

Bob Sall, Master of All

Bob Sall was introduced to the world on January 22, 1908 in Ridgewood, New Jersey. Having an interest in anything mechanical came early in life so when he showed an interest in auto racing it came as no surprise to family and friends.

He got his chance to participate in his first auto race at Freehold Speedway in New Jersey in 1928, driving a big car. The day was a hectic one with Bob sailing through the fence resulting in him having to spend a few weeks in the hospital. Bob's first few seasons were spent in competition on independent speedways scattered throughout the East and one track in particular stood out because many drivers got their start there: Deer Park Speedway, a half-mile dirt track. Get this: Sall led at least one lap in every race he entered at Deer Park but because of motor trouble and other things that went wrong, he failed to complete the distance even once during the first few seasons. However he improved steadily and in 1932, he was able to finish in second place in the American Automobile Association's Eastern point standings. Bob finished first in the point standings in 1933, his really big season, and in the short period of six months, Bob Sall became a nationally known figure in the sport of auto racing.

By 1934 when the mighty midgets, the smaller type of racing cars that blossomed here and there in the Metropolitan area, Mr. Sall who had by this time bought himself a brand new McDowell-powered dirt track big car, took a break from the big cars to sign up with Mike Caruso, the famous Hicksville car owner to drive his little outboard-powered midget racer. In this # 12 car, Bob raced at every speedway in the Eastern states as well as in his new big car Sunday afternoons and on the fair dates.

Most times, He would only use a lap seat belt and goggles along with his leather helmet. That's almost no protection. The year 1935 saw Bob in two spectacular crashes, both being snapped by photographers and appearing in almost every newspaper in the nation. The first crash occurred in the 250-mile stock car race on the Daytona Beach where, while traveling at over 90 MPH, Bob rolled over in the roadster he was handling and was tossed high into the air. Luckily he escaped with serious injury and raced shortly after. The second spectacular crash took place at the half-mile dirt track at the Altamont Fairgrounds in upstate New York where he rolled his McDowell dirt track car, finally coming to a stop with his crash helmet completely ripped from one end to another but with almost no damage to his car. With that kind of luck on his side he

showed real courage by coming back to win the main event that same day.

Bob has been at Indianapolis, the biggest race for every race driver. Appearing there



Sall rolling his car at the Altamont, NY fairgrounds in 1935. Bob's crash helmet was completely ripped from end to end. Sall showed real courage when he walked away from his spectacular spill to return to the speedway and win the feature race the same day

in 1935 in one of the many Fords that were entered that year, he qualified the car at 110 MPH but the engine gave up in the 131st mile. Hampered by car trouble in the spring of 1938 he wound up the summer in a blaze of glory with his record in 18 races he won 15 times. He also finished second twice; third place once and set 12 new track records for good measure.

Sall was one of the few chauffeurs around at the time who had board track experience, getting some of it on the old Woodbridge Speedway in New Jersey among other places and also driving a midget on the Garden Track in Boston. In 1935, 1936 and 1937, Bob won the Southeastern A.A.A. Championships. He established the one-mile record at the dirt track at Langhorne, Pennsylvania Speedway in 1938. He also set new track records for 10- and 20-mile races at the Langhorne one-mile course that year. In 1939 he met the best racing against such greats in those days as Bill Schindler, Gus Schrader, Emory Collins, Jimmy Wilburn, Ben Shaw and others over the Midwest speedways. Bob placed third in the point standings that year and he won more races at the Altamont site than any other Fairgrounds tracks, and he also took more spills at the Altamont course than at any other raceway. During 1945-46 Bob took care of the Peter's Offy big car that was being driven by Joie Chitwood, the same Joie Chitwood of the "thrill show" fame.


In 1947 Bob deserted the big cars and went with the midgets as the chief mechanic for the Buck Wheeler racing team. In the fall of 1947 Bob assisted Frankie Delroy in building and servicing midget racecars in Paterson, New Jersey and also kept the Johnny Ritter Kurtis Kraft Offy midget in top shape for the indoor races at the Kingsbridge Armory in the Bronx. He was not only a driver, mechanic and auto racing official, he was also the promoter at the Kensington Rhode Island Fairgrounds' dirt track for stock car racing in 1948.



#5 Bob Sall seated in the Peters Offy Big Car, April 25, 1940. Photo taken at Gasoline Alley, Patterson, NJ. This same car was later driven by Joie Chitwood

After retiring from active racing he started a new career working for NASCAR. Bill France, Sr., president of NASCAR, appointed him the director of Northeast competition, and on any given night at the Islip Speedway, Bob was always on hand at the sign-in booth at the back gate where all the racing cars entered. (He was by the way, related to famous starter, Ray Sullivan, from Long Island, whose son, Glenn, was a veteran NASCAR driver.)


I came to Islip Speedway from Freeport Stadium in July of 1965 because we had a drivers' strike and on that day I met Bob Sall. I showed up that day with my 1956 ford #250 Liberty Special. Bob came over and told me that I would have to change my number because there was already a car #250 registered to Tom Nolan. I took a quick look around in the pit area and saw a car, #X-3, driven by Jim Hendrickson so asked Bob if I could I drop the #2 and replace it with the letter X. He agreed and I kept the #X-50 until I retired. Mind you, I did not know Bob Sall nor did I know that he had an exciting auto racing career. I remember on many nights at Islip Speedway there would be a dispute involving a NASCAR rule and when Bob would make his decision some of the drivers, car owners and mechanics would make comments like "who is he" and "what does he know" and "who does he think he is?" Later on after talking to Bob about his career, I would tell the complainers that Mr. Bob Sall "forgot more than they will ever know about auto racing." And if they asked how I knew I would tell them about my conversation with Bob then I would give them a quick rundown about his racing career and after that no more wisecracks. •






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