

Gentleman Jim Hendrickson

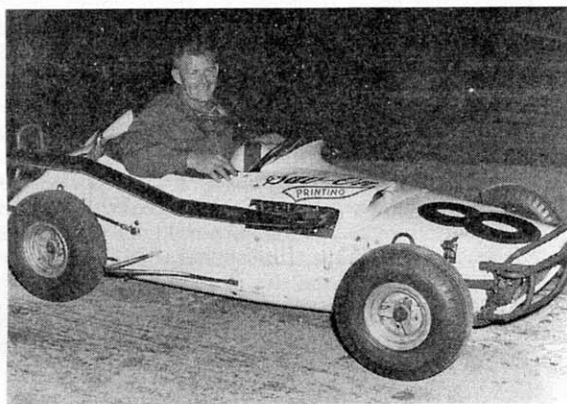
Jim Hendrickson was born on Christmas Eve in 1924. He and his wife, Carol, raised three children, Darlene, Scott and Jim, Jr. Jim was self-employed as a trucking contractor. If there ever was a model on how to conduct yourself in life, it was Gentleman Jim Hendrickson, the nickname he earned from his colleagues and competitors in the racing community.

Hendrickson had always been interested in cars. He built his own car, 1937 Ford Coupe, and in 1951 competed in his first auto race at Freeport Stadium. He won his first stock car main event in 1953, which paid \$25.50, a far cry from today's large purses. In Jim Hendrickson's career, he won at least eight stock car championships, one three-quarter midget championship and more than event wins overall. Jim was a member of the Islip Speedway Hall of Fame, the Race of Champions Hall of Fame and the National Auto Racing Hall of Fame. Jim also had the honor of winning the last stock car race ever held at Freeport Stadium.

Jim loved kids, did not smoke or drink and always had time to sign autographs for the racing fans. Among the many racetracks in which he competed were Islip Speedway, Freeport Stadium, Riverhead Raceway, Dexter Park, and the Polo Grounds, all in New York.

In New Jersey, he competed at Old Bridge Stadium, Wall Stadium, Fort Dix Speedway, Pitman Stadium, Trenton Speedway and Vineland Stadium. Jim also competed at racetracks in Massachusetts, Connecticut, Pennsylvania and at the famous Daytona Beach Speedway in Florida during 1959, 1960 and 1961. Whenever he could, Jim also raced three-quarter midgets at tracks such as Island Gardens in West Hempstead and the Long Island Arena in Commack. In New Jersey, he raced at Pine Brook Stadium and Wall Stadium. Jim amassed many victories in his career, such as a 500-lap stock car race at Wall Stadium and a 50-lap stock car race at Old Bridge Stadium. Jim also won a 50-lap title race in a three-quarter midget.

One of Jim's biggest thrills was winning the Anvall Glen Ford Memorial 100-lap stock car race. Several times at Islip Speedway, the race was held to honor Jim's good friend, Glen Wagner, A.K.A. Glen Ford, a local driver



Jim Hendrickson drove cars for many of the best owners in the sport. Even though he preferred to drive with one hand, he very rarely had an accident. (left) Jim sits proudly in the Savona Roadster three-quarter midget #8 at Freeport Raceway. (right) Jim with the Tony Ferrante X-3 Modified at Islip Speedway in 1970.

who was killed at Syracuse, New York. Jim drove racing cars for the best car owners in the sport such as Fred Formato, Joe Orzano, Tony Ferrante, Bucky Miller and Frank Savona, owner of the #8 Savona Roadster three-quarter midget. He raced against such drivers as Lee and Richard Petty, Mario Andretti, Bobby Allison, Al Deangelo, Junior Johnson, Charley Jarzombek, Johnny Coy, Axel Anderson, Fred Harback and Richie Evans.

During his racing career, Jim was involved in very few wrecks. He was known for doing most of his driving with one hand. And his racing uniform consisted of a blue shirt, white pants, white moccasins and a friendly smile. All the years that yours truly competed with Jim Hendrickson, I never saw him get mad or use profanity. That is probably one of the reasons that they called him Gentleman Jim Hendrickson. One personal experience I remember involving Jim happened one night at Islip Speedway. Jim and I were in the same race and every time I looked in the rear view mirror, I saw Jim in the car #X-3 close behind. After a few laps, he was still there. It was unusual for Jim and the #X-3 to be behind anyone for more than a lap or two. So I thought for some reason that I was



taking up too much of the track and decided to drive as low on the track as I could. Jim never did get by me. After we left the track and took our cars into the pit area, I walked over to Jim and I said, "Jim, I am really sorry for holding you back for so long." Jim's reply was, "You were not holding me back... tonight was your night, Marty." Some drivers, given the

same situation, might have taken me out of the race. Not Jim Hendrickson, A.K.A. Mister Clean.

Jim Hendrickson passed away February 2, 1997. Jim's famous #X-3 Ferrante modified stock car is on display at the Himes Museum along with his helmets, goggles, uniforms, jackets and autographed photos. Also on display is the #8 Savona three-quarter midget roadster. Gone but never forgotten, rest in peace, Gentleman Jim Hendrickson. ●

Marty Himes is the owner - curator of the nationally recognized Himes Museum of Motor Racing Nostalgia in Bay Shore (631)-666-4912

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