

Holmberg and Meade: A True Racing Team

**B**ob Holmberg was one of the most popular race car drivers to ever turn a wheel in the Northeast. Born in Bay Shore on December 13, 1936, Bobby started racing in 1959 in the Jalopy Division at Islip Speedway and in 1962; he set up a new track record by winning fifteen main events. By doing that he became the Islip Speedway Jalopy Track Champion and also the New York State Jalopy Division Champion.

Jalopy racing was introduced to promote greater interest in stock car racing and to enable novice drivers and owners to compete in their own class while being the least expensive way to break into the sport. The cars were, for the most part, strictly stock but small changes were permitted. Gasoline was the only fuel allowed.



Bob Holmberg, #918, 1937 Ford Coupe, during a Jalopy Race at Islip Speedway, 1959

Jalopy racing at Islip Speedway had been accepted as a most enjoyable and exciting sport complete with thrills and spills. Before long the top drivers in the jalopy division would graduate to the speedier divisions and would be put to good use the lessons learned in the popular jalopy races. After the jalopy division was discontinued, Bobby had a few different modified stock car rides where he drove cars for Johnny Muller, John Tures and the Scibelli Brothers.

In 1970, Bobby got his big chance to drive a very fast and well maintained competitive car, the former Bugsy Stevens car. This car was now owned by three partners: George Meade, Larry Phillips and Eddie Collins, all of Islip. They operated Meade's Service Station in Islip Terrace. The car, sponsored by Nippe's Nursery Furniture in Bay Shore, now numbered # 9-A, was a 1936 Chevy Coupe powered by a 440-cubic inch Chevy engine.



Bobby Holmberg, Islip Speedway, 1970, before the start of main event

Bobby was a self-employed heavy equipment operator. He also spent three years in the United States Army tank division. In addition to the sport of auto racing, he always enjoyed 18 holes of golf and when the race tracks were closed you would find him at the local slot car track. He also loved to race go-karts. Some of the tracks that Bobby raced on include Old Bridge Speedway, Fort Dix Speedway and Wall Stadium in New Jersey; Stafford Springs Speedway and Thompson Speedway in Connecticut; Norwood Arena in Massachusetts; Islip Speedway, Utica-Rome Speedway,

Albany Saratoga Speedway, West Hampton and Riverhead Speedway in New York; and also the famous One-Mile Track in Langhorne, Pennsylvania. Bobby won several main events at Islip Speedway driving the Meade's Service Station entry, one being a 100-lap national championship modified stock car race on a mid-summer Wednesday evening at Islip Speedway. Bobby also raced a modified stock car, #19, owned by Bob Park from Islip in a 100-mile race at Langhorne Speedway.

Bobby was always a good competitor and well liked by his fellow drivers and the racing fans alike. Another part of his story involves the Meade family and it all started when an uncle named Charlie Donnelly from Brooklyn had a big "sprint" car powered with a Plymouth engine and driven by Chet "Wiltcat" Gibbons and wrenched by George Meade, Sr. They raced this car at the Cross Bay Speedway in Ozone Park in 1936. Now Freda Meade, George's wife, was an office manager along with Dot Jaekel for Larry Mendelsohn at the Islip Speedway for many years. Also George's son, John, raced for several years at Islip Speedway, first in the Figure Eight Division in 1971 to 1974; then in the modified division from 1976 to 1989.

After a few serious health problems John retired from driving and started a new career along with his brother, George, building and repairing racecars for other owners and drivers. Three years ago we had a fire at the museum and many of the racecars were severely damaged and I was not sure where to start with the restoration. So I called John Meade and tolled him about my problem and he said, "No problem I can and I will take care of it for you." John repaired fuel tanks and body parts and did a beautiful job in the process and would not accept any money. Thanks John.



Bobby Holmberg driving the #75 Scibelli Brothers' car to another victory at Islip Speedway

As this story was being prepared, John Meade told me that when I was racing my #X-50 modified at Islip Speedway, that he was one of my biggest fans. Again, thanks, John. Bob Holmberg and George Meade are gone now but their memories live on at the Himes Museum. ●

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

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