

In His Own Words

As told to **Lew Boyd**

Bobby Brack



PRESENTED BY:

- Born August 20, 1938 in Miami, Florida
- Winner of an astounding 475 races over a 35-year career, which included stints in early supermodifieds, NASCAR Grand American, NASCAR Cup, and late models.
- Experienced a thrill show of a life, from being a Hollywood stunt driver to landing big sport fish to becoming a South Florida racing legend.



They've called me "King of the Late Models" here in Florida, but I'm not sure about that. Lots of guys have won a lot of races—like Dickie Anderson.

Who knows why it worked out this way, but I'd say there were three important things for me. First, I *really* wanted to race. Second, where I started taught me a certain driving style. Third, I'd have been on my porch long ago were it not for my friends.

Miami was one hotbed of racing in the '50s. One night I got a kiddie ride with Harry Vernon. My eyes about popped out. So I walked by his garage and walked by.... Finally, he noticed and asked me to strip the Chevy coupe out back. Soon I was in my glory, riding to the races in the back of my hero's '54 Ford pickup.

July 4, 1956, my first race, was in a sportsman duplicate to Harry's No. 57 modified. It was much better than I was. I went end-for-end onto a railroad tie, trapping me

GEORGE POVEROMO

for 20 minutes. My dad was watching and never went to the races again. No one was even a little pleased when I rebuilt it in our driveway.

Under Harry's watchful eye, I won Hialeah [Speedway] sportsman titles in 1957, '58, and '59.

My friend Billy Wilcox's dad, H.C. Wilcox, was a one-eyed genius machinist with a shop next to Jim Rathmann's. H.C. even developed a rocker-arm oiling system for GM. Billy and I built a sportsman. We cleaned up.

But I wanted to move to the modifieds. Guys like Gil Hearne and Pee Wee Griffin—lively even then—had already. Pee Wee's father, Emery, let me run his a few times. Frankly, Billy's car had been so fast that it didn't seem much different.

So, with my buddy LeRoy Tate I built a surprisingly superior '32 coupe open-wheeler with a 301 and fuel. That positioned me for a ride with Fred Wilcox's Crosley-bodied car with a huge wing. Not sure the wing did a darn thing. Then a guy named Harold Smith came down from Ohio with a real supermodified, and everyone began to tool up, making it so expensive. By 1964 the open-wheelers were phased out. I was gone, too.

Red Farmer was probably the first to migrate north towards larger purses. I had just married and hoped to make the same money racing up there that I could being an electrician in Miami.

I built a car to NASCAR rules. We landed in a trailer park in Paulsboro, New Jersey, home of champion Budd Olsen. We had familiar neighbors like Pee Wee, Gil, Rags Carter, and Bobby Allen. Things didn't work out. I shouldn't have built to the rules.

I was back in 1965 with a flyweight. Opening day at Wall Stadium [Speedway, in New Jersey], I set a record time, but things still weren't right. My friend Wally Dallenbach got me into Don House's No. XL1 at Trenton [Speedway, in New Jersey]. Although I'd never been on a mile, it seemed like no big deal—as long as I didn't look aside and see how fast it

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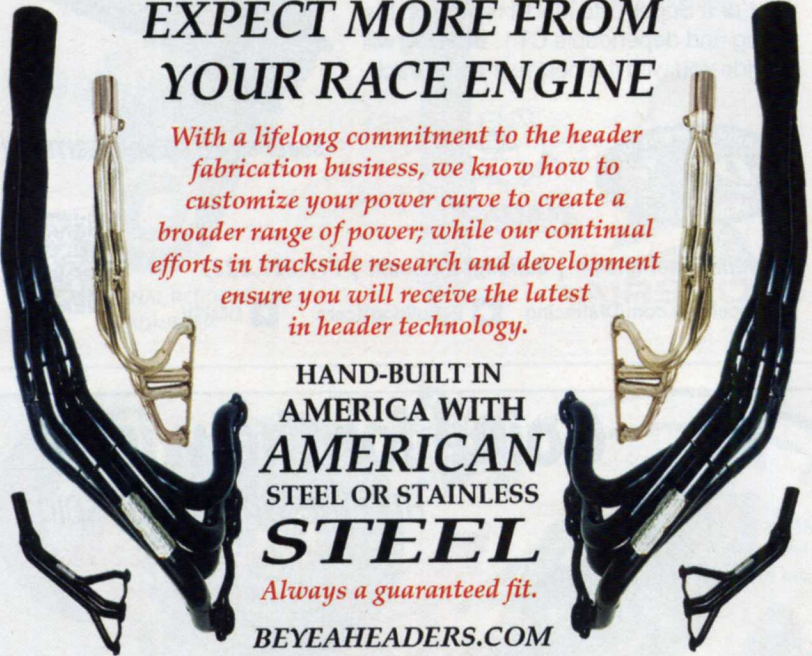
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was. Surprisingly we almost won. That's probably because I'd run often at Palm Beach, a high-speed half-mile with different grooves at each end, giving lots of different sensations. Guys like Rags [Carter], Red, and Donnie Allison who went there a lot got really good.

By 1966, with two kids, the North seemed impossible so we settled back in Miami. I'd been running late models over the winters for the Wilcox family—and even for Gil Hearne who broke his leg fighting by the concession stands. Ask him about it. Hialeah was always frisky.

Although in a good place for a long time, actually I was changing owners almost every season to keep going, being careful to maintain relationships.

LeRoy Tate and I put together a '57 Chevy for the 1966 Governor's Cup at Golden Gate in Tampa. We beat 100 other cars that day.

There were good rides. I liked Tom Mottle's especially. He paid me. And the Bean Pickers' No. 0 was hot. Some weren't so good. A throttle stuck in Jimmy Crowe's Daytona car at Palm Beach. That wall was perpendicular to a level, not to the banking, and ramped me right out of the place. Nothing was left. Even the motor was gone. Without its 1-1/2-inch bars, I'd have been in the hospital a lot longer than a week. We were winning frequently, and I even doubled for actor Steve Alaimo in stunt-driving scenes for the biker movie *The Wild Rebels*. But by 1970 that urge to branch out nagged me again.

With Don Kinsley I bought a '68 Camaro Grand American [division car] from Billy Yuma. We went to Daytona, Talladega, Charlotte, etc. We had top fives, but the dollars just wouldn't stretch far enough.

It was the same when a West Florida Ford dealer put me in a Winston Cup car, and 12th in the Firecracker at Daytona paid us just \$1,200. So much for the big tracks.

If Palm Beach helped me with high speed, Hialeah experience helped me in short-track late models. We won hundreds of features. People say I was especially smooth. It may be true—Hialeah demanded finesse. You have to work the outside—sometimes

just a half a length a lap. Sometimes the surface seemed banked the wrong way. You had to learn rhythm and not get greedy.

In 1976, Speedweeks at New Smyrna were tough. Mark Martin was very young and had far better equipment at the time than achievement. He walled me. Laid up for six weeks I studied for my contractor's license for Brack Electric, Inc.

I drove for owners like "Daveo" Machleid in the late 1970s and had another shot at Cup with the Rahmoc team at Charlotte. It was good just to qualify. Unlike today, there were 70 entries. But a broken locker at 100 miles took me to the fence.

By 1980, racing went through a bad period in Miami with some bad actors, and people throwing money around. It wasn't my thing. I quit for five years.

All my life, though, racing friends never stopped bringing me things. My old mentor Harry Vernon had Captain Harry's Fishing Supply. He got me into sport fishing. And then George Poveromo reappeared. As a kid he'd ask me all kinds of questions after the races. More recently he's run the Miami Billfish Tournament and does a NBC Sports show on fishing. We've been all over together—even Cancun where I landed a white marlin and a sailfish. No way I'd even have caught a cold if he didn't tell me how.

In 1985, I came back racing with Bill Flingos. We won the second week out, but I could tell I'd lost a lot. The finishes were good, but somehow it was not the same.

I liked helping both my boys, Steve and Keith, take a shot behind the wheel. I built a car for each of them, and both had success.

In 1995, when I climbed out of the car for the last time, I didn't even realize it was the end. When [Bill] got cancer, he went down really fast.

After all those seasons, through thick and thin, it really comes down to those friendships that allowed me to motor on. I am still friends with everyone.

They had a long memory. And I did, too. ♪