



# **RICK STANDRIDGE**

***In His Own Words***

As told to **Lew Boyd**



• **Born November 10, 1951 in Springfield, Illinois**

• **Patriarch of Illinois' high-performance Standridge Family of Racing with some 700 combined wins. An admired, unrelenting, and self-sufficient runner in sprint cars and late models for more than six decades. In many ways the definition of an American race car driver. Married to racing journalist Joyce Standridge.**

I'm not sure how people look at me. We old time-racers kind of shake our heads about the sport today. If there was a race anywhere, we just had to go. Never mind taking a week off for boating. We'd race four nights a week. I guess we married the best women in the world. They'd not only not complain, they'd support us.

Racing has been my whole life. Every spare moment has been in the garage or in the pits, and I guess that was inevitable. When I was growing up, you could say things were just a little busy—and close. We all started out in a pink 1,000-square-foot ranch house a block and a half away from Springfield Speedway in Illinois. Inside were my dad Dick, a hard-working union laborer; my mom Mary Lee, who worked nights (and is in the Springfield Sports Hall of Fame for her race officiating); my younger brothers, Randy, Ronnie, and Robbie (all racers), and sisters Carol and Janet—plus anyone hanging around working on the cars. We had one phone that rang constantly, one bathroom, and out back was an old Lincoln welder and at least two sprint cars.

My first of every Sunday night at the track came at age four. I hid behind my mother when Dad came out in his coupe, so afraid he'd be hurt, but I was fascinated with the cars.

I soon became an expert fan, but I knew I wanted to race. I had to teach myself because Dad was busy with his own racing. I taught myself to weld on an old go-kart. It

was trial and error, and when I finished it, the kart went left when I steered right. By the end of high school, though, I had run a couple of races in fender benders. Driving turned out to be so much better than I had ever imagined.

The next year Dad bought a second sprint car and let me take over his old CAE. Joyce and I spent our courtship that winter rebuilding the car in a brutally cold garage.

When I first took it out, I was determined not to be a track packer. I knew sprint cars had to be sideways back then, so that's what I did. I only hit the wall twice and I wasn't last. It was tough going with usually 40 sprinters trying to make the 16-car main. I made two features that first year.

In my third season, I was offered a ride in a late model known as the Woodpecker Express, usually running the same night as the sprint car, and ironically, my first win came over my absolute hero, Jim Moughan. I was out front, saw his nose peeking under me and I got out of control, blasting into the next turn way too deep, taking him out. You'd think I'd be jubilant about winning, but I was so despondent I had tears in my eyes.

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I continued with sprint cars, but with better rides my late model results were more successful. I had a welding job for 15 years, but in 1982 we were on strike. During that period, I ended up building a late model, copying Howe's. Almost every hour I spent building chassis or working on race cars, my best friend Buddy Gathard was there, working even harder than I did. He has been around so much that, when my kids were young, they honestly thought he lived with us.

We won 16 of 18 races that year at Springfield with the car we built for ourselves. That got a lot of attention, and we sold 14 more to others. At the same time Bob Pierce was starting out doing the same thing. I stopped the work because it didn't provide us health benefits, and sales seemed



## VOICE OF EXPERIENCE

unpredictable. It was back to union welding, but I often wonder what might have happened if I had kept going. It sure turned out okay for Bob—and Bobby—Pierce.

Especially early in my career, I did a lot of racing with my brothers. We did watch out for each other, and, if there was trouble, we were there to support each other. Occasionally there was some scrapping between us, but never anything physical. We knew each other so well. It was more like, "Let's make sure *that* never happens again..."

There were certainly good times—like when I won the late model feature at Springfield and one of my brothers won in the sprint cars. We seldom left the track before 2 a.m. partying, but you can bet our mother, "Mama Speedway," made sure we were at work the next morning. Bright-eyed.

Then at the end of 1985, something curious happened. Ronnie lost his sprint car ride, and my sprint car owner, Curly Rahn, seemed unwilling to spend what was needed on motors, even though we had won his first championship together. Meanwhile, Jeff McKay was after me to drive his late model full-time. Ronnie hopped in Curly's car, and Curly turned around and bought him two new Gaerte motors. They promptly went out and won 10 of their next 20 features.

Things worked out for Jeff and me, too. We won some big races, and it was a thrill to qualify and make the World 100 that year, with 240 cars entered. I ended up racing a lot more nights and didn't have to compete with my brothers. All said and done, I won six features in sprint cars and over 200 in late models. Even so, I still wonder today what would have happened if Curly had bought *me* those engines!

I was never really intimidated by racing but some things did catch my attention. Back then it was a big half-mile down at Illinois' Tri-City Speedway and really fast. Back when we all began experimenting with wing technology in sprint cars, we were going faster and faster, not really understanding what we were doing. The cars were so squirrely you couldn't even relax on the straightaways. Joyce didn't like it at all. Me neither.

I don't believe I was a big crasher, but I got gonged a few times. Once I did some snap rolls in a sprint car down in Missouri and landed upside down. When one of my crew came over to see if I was okay, I looked up at him and asked what in the world he was doing inside my race car while I was still racing. Joyce beat me to the hospital. It turned out I was not badly hurt, but it did make me a little crazy.

A very special time along the way was being invited to represent our country in some British dirt tracking. I was really proud, and it turned out to be wild, high-contact competition, very popular and entertaining.

I have to say my most memorable race was the 100-lap Iowa Governor's Cup at Hawk-eye Raceway in 1987. Billy Moyer probably was not pleased when I passed him with two to go, but the governor was, and sent me a congratulatory letter.

These days at 73 I'm trying hard to help my boys. Our son Richie races successfully as does our grandson Bryan Leach. Our other son, Chris, was a Junior Olympian in fencing, so he didn't come to racing until late. These days he's focused on his sons' interests. But it's tough to keep going myself. Everybody has so much stuff, and mine feels so outdated. My late model and modified are really tired and the motors clapped together.

I guess I am, too. Last year I time-trialed in Tennessee and went wide open. It felt good and strong, but I was 16th out of 18 cars. And during the feature, my asthma really kicked up. And, old-timer that I am, I have to say that it is so hard running once a week or so. In the past going three to four times a week you could just feel yourself getting faster and better.

Nevertheless, these days I drive a school bus to make my racing money, and it gives me \$400-500 a week to get to the track with an occasional new tire or two. I am still on the case and plan to pick up the pace this year.

I'm not sure what Joyce will say about that this time. **FSW**