

Al Duffy: Long Island Speed King

Born on September 5, 1912 in New York City, Al Duffy attended PS #95 in Sheepshead Bay, Brooklyn. While still in school, Al started tinkering with motorcycles and before long he started going to the motorcycle races at the Coney Island Velodrome track which was shaped like the inside of a barrel. Well, needless to say, Al liked what he saw.

A short time later, Al altered his motorcycle to comply with the racing rules such as removing fenders, souping up the engine and mounting special tires. Al raced motorcycles with much success until the late thirties. About the same time Al started racing midgets on some of the same tracks that he raced motorcycles. He raced midgets until the war broke out and he entered the Coast Guard, becoming an officer in the engineering department on a ship. By 1945, Al was back home and working as an auto mechanic. When midget auto racing resumed on September 3, 1945, at the Freeport Stadium, Al was there. Freeport Stadium ran 13 shows in 1945 and Al placed in the money all but twice.

When the 1946 racing season began, Al was ready to race, to say the least. He won at least eight main events at Freeport and two were 50-lap championship races. According to my records and those of the A.R.A., Al won more races than anyone in 1946. Once he won two main events in one day at Freeport; the regular show and a main event which was held over from the week before because of a rainout. Al was also awarded the Grumman Executive Jake Swirbul High Point Trophy for 1946.

Other tracks where Al won races included Cedarhurst Speedway, Roosevelt Raceway, Mineola Fairgrounds, Deer Park Speedway, Thompson Speedway on Staten Island and Shangri-la Speedway in upstate Owego. Al was a commission driver meaning the more money the car earned, the more money he earned. This might explain why Al became such a great driver. Johnny Coy, an 11-time racing champ, told me that he met and became friends with Al at Freeport. One day Al told Johnny that he was going to show him the best way to get around the Freeport track. He said, "John, I am going to go to the first turn and I am going to put my foot on the white line on the inside of the track and you better not hit my foot but that is where you need to run." I think Johnny learned a lot from Al. Johnny looked up to and respected Al so much that he has a tattoo on his arm of Al's name along with a midget racecar.

During 1947, Jake Kedenburg, the promoter at Freeport Stadium, also promoted midget racing at Tropical Stadium in Havana, Cuba, and Al won the very first race ever held in Cuba. He also raced at the



Al Duffy in the #8 Cheesman Offy 1946 Reading Fairgrounds in PA



Al Duffy in the Charlie Wozniak #35 Ford V8 1947

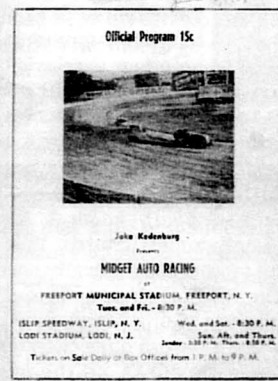


1946: Al Duffy at Freeport Stadium

Mexico City Stadium and was billed in the programs for Cuba and Mexico as the United States Champion. Al was responsible for the great popularity in the sport of midget racing. Always a crowd pleaser, he sometimes would wear a checkered helmet and a black silk shirt with white piping and a white tie. His wife, Louise, had a son named Al, Jr. During Al's career, they lived in Roslyn, Mineola and Greenvale. During his off-season Al was a bartender at The Lamp, a popular night spot in Freeport where a lot of racing fans would spend their evenings. The owner, Mr. Tini Marone, also owned a midget racecar that Al drove.

In 1947, Al's regular car was the Charlie Wozniak #35, a V-8 Ford, but for some unknown reason, on the night of June 10, Al was driving the Grella V-8 Ford Midget which was usually driven by Johnny Ringer. On the first lap of the first semi-final event, Al's car was hit by another car and flipped over. They rushed Al to the hospital where he lived until 5:22 AM the following day. Al died from a broken neck.

Ever since the day I started the museum in 1975, I tried to locate Al's family members, but to no avail. I went to his old address and talked to his old friends with no luck. But I never gave up because I had so many memories, photos and news clippings to share with someone, hopefully his family. Well I got my wish one day this past April when I received a phone call from Keith Allan Dill and he told me that he was Al Duffy's grand nephew and he wondered if he could come by for a visit and, of course, I said yes. He said he would talk to his sister Karen who is Al's grand niece and their mother Barbara who is Al's niece and get back to me. They all visited the next day and the first question I asked was where they were from and they said Bay Shore and I nearly fell over. All the years of looking for family members and they all live right here in Bay Shore! They then told me that until they died a few years ago, Al's sister and mother also lived in Bay Shore. The following week, Al, Jr. and his two sons, Kenneth and Kevin, came up from Pensacola, Florida, and we spent an entire day reminiscing about Al Duffy. To top off a super special day, Johnny Coy stopped and told many good stories about his good pal Al. John also posed for photos with Al's family and showed them his arm tattoo with Al's name and car. Al, Jr. donated his father's helmet to the museum and also brought his father's shirt with "Al Duffy" embroidered for me to see and photograph. Many thanks to everyone involved with this very special day. Al Duffy's helmets, photos, etc., can be seen at the museum. ●



Original program June 10, 1947 Freeport Stadium, Al's last race



Johnny Coy, Al Duffy's best friend, holding the actual shirt Al Duffy wore on June 10, 1947

Marty Himes is the owner-curator of the nationally recognized Himes Museum of Motor Racing Nostalgia in Bay Shore

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