



# Tim Gee

*In His Own Words*

- *Born June 31, 1957, in Estevan, Saskatchewan*
- *This popular, champion sprint car racer faced enormous odds to become the only Canadian World of Outlaws winner in three decades. Currently a speed-shop owner and inductee to the Western Canadian Motorsports Hall of Fame.*

## As told to **Lew Boyd**

It was pretty quiet up growing up in Whitehorse in the Yukon, near the Alaskan border. But, when I was a kid, a little track was opened by the Klondike Auto Racing Association, and they ran small fields of '55 Chevys and the like.

My dad had a trucking business and was approached to sponsor a car. He checked it out and loved it, soon wrenching, driving, and owning them, taking me along for the ride. It totally ate me up from the first time I saw it. And, then, at 14, when he plugged me into a seat—that really sank the hook.

The economy has always had its impact on racing. Back in the early 1970s, an oil pipeline was being built in Alaska, and money was flowing. Up in Fairbanks, 550 miles away, racing was taking off, and guys were going to the West Coast to buy faster cars. We started going up there when we could.

Dad's business was going well, and I got out of the jalopies into a little glass-bodied 2x3 tube frame car with a 283. I was wound up.

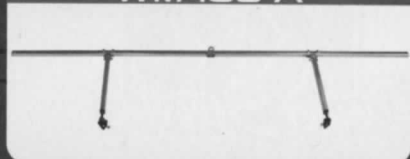
It was impossible to be serious racing just in Whitehorse with an occasional jaunt to Alaska, so, at age 20 I figured I'd move to Edmonton, Alberta. I was driving trucks for Dad, and he had a terminal there. I knew Indy drivers like Eldon Rasmussen had come from there, and now a nifty new track called Westwind was being built. But right when I arrived, the facility was bought out by a developer, reducing racing activity a lot. The lesson: Before you do your plan, do your research. We raced what we had, did the best we could, but I just knew the world had to be bigger than this.

Fortunately for me, Dad's business had done well, he sold it, and he sure was into racing. We didn't know quite what to do, so we sought advice from Larry Fleming, a local racer, who told us about the periodical *Rolling Wheels*. We put in an ad looking for a sprint car, got 100 responses, and bought one in Gillette, Wyoming.

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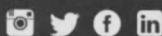


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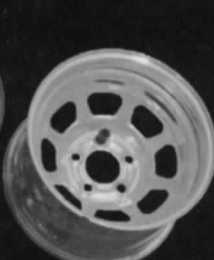
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Be aware to prepare

## VOICE OF EXPERIENCE

By now I had met my life's partner, Ruth Chambers, a First Nation citizen. Our first sprint-car race was at Alberta's Speedway Park. I got fast time and was mid-pack in the main. I was psyched, but it did take time to master the transition. You didn't have to be so physical with it, you'd pedal a little easier, and move your hands more steadily. We did a World of Outlaws show in Manitoba. I was about three laps down but full of ambition.

In 1980 we bought a motorhome. It was Dad, Ruth, my mom, and me about to do more road miles than imaginable. We picked up a brand-new sprinter from Jerry Barnett in Phoenix.

It was challenging at first. But after being over in Southern California for a while, Ron Shaver built us a nice aluminum motor. Our first race with it was at Chula Vista. Amazingly, I qualified for the pole, with Bubby Jones on the outside. The officials were all nervous, telling me to just fall in line behind Bubby at the start and he would take care of me. The way I saw it was that I was starting on the pole and Bubby was on his own. My cockiness did me in. I stood on it and looped it in front of the whole field. I did a couple of 360s, knowing that I was going to die. But somehow the waters parted, and everyone missed me. We finished about tenth.

It wasn't always comfortable living in that motorhome, and we knew so few people. But the culture of racing was different back then, more inviting. At a new track, if you parked next to a local, likely you'd be invited to his home for a meal or to his garage to use his welder. Walt Kennedy was great to us over in California, as was Ron Shaver—and a bearded wing-maker named Buffalo.

I guess I made an impression at an Outlaw show at Chico, California, by flipping and tearing everything up. Ted Johnson, seeing my motivation, persuaded us to join the Tour in 1981. Ruth and I went down alone to Plant Field in Tampa that winter, and the two of us had to manually push the car to the starting line. But we were competitive. On the tour we passed frequently through Indiana, so we decided to buy a little acreage and base in James-

town, Indiana, where Lee Osborne was. It became our part-time home for ten years.

We also drove past Reno from time to time, and Ruth and I discussed tying the knot. But she wouldn't settle for that. She deserved and got a big wedding. That happened on our winter break, of course, with our families back up in Whitehorse on January 3, 1987.

We ran well for what we had. In 1983, we were quick at WoO's first show at 131 Speedway in Michigan. In the preliminary feature, we hit it just right. I passed Kinser, Wolfgang, and Swindell—and in those last 15 laps I squeezed that wheel with everything I had. We won, and, though it did not count as a full win back then, the rules changed, and it does now. We also won at Paragon, Indiana. I was the only Canadian WoO winner until Stewart Friesen copped one at Oshweken in 2015.

We raced a lot, and I was fortunate never to be hurt bad. The scariest thing was a few fires, and the luckiest was that I always happened to have my three-layer suit on. One night at Williams Grove I was leading a qualifier and the front axle broke, and it spun over. That threw me sideways, and Craig Keel drilled me full bore. There was fire everywhere, and I was winded. Puffing on the fire retardant being sprayed, I lost consciousness. Somehow, we raced the next night.

Then at Knoxville, I was in another major fire and got tangled up in the seat belts trying to escape. Fortunately, the safety guys were right there again this time, but a couple of them did get burned.

By 1986 Dad was still all in, even building my engines. But I really worried he was spending too much of what he had earned with his business, and I insisted that Ruth and I continue on our own.

We kept going, but it was tough. We had made lots of friends but few influential ones who could help with sponsorship. Increasingly race teams could not sustain themselves on their own.

One night in the garage at 10:00 after 14 hours, I wondered how much money I would make working this hard on a reg-

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## Quote Worthy

*"It's not about horsepower."*

Danny Hanson  
WISSOTA champion  
Speedway Illustrated  
March 2011

ular job. I was 30, and my perception was changing. I thought no way can I still be doing this when I am 40. To a degree I do regret that now. The '90s turned out to be a great time in sprint car racing, and drivers do compete much longer these days. But at the time I just didn't want to be an older guy banging around the country in B mains.

One day I heard that a new track, Castrol Speedway, was opening up in Edmonton, and that racing was really perking up. I had always wanted to have a speed shop. So, in 1991 we moved back up to Leduc, opened up Gee and Gee Racing, went to Hoosier, and picked up 30 tires by the first weekend. Now, 30 years later, we are still there and Western Canadian Distributor for Hoosier. The business grew well, especially about ten years ago when there were a half-dozen sprint-car tracks in the area.

In the last three to four years, however, it's been tough going. It's that economy again. Oil prices really dropped, and Covid dropped right on top of it.

Now at 63, I've made the decision with Ruth to begin to sell out and move back north to Whitehorse and our families. It feels right, but honestly it seems ironic because 40 years ago, all I wanted was to get out of there. I am still passionate about racing.

But what comes around, goes around. Thirty-five years ago, my dad and I were at the tricky Lebanon Valley Speedway in New York, having a frustrating night. I remarked that if the car pushed in the feature, I would drive it right through the fence. That's just what happened. Then two years back, our one child, Skyler, crashed at Lebanon Valley in exactly the same spot! Like me, Skyler got eaten up by racing when he was still in short pants. By 17, he was driving sprint cars. His summer base is now in Brownsburg, Indiana, running successfully full-time on the All Star Circuit of Champions.

It wasn't always easy, but I know how very fortunate I was to be able to have the racing experience with my dad. Now I can with my son. I will continue to go south in the summers—to warm up, to help him out—and enjoy life. 🍷