

*Racing Champions Barbara and Gene Gamache*

**P**retty young Barbara Koff grew up in the Bay Shore/Islip area. After graduating from high school, "Bobby" met and started dating a man named Gene Gamache, a good looking auto racing driver from Bay Shore. Soon they were married and settled in Bay Shore where they raised their family. Barbara was not only a pretty young housewife and mother; she was also a racecar driver.

I must tell you that Barbara not only raced against woman drivers but on many nights she raced against the best men drivers at Islip Speedway, Freeport Stadium, Dexter Park and Riverhead Raceway. She placed very well in many races and sometimes she even finished ahead of her husband Gene. Barbara was also a past champion driver at Islip Speedway and Riverhead Raceway. Some of the men drivers that she competed against included Axel Anderson, Al Deangelo, Johnny Coy, George Tet, Johnny Rocco and Jim Hendrickson. A few of the women drivers she raced with were Maggie Heckler, Marie Miller and Harriet Gippi. One of the racecars that Barbara drove was a 1937 Ford Coupe #11-A that was owned by Frank Cole who operated a service station in Islip. This car was also driven at one time by Maggie Heckler.

Gene Gamache was born in Los Angeles, California, and

Long Island drivers were invited to participate. Gene tied for first place in the season point standings in Cuba two years in a row 1951 and 1952.

The track in Cuba had a half-mile dirt track with a half-mile oval inside. Back at Islip Speedway, he won a modified stock car race driving a sportsman car. A sportsman car had a smaller engine than a modified.

In 1955 at Islip Speedway, Gene won two 50-lap championship races. He finished third in the driver point standings at Islip Speedway in 1955. He also holds the record at Islip and Riverhead for winning the most semi-final races. In 1958, Gene won a modified-sportsman race, "two classes in one event," at Islip Speedway against the best drivers in NASCAR.

Other race tracks where Gene competed include Wall Stadium in New Jersey and Utica Speedway in New York. In 1959, Gene also raced a 1958 Ford in a late model race at Darlington Speedway, North Carolina. In 1960, driving the same 1958 Ford, which was owned by Matty DeMathews and sponsored by the Autolite Co., he raced at Daytona Speedway in

Florida. The late model race included drivers such as Lee Petty, Bobby Allison and Junior Johnson. Gene belonged to the NASCAR, Allstate, Seaboard and United Racing Associations.

Gene and Barbara had four children; Rickey, Lynda, Kenny and Terry. Rickey and Lynda raced Quarter Midgets at the local tracks with cars built by their dad. The children also did very well. Barbara and Gene passed away many years ago but

their memories live on. Stories and photos of Barbara and Gene, along with one of Gene's trophies can be seen at the Himes Museum in Bay Shore.

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



Barbara and Gene Gamache are pictured (top center) at Islip Speedway in the early 1950s. In the above photo, Gene stands with his 1937 Ford at Islip Speedway in 1957

moved to Bay Shore with his parents when he was a young boy where he attended Bay Shore schools. After graduating high school, Gene became a top notch mechanic and after working at a few shops in the area, Gene and his good friend and fellow racing driver, Al Hansen, opened their own service station on the northeast corner of Sunrise Highway and Manatuck Blvd. in Bay Shore. If you liked to talk about auto racing you were welcomed to stop by any time and talk to Gene or Al. Two other very good racecar drivers were employed at this service station, Johnny Mann and Bob Lamoreaux. On any given day, other drivers would stop by and join in the story telling.

During Gene's racing career he won at least two driving championships driving a 1937 Ford Coupe modified and owned by Johnny Fetherston of Islip. The car was sponsored by Mars Store of Bay Shore, the oldest auto parts store on Long Island. And the same Mars Store, operated by Alan and Richie, is still operating on Main Street in Bay Shore. During this same period of time, Mars Store's Freeport branch sponsored my own racecar at Freeport Stadium.

Gene started his racing career in 1950 and continued until 1965. Gene won the modified driving title at Islip Speedway in 1954 and 1957 while racing with the Allstate Stock Car Racing Club. In 1951, Jake Kedenburg promoter at Islip Speedway, Freeport Stadium and Dexter Park, decided to try promoting auto racing in Havana, Cuba and Gene and a few other



Gene Gamache's actual pit pass from 1951 when he raced in Havana, Cuba

CELEBRATE VALENTINE'S DAY AT

*The Gallery at*

**FASTFRAME**<sup>®</sup>

EXPERT PICTURE FRAMING

**With 20% Off All Framed Art**

**INCLUDING WORKS BY:**

- THOMAS KINKADE • JANE WOOSTER SCOTT
- DANIEL POLLERA • JOHN MANSUETO
- NORMAN ROCKWELL & MORE

74 Main Street, Sayville • 631-567-2293  
(Across from Starbucks)

**OPEN SUNDAYS NOON TILL 5 PM**