

# Brad Noffsinger

*In His Own Words*



- Born August 24, 1960 in Los Angeles, California
- A graduate of California's legendary Ascot Park, Brad Noffsinger leveraged his prodigious open-wheel driving skills into a long and successful career as racing's man for all seasons. He has suited up to run motocross and Cup—and everything in between. He's also been a car owner, a crew chief, a spotter, a fabricator, a driving instructor, and an admired driver coach.

## As told to **Lew Boyd**

**N**o question I was fortunate. My mom and dad had a midget and a sprint car, and I grew up at Ascot. It was meant to be for me to race. I started on motorcycles there, and once I got rolling, I had no fear. That came later when I realized that if you're not careful, racing can make your bones stick out.

At 16, I got into a midget on the inside quarter-mile track there; after just a few shows, it was into a sprinter.

The California Racing Association was really something back then. I was probably the youngest driver in the southern part of the state. I could watch and learn from guys like Dean Thompson, Bubby Jones, Ronnie Shuman, and the Jimmys, Oskie and Sills. I even got to know Don Peabody, the great CRA president. One of my biggest thrills was winning Ascot's Don Peabody Classic in later years.

A big break came in 1980 when Bill Krug hired me, and we did some Outlaw racing, to Phoenix and out to Pennsylvania and back. There was no Internet, and it was hard to get publicity. That came from paper and pencil and self-promotion.

It was back in California in 1986 that I really started winning races and a couple of championships. I picked up the Gardner Family Racing Team ride. The Agajanian Family supported me with that, as did Mike Curb, as he would for 25 years.

A huge moment for me was when we were first to break the 18-second bracket at Ascot. Jimmy Gardner and I worked on achieving that, and it was a lap that, when you felt it, you knew you had it. I didn't even breathe that throttle. When I came across the start/finish line and pitched it on lap two, I glanced across the infield at the backstretch score board. 18.86. Wow! People went crazy.

In 1988, Mike Curb and Cary Agajanian offered me the seat in their Sunoco Cup car. My wife, Robin, and I picked up and moved to North Carolina. We were close to being Rookie of the Year, but sponsorship soon ran out.

I just liked driving race cars, fenders or not. But I wasn't a stock car guy, so it wasn't really in my interest to stick around. We went back to California and ran 90 sprint car races a year. We had lots of wins.

Four years later, I decided to take another shot at NASCAR. We moved back to North Carolina, and I became an instructor in what would become Richard

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## racing dictionary

### Understeer / 'ən-dər-, stir/

The tendency of an automobile to turn less sharply than the driver intends. In racing this is often referred to as "tight." A tight car hits the wall with the front of the car. A loose car hits the wall with the rear.

Petty's Driving Experience, working for the original owner, Barry Graham. I also did some crew-chieving and spotting for Felix Sabates' team and some fabricating and spotting for Darrell Waltrip, but I really was looking for a ride.

I drove a few races in Harry Hyde's Melling car and with a Busch team I was managing for Cary and Mike. Some people like Dale Earnhardt were really great in helping me, and I did okay whenever I could flat-foot, but I could have used some mentorship from Barry Graham myself. I came to realize I just didn't have the experience in that type of car to provide the feedback they needed. Also, I could see that now teams were looking for drivers in their teens, especially those with sponsor appeal.

So, in 1999, on top of everything else, Robin and I decided to form a Silver Crown team. We ran those mile tracks, dirt and pavement, and I set a Silver Crown world record at Gateway. We were fast, but I'll admit it was a struggle financially. Robin didn't like the way I was driving because I ran it to wear it out. And for those four years, we only had that one engine we bought from Bob East. Those rebuild invoices were expensive!

By this time, I had also joined Richard Petty's Driving Experience full-time. My role was in the driver training program that oversaw 100-plus drivers around the country.

It was interesting watching who came through the program. Many customers were just out to have their jollies—they'd buy driving suits and prance around. But some were serious. When Chase Briscoe came through, you could spot his talent immediately.

And some we missed. Brent Kaeding once introduced us to this little kid, saying "Trust me, he's the real deal." We'd heard that so many times that we passed him up. Now Kyle Larson is the best in the world.

Over time, I got active in some USAC Sprint Car racing and on a driver development team in the USAC Midget Carolina Series. I also ran some ISMA Supermodified events.

For the past 10 years Wade Brown and I partnered in taking care of Frank Manafort's midgets. Frank was an incredible, successful guy with a farm in Vermont. It was a wonderful experience until he died last February. We did well, especially with Brady Bacon in the seat. Along the way we won the Leffler race, the Kokomo Clash—and almost Turkey Night twice. The best, though, was our win at the Brickyard midget show. At 59, I was about the youngest guy on the crew, but we unloaded fast and never looked back.

Jason MacDougal (J-Mac) had been Frank's last driver. His family has a business called Factor 1 Racing in Broken Arrow, Oklahoma, and they are into micro sprints. They are really racy cars, for both competitors and fans, but they're also affordable. I really wish I had known about them earlier.

My friend Mark Dailey talked me into starting a micro team here in Concord. We're calling it Factor 1 East. We're putting together a rental program as part of it so guys can really get a racing education. Chase Cabre, a strong ARCA guy who likes dirt, drives one of our cars and is going to the Nationals in Logansport, Indiana. I'll be staying around Concord with Hailie Deegan in our other car. She's much prettier—and really talented. There are a lot of young female drivers now, but Hailie's the best I've seen. She just finished up front in a tough 30-lap Micro race at Millbridge on a hot night. She got quicker every lap, and her fastest was the 29th! I went to the scales and when she took off her helmet, there was not a bead of sweat. The other guys looked like they'd been beaten with a wet rag.

We have two daughters, Christine and Jamie, and five grandkids, Madie, Blake, Peyton, Camber, and Aiden. Aiden is 12, sharp, built like a fire plug, and he's infatuated with racing. He loved Frank and was always at his side. He was convinced he was going to be one of Frank's drivers, and Frank even bought him a little race car.

My goal tomorrow is to enjoy life with my family after being away with racing for so many years—and maybe making Aiden a champion along the way. 🏆