

"Uncle" Axel & His #590

Axel Anderson (yes, Axel is his real name) was born in Bay Shore, grew up and attended grade and high school in Sayville. After serving in the Philippines during WW II, Axel Anderson became a well known stock car driver.

He won championships at Freeport and Islip Stadium and raced at many different race tracks including Islip Stadium, Freeport Stadium, Dexter Park and Riverhead Raceway; all on Long Island. He was also well known around the tracks at Langhorne Speedway, Pennsylvania; Old Bridge and Wall Stadiums in New Jersey; Philips Field, Florida; and on the sand at Daytona Beach. And in 1951, Axel traveled all the way to Havana, Cuba's Tropical Stadium to race on a quarter-mile cinder track.

A broad shouldered, curly haired, handsome fellow, Axel was one of the most renowned showmen in the sport of stock car racing. When asked how he began his lead-footed jockey career, Axel replied that it was sort

of a joke. He explained to me once that he had always been interested in stock car racing but had not given driving a thought until his close friend, Johnny Miller of Patchogue, dared him to get behind the wheel of a stock car. That dare was to lead the hard driving Axel to stardom while behind the wheel of his very fast green and yellow #590 stock car. With the #590 in 1952, Axel won the amazing total of 22 main events at Freeport, Islip and Dexter Park. In 1952, Axel Anderson was the All-State Racing Stock Car Club Champion at Freeport Stadium and Islip Stadium and held second place at Dexter Park. When I asked him about how the nickname "Uncle" came up, Axel told me that some of his relatives used to attend the races. One night, they started yelling "Uncle" and that nickname stayed with him until he passed away in 1994. He left his wife Linda, sons Wayne and Thomas, and daughters Alexis and Tammy.

Axel was a warm hearted person; if he was your friend, he was your friend for life. He lived most of his life in Patchogue where he founded, owned and operated Axel Anderson Truck Repair Company for over 50 years.

Since I was his close friend, I am proud to tell you about what a great man and racer Axel was. But there is another important part of the Axel Anderson story: the #590. It began as a 1937 Plymouth coupe. Then along came Axel and his pit crew; Vinny Cardamone, Howie Van Schaick and "Uncle" Zip Cardamone, who removed the original 6-cylinder engine and replaced it with a more powerful 6-cylinder Chrysler Spitfire engine. This car, with Axel driving, would dominate stock car racing on Long Island for many years. Over the years, the car was sold many times and Axel lost track of it. In the early eighties, I located the remains of the car, rusting away in the woods in Hatboro, Pennsylvania. I received permission from the owner of the property to remove the car, or, I should say, what was left of the car. There was practically nothing left of it. The engine, transmission, drive shaft, wheels and tires were in very sad shape. There was no windshield, hood, seat, gas tank or radiator. And the rust-well, there was more rust than metal.

The biggest problem I faced was to see if it could be restored in 30 days because a ceremony honoring Axel Anderson was planned at Islip Speedway and Axel himself wanted to drive it one more time for that ceremony. The Himes Museum, with the help of Axel and Wayne Anderson, Scott Johnson, Red Raynor, Vinny Cardamone, George Brunnhoelzl Sr., Harold Seamon and the Himes family, worked day and night to restore the car. We got the job done only to have a Hollywood cliffhanger hit in the eleventh hour. We got it running and I took it out for a test drive. While driving it, I heard a loud groan. The rear end was bent. We managed to replace it and Axel did get to drive the #590 for the ceremony. Needless to say, he had a smile from ear to ear.

Another true story regarding the #590 was told to me by Vinny Cardamone, one of Axel's oldest and best friends and a former mechanic of the #590. It was 1951 and the Hudson automobile was the dominating car on the race tracks all across America. Warren Leach was a local car dealer who happened to pull into Ed Kalinoskis' garage on Main Street

in Patchogue, driving a brand new 1951 Hudson Hornet convertible. This is where Axel kept the #590. Working under it was Vinny Cardamone, welding in a new rear end so they could go racing that night at Dexter Park. He just finished putting in the rear end and he had one more little weld job on it. "Warren Leach, the working man's friend, pulled up and we all went out to look his new Hudson over," Vinny recalled. "Warren boasted that it was the fastest thing around so I asked how fast." Warren claimed, "It will do this and do that." So I said, "the #590 will do this and do that and he said, put your money where your mouth is". So I dug into my wallet and pulled out one hundred dollars. He looked at me and challenged me to double it, so I did. There were several side bets as the word spread. It was a Sunday around high noon. There were no tracks nearby but there was the brand new Veterans Highway. Racing on a public highway, even a nice new straight one

like Vets is not only dangerous, but it's against the law. So to ensure the safety of the public, the law got involved. There were two guys from Ed's garage, two Islip police detectives and Vinny. "We road-blocked five intersections with some flares we took from Ed's tow truck," Vinny remembered. "The distance was about seven miles from Blue Point north to Ronkonkoma. I was standing on the first corner. When Axel passed me, he was doing better than ninety. It felt like standing on a railroad track when a freight train blows by. I just kissed the money. That was it; I knew Warren was not going to catch him. Axel picked up the lookouts on the return trip and they hung on the running boards. Warren claimed he was set up. But there was no real speed equipment on the #590; just a powerful Chrysler Spitfire engine and a determined driver. Had they switched cars, I would have bet on the Hudson. We tracked Warren down to get his side of it. After over 50 years, he was a good sport about it. As for the degree of competition, Warren said

once we got rolling, he went by me like I was tied to a tree."

The #590 racing car and other Axel



Axel Anderson drives his #590 car during a ceremony in 1982 to honor a great career and many victories from here to Cuba. (below) The car needed a lot of restoration to get it ready for the showcase. (bottom right) "Uncle" Axel gets ready for a race at Islip Speedway in 1952.



Anderson memorabilia can be seen at the Himes Museum. Also, on Sunday August 24th at Riverhead Raceway, the #590 along with many other old racing cars and retired drivers from the past will be on hand for our annual Freeport/Islip/Riverhead reunion. The reunion is held every year at the Riverhead Raceway near the end of August. Come on out for a day of fun and reminiscing. You are welcome to call me for more information. ●

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

