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Remember When: Ron Piovesan

Many people think that Piovesan's first name is Ronald and that he got his nickname of "Eagle" through auto racing. Both assumptions are incorrect. His first name is Ronal and he received the nickname "Eagle" during his childhood. As Ron tells it, "The nickname was given to me when I was 13 years old by a scoutmaster at Scout Camp. They initiated you into the Boy Scouts by doing things like tearing down your tent, or throwing you in the creek. I knew they were planning to throw me in the creek after we were finished with lunch. I climbed up a tree and hid from everyone so they could not find me. They must have spent two or three hours looking for me. They started to get worried and formed a search party; I revealed where I was. My scoutmaster saw me in the tree and said I looked just like an eagle. The nickname stuck with me ever since."

Ron got his start in racing in the 1950's. He raced motorcycles at Claridge Speedway and watched the stock car races in between. He eventually decided to run a car himself. He remembers, "I didn't know anything about racing." I had such a hard time because I didn't know anything about geometry or suspension. I liked to race but I couldn't get the car to handle. I spent two or three years of racing, experimenting, and asking a lot of questions; it didn't seem to do me much good."

After awhile Piovesan drove a modified for long time car owner Forbes Pete but soon went back to designing and building his own racecars and engines. He built seventeen cars from scratch during his fifteen-year career. He recalls, "In 1972, I built a car that was probably fifteen years ahead of its time. The car was unbeatable. One night at Marion Center, we started last in a heat race. Within three laps, we passed everyone and won the race. We started last in the feature and three laps later, we passed everyone. We went back the next week and they

wouldn't allow us to race claiming we were illegal, which wasn't true. We had a good running and good handling car.

"The best year we had was 1972. We broke three track records that year. If the car didn't break down and we finished the race, we would win. I don't care where we started." He continues, "One night we went to Morgantown Speedway where we set fastest time during qualifications. Eventually, one by one, everyone loaded up their cars and took them to the parking lot. Nobody wanted to race against me. I was there because I received a special invitation from the promoter. He wanted to pay me first place if I would leave, but I refused his offer. He invited me down and I wasn't going to leave. After two hours, the fans were getting rowdy and angry, so the drivers came back and agreed to race against me. We were leading the race when a valve lifter broke."

"I also remember a race at Bedford Speedway. I started in the back - before we got to the flagman's stand at the end of the first lap, I passed twenty-seven cars. I almost passed the first and second place cars before one lap was completed. I was running on the outside on the backstretch. I thought that maybe there was a wreck because everyone was running so slow. Looked at the light and it was green, so I kept it on the outside with the hammer down. As I started to pass the second place car, he pulled over to go around the first place car. He ran into the side of me and knocked me into the wall. I went across the track and into the infield and hit a pole. That put me out of the race."

One night at Jennerstown there was an engineer from Florida at the races and Paul Fess told him that he wanted Ron to show him the car. Fess asked if the guy could look at the car. The engineer shook his head and said he didn't see anything spectacular. Fess told him 'you tell me that when he comes off the track!' Piovesan broke his own track record that night. The record was good for ten years.

Leaf suspensions were completely different then what the norms today. Ron was always experimenting. This was something he enjoyed and he never ran the same set up twice. The car had plenty of horsepower but that was not the reason the car did so well. The reason for the

car's success was weight transfer. Ron had a couple of theories about weight transfer and applied them to the car and it worked.

One of the worst accidents he ever had happened at Heidelberg in the early 70's. Another driver caught hit him in the quarter panel and propelled him straight into the wall at about top speed. That was a direct hit and the hardest he ever experienced. Every pipe on the car was bent. Ron was hospitalized for three days because the medical personnel feared that his internal organs might have torn loose. After he got out of the hospital, he experienced pain for the next six months. As the rescue people were removing Ron from the car, it started to rain with torrential downpours and the remainder of the show was canceled.

That was not Piovesan's first time on asphalt. Around 1969, he built a car for Trenton from scratch in merely three weeks - another experimental machine. He started 35th in the race. On the 75th lap, he was in thirteenth position and running about 155 MPH not too bad for not having been on the blacktop before.

In addition to all the tracks mentioned, Ron also competed at Ruffsdale, Hagerstown, Lernerville, North Hills, Greater Pittsburgh, Schmucker's, and South Park. Motordrome was his favorite track, and he always considered it his hometown track.

Piovesan said that some of the best looking cars he had were the worst performance wise. He says, "The last car I had, was the nicest looking car I ever raced. It was about the only year we had a sponsor. But it was the worst car I ever had. The car I ran in 1972 was the best car I raced, but was the worst looking."

He continues, "I was into racing pretty heavy. We ran three or four days a week and worked on the racecar many hours. I always had good people helping me."

How did Ron come up with the number "22"? "When I started racing the modified, Herb Scott was number 1 and number 2 always tried harder. When I went into the late models, I just threw another 2 on it. I tried twice as hard.

Piovesan has been retired from racing for about 30 years. However, his knowledge and racing smarts remain intact. He says, "If I was running a car today, I know I would have one of the best cars on the track." The Eagle's reflexes are still there and he proved this recently in the Pittsburgh Circle Track Club Senior Series race at Jennerstown. Ron climbed into the Roger Onstaed #73 and started last in the feature. As he became more comfortable in the car, he managed to finish third behind two of the regular Senior Series competitors.

Piovesan is 71 years old, but looks much younger. He keeps himself in great shape by maintaining his weight at about 165 lbs. That was his weight in high school. He became a vegetarian many years ago. Ron owns Piovesan Construction, a firm that builds just about anything, and does whatever needs to be done. The establishment is based in West Newton, Pa, where Ron has lived most of his life.

Piovesan had fan club, which printed a bi-weekly newsletter throughout the 1975 season. It was around this time that he entered the STONEY 200, Motordrome's big season ending event. He recalls, "By lap ninety five, he lapped the field twice. They stopped the race for about an hour and a half so the scorers could figure out who was in second place. I remember the race because a streaker ran across the track during the delay."

Ron certainly has led an interesting life. He delivered his twin daughters Renee and Ranelle, who were born at home on New Years Day. The doctor came to the house and was limited in what he could do because of a handicap. He gave me instructions and assisted whenever he could." Ron has five grandchildren and two great grandchildren.

Why did Piovesan quit racing while he was in his prime with such a promising career ahead of him? He states, "I got out of racing because there's more to life than running around in a circle. I started getting into the Bible and going to Bible studies. There wasn't enough time for racing and something had to go. I chose the Bible over racing.

Piovesan spends most of his time working in his business during the day, studying, and teaching the Bible at night. He spends his Friday nights in quiet preparation for the Saturday Sabbath.

Piovesan owns a 1964 Corvette with a big block Chevy engine. Every now and then he likes to open it up to see what it'll do. He recently purchased a Harley Davidson motorcycle. Ron owned several motorcycles over his lifetime but none in the past 30 years until now. His passion for riding is just like his love for the track and racing as you watch him maneuver the bike and test its handling and speed; just like the Eagle, he helps us all to remember when.