

## WALLY PARKS

NHRA Founder and Chairman of the Wally Parks NHRA Motorsports Museum.

1913 - 2007



The primary driving force behind the formation of the National Hot Rod Association, Wally Parks is the visionary whose early goals created what today is the world's largest motorsports governing body.

Parks, 94, who founded NHRA in 1951, has never implied that he did it all himself. Reflecting on the tremendous growth and success of NHRA, he notes how fortunate he was that

so many dedicated people have shared his outlook that almost anything is possible if you believe in it strongly enough. One of the most dedicated was unquestionably his late wife, Barbara, who was regarded as the most influential "behind-the-scenes" force in the growth of NHRA. Ms. Parks succumbed to cancer in late January of 2006 after a long battle with the devastating illness.

But without Parks' vision and perseverance, much of what has happened today may not have been achieved.

Born in Oklahoma, then living in Kansas until age 8, Parks' automotive interests surfaced after his family moved to California. There, in his high school years, he became active in building stripped-down Model-T Fords and Chevy fours for use on the street and in early speed trials conducted on dry lake beds in the Mojave Desert, north of Los Angeles.

In 1937, Parks took part in the formation of the Southern California Timing Association (SCTA) - an organization focused on conducting land speed record events - serving as one of its officials until World War II began. In 1946, following military service in the South Pacific, Parks was elected president of the re-organized SCTA. In 1947, after 10 years of employment as a road test driver and process engineer for General Motors, Parks left GM to assume a new role as the SCTA's general manager. It was his concept that produced America's first Hot Rod Show, presented by the SCTA in 1948 at the Los Angeles Exposition Armory.

In 1948, Parks helped co-publishers Bob Petersen and Bob Lindsay in the introduction of Hot Rod magazine, which became one of the world's largest circulated auto enthusiast publications, and later was named its first editor. In 1949 Parks organized the campaign that led to the opening of Utah's Bonneville Salt Flats for hot rod speed trials - a still thriving annual activity.

In 1951, utilizing Hot Rod Magazine as a conduit to nationwide readership, Parks formed the National Hot Rod Association. In 1963, he resigned his position as editorial director for all of Petersen's automotive magazines - Hot Rod, Motor Trend, Car Craft, Sports Car Graphic and Motor Life - to assume full-time administrative duties as president of NHRA.

An early recipient of Car Craft magazine's prestigious "Ollie Award" for his many contributions to motorsports, Parks was named "Man of the Decade, 1962-1972" by Popular Hot Rodding magazine and was recognized as "Man of the Year" in 1973 by the Specialty Equipment Market Association (SEMA). The American Auto Racing Writers & Broadcasters Association (AARWBA) honored Parks in 1988 and again in 1994 for his pioneering efforts in motorsports. Parks received his highest honors in 1992 and 1993. He was drag racing's first inductee into the International Motorsports Hall of Fame in 1992 at Talladega, Ala., and in 1993, he was inducted into the Motorsports Hall of Fame at Novi, Mich.

In 1994, the tributes to Parks' legacy continued to increase. A large bronze statue of Parks was presented at NHRA's Gainesville Raceway, which was eventually moved to its current location in front of the NHRA Motorsports Museum at the Fairplex in Pomona, Calif. Later in 1994, Parks and wife Barbara were co-inductees into the Don Garlits' International Drag Racing Hall of Fame at Ocala, Fla., for their pioneering efforts which spearheaded NHRA's success. Parks also was the first recipient of the Don Prudhomme Award, a trophy presented by NHRA to an individual who has made a profound impact on the growth and positive image of the NHRA POWERade Series.

At the 2001 NHRA Awards Ceremony, Parks was presented the prestigious Blaine Johnson award for his dedication, perseverance and nurturing commitment to the sport over the years.

In 2002, Parks again was recognized for his many contributions to the sport of drag racing. He was presented with the inaugural Robert E. Petersen Lifetime Achievement Award at the fourth annual Hot Rod & Performance Trade Show in Indianapolis. Petersen, a renowned automotive publisher and creator of multiple automotive magazines, presented Parks with the all-bronze sculpture which was created to honor the entrepreneurs who have contributed to the history, growth and well-being of the hot rod industry.

In late 2003, Parks received another honor of distinction, as he was named the Dean Bachelor Lifetime Achievement Award winner by the Motor Press Guild in Los Angeles.

Parks remained on NHRA's board of directors until he passed and had dedicated much of his time to his per-

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