack's hometown and the team ran together for about three fourths of the season when several crashes convinced Lupe that he couldn't afford to continue. Jack finished the season in the Al Deane #65 sprint car.

Lupe sold his car to a driver from Macon GA and the fellow went to Williams Grove to race. Shortly after Sodeman got a car from Jack Gunn, the promoter at Williams Grove, and he said the man wanted to sell the car. Sodeman went to Georgia, bought the car, and returned home to team up once again with Eicher. Jack bought eight or ten cars after that through out his career.

Sodeman's first modified ride came when car owner John Fleming was looking for a driver and he teamed up with Sodeman. They ran the car for about six weeks when a serious crash rendered the car unusable. Fleming purchased the car that Toby Tobias was running and the team really clicked. Sodeman said the car handled just like a sprint car up on the cushion. He said it did not have power steering and he only weighed 150 pounds but it handled the way he liked it. Fleming kept the stats and counting heats and features they won the first sixteen races they entered.

Jack retired for health reasons and decided to get his son started in go-karts. At age eight Jack Sodeman Jr. started racing on a small dirt track in the infield at the Sharon Speedway. Trips to the asphalt track in Columbiana Ohio helped junior hone his skills. The next step was the 360 sprints at Hickory Speedway. Senior bought a used sprint car and they were off and running. It broke his heart when Hickory closed and they had to step up to the more expensive 410 sprints.

He liked the competition and victories but found the finances were the toughest thing to deal with during his years at the local short tracks. His most memorable moments in racing were winning his first race and his first track championship at Lernerville in 1979. Embarrassing moments in racing included winning a race and not making weight and running out of fuel at the checkered flag at the same event. He got involved in racing because of his need for speed.

His hobby is fishing and his favorite competitor was Lou Blaney. When asked who he would most like to be compared to and why his answer was Buddy Cochran because he was a clean racer. People assume that Jack is shy but I found on a recent radio interview for Trackside that once you get him talking, he is a versatile individual. Sodeman's list of car owners is quite impressive. They included the following sprint car owners, Vic Eicher (#23) Bert Wibel (#05), Al Deane (#65), Nick Lupe (#66), Arley Utsinger (#23), Bob Noble (#23), Butch Osmond (#3) and modified owners, John Fleming (#3) and Gene Cochran (#8). Pit crew members on the various teams included Jim Gane and family, Hunk Hunter, and Mike and Billy.

Tracks where his teams competed include Buckeye, Canfield, Challenger, Greater Pittsburgh, Hagerstown, Hickory, Jennerstown, Latrobe, Lernerville, Lincoln, Mansfield, Ohio, Marion

Center, Mercer, Morgantown, Motordrome, Pennsboro, Port Royal, Raceway 7, Schmucker's, Selinsgrove, Sharon, Skyline, Ohio, Sportsman's Speedway, St. Clairsville, Tri-City, Wayne County, and Williams Grove.

Sodeman was a busy driver racing every Friday, Saturday, and Sunday in the sprint and modified divisions. Championships were won at Lernerville in the Sprint Cars as well as Challenger, Tri City , and Lernerville with the Modified. Jack had a lot of fun racing and is currently the car owner and crew chief for his son Jack Sodeman, Jr. Sodeman and his wife Cheryl also have a daughter Lisa. The family resides in Butler , Pennsylvania not far from the Lernerville Speedway. Jack created a lot of great memories for the fans and a good reason to "remember when".