

# WEEKEND WARRIOR ROUNDS-ROUNDA-RAMA

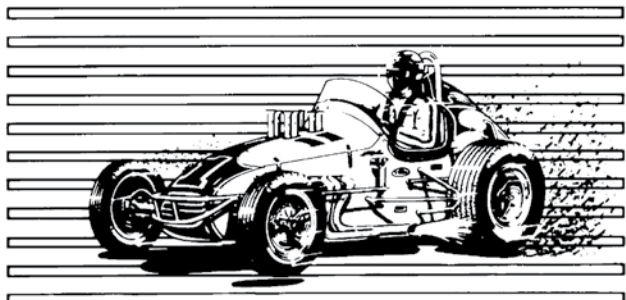
-Glenn Quagmire



Photos courtesy of David Herrmann,  
Conrad Nelson, and Dave Hill

## ***The National Sprint Car Hall of Fame is a tribute to the cars that have made a science out of left hand turns***

# NATIONAL SPRINT CAR



# HALL of FAME & MUSEUM

KNOXVILLE, IOWA

Sure we're all motorheads, and sure we all love all types of cars, especially race cars. We may prefer street rods, restored "trailer queens," drag cars, imports and sports cars, vintage cars, muscle cars, early 20th century "brass cars," NASCAR cars, Indy-type open-wheel cars, and even (dare I say it...) demo derby cars.

But one thing's for sure. Darned near everybody likes sprint cars. There's a certain mystical appeal for them, and nobody seems to know why. Maybe it's the fact that some models use four different size tires at the corners. Or maybe it's the fact that the cockpit and bodywork are not symmetrically centered between the wheels. Maybe we're mesmerized by the giant asymmetric wing atop the cockpits of many of these cars.



Or, there's a good chance that we're all just intrigued with the fact that these cars corner sideways with the nose of the car always pointing toward the apex of the turn.

There are other reasons to be fascinated by these cars. They typically have outrageous power-to-weight ratios. Many of them are direct-drive with no clutch. Lots of folks like this kind of racing because it is a contact sport. And many folks show up to see the inevitable occurrence of one of these cars doing its best impersonation of a turtle.

But regardless of the reason, folks love sprint cars and sprint car racing. Most of it is done on dirt tracks, but some on paved ovals as well. And the sport is so popular that it deserves its own museum.

## **FORTUNATELY IT ALREADY HAS ONE.**

Strategically located immediately adjacent to the Marion (Iowa) County Fairgrounds in Knoxville, Iowa, and overlooking the Knoxville Raceway is the National Sprint Car Hall of Fame and Museum. And what more appropriate location could such a facility have than right next door to one of the top half-mile dirt oval race tracks in the country.

The NSCHoF&M (boy, that saves a lot of typing...) is a modern, \$1.7 million, four-story tribute to all things roundy-round that first opened its doors in 1992.

The first floor is a massive 8,000 square foot display area that houses more than 25 oval track cars on permanent display, plus other cars and collections on a rotating basis, so there's always something new to see there. Individual collections on display there are often tributes to drivers who have used oval track racing as a launching pad to fame and fortune in other forms of racing.



Recent displays of private collections include cars formerly driven by Mario Andretti, Jeff Gordon, and Tony Stewart, who continues to supplement his NASCAR Sprint Cup driving with regular participation in local and regional sprint car oval-track racing. Despite his huge success at the highest levels of stock car racing, Stewart still loves to play in the dirt.

The cars on permanent display are beautifully restored and provide a sort of “time capsule” of oval track racing, including sprint cars, modifieds, and the so-called “big cars.” They include cars with and without wings, as well as cars set up for dirt and/or asphalt.

Of particular interest is a re-creation of the workshop of John Gerber, an early 20th century engine builder, car constructor, and racer. Gerber actually designed and built racing engines and chassis, and enjoyed success in competition before turning the driving over to a series of hired hot shoes, who set lap record after lap record thanks to

Gerber’s engines and chassis. In fact, one of the last to race his cars was the well-known and respected Rex Mays, who went on to sit on the pole twice at the Indianapolis 500.

In addition to the permanent and rotating displays of cars on the main floor, visitors can also view and study all sorts of roundy-round memorabilia, including helmets, driving suits, trophies, and photos and paintings, all of which go a long way toward documenting the history and advancements of oval track racing.

Moving on to the second of four floors, visitors will enter the Sprint Car Hall of Fame, which honors the pioneers and champions of oval track racing. It is gratifying to note that this Hall of Fame honors not only the drivers of oval track cars, but also the many unsung heroes who labor behind the scenes to provide the cars in which the drivers get to shine. The Hall of Fame honors several hundred of the most influential people in the sport, drawn from the ranks of drivers, naturally, but also



car constructors, engine builders, mechanics, team owners, promoters, sanctioning officials, and even members of the media who have reported on and analyzed the sport.

Entry into the Sprint Car Hall of Fame is no slam-dunk just because a driver has a winning record. In fact, there is an extraordinary 72-member induction committee consisting of representatives from all aspects of the sport -- historians, media, and representatives of the major oldtimers organizations -- all of whom are especially well-qualified to determine just who, among many, should receive this prestigious honor.

In addition to all of the exhibits and memorabilia devoted to honoring those who have been elected to the Sprint Car Hall of Fame, the second floor also houses a 40-seat theater, which is suitable for viewing films that are entertaining or educational or both. And the second floor also houses the Sprint Car Library and Research Center which offers a wealth of information on the history of the sport and key participants.

This second-floor area is also the place for frequent meetings and banquets for car clubs and other groups, and includes a large conference and banquet facility, a catering kitchen, administrative office space and, to the delight of many, a 150-seat clubhouse overlooking the half-mile Knoxville Raceway dirt track, making for an ideal spectating and party venue on race dates. This clubhouse seating is ideal for automotive group gatherings, as well as corporate functions, and is available by advance reservation.



All of this brings us to the third and fourth floors of the modern HoF building, which comprise a total of twenty skyboxes, each with twenty seats, offering spectacular views of turn 2 of the famous oval track during the weekly races that are held during race season. These skyboxes are available for rental on race weekends, and are often taken by companies sponsoring the track itself, specific race events, or motorsports in general, as well as other businesses, car clubs, and other groups of enthusiasts.

There is a modest admission fee to tour the facility. These fees, along with rental income from the skyboxes, help cover the overhead of this facility. But, being a 501(c)(3) non-profit organization, the SCHoF&M

sponsors other activities in order to meet operating expenses. A museum store offers wearables along with books, model cars and other souvenirs. Of course donations are welcome and likely to be tax-deductible (check with your accountant to be sure...), and annual and lifetime memberships are available as well. Other fund-raising events include raffles, auctions, and golf outings, all with a racing theme, naturally.

Many folks are surprised to learn that there is a resurgence of interest in oval track racing, with new tracks popping up and new publications covering oval track racing. At the same time, there is new-found interest in nostalgia racing, and many older oval-track race cars are being brought out of barns and rejuvenated for current-day competition. So the sport is indeed alive and well.

In light of that, officials of the SCHoF&M have ambitious plans to expand the facility. Such an expansion will allow for the display of more cars and memorabilia, as well as more exhibits, possibly including interactive exhibits, plus more educational programs and special events. In fact, the state of Iowa is offering a special state income tax credit for Iowa residents who contribute to the facility's endowment fund.

So if highly-competitive wheel-to-wheel racing is your cup of tea, if you like the sound of thousands of horsepower all trying to propel their steeds through the first turn of a race, if the "chrome horn" is something you like to see and hear, then a visit to this museum in the heartland is just the place for you.

**JUST BE SURE TO GO ON RACE DAY...**  
**MORE INFO [WWW.SPRINTCARHOF.COM](http://WWW.SPRINTCARHOF.COM)**

