

PHOTO TRIVIA

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Scott Belknap Collection

You didn't get to the All Star League without having plenty of driving talent. This photo is packed with it. Can you guess the identities of these three drivers?

As the handwriting shows, these accomplished racers are (L-R) Gil Hearne, Fred Harbach, and Pat Moon. These racers made up the Islip Speedway All Star Stock Car Racing League Team in 1967. The team finished fourth out of eight teams in the standings that year. Each of these racers merits his own full-page piece. Since we don't have that much space, we'll have to stick to the highlights.

Gil Hearne raced in the League on the Islip Speedway team in 1967 and for the Wall Stadium team in 1968 and 1970 through 1973.

Hearne started racing in Hialeah, Florida in 1957. He enjoyed success in Modified competitions in the South, as well as NASCAR Grand National, ARCA, and Late Model races. However, the lure of big money at Northern tracks brought him to chase NASCAR's National Modified Championship. Eventually he settled in New Jersey and won at the local tracks. Although Hearne developed his skills in dirt racing, he is known more for his asphalt racing, particularly at Wall Stadium, where he was the Modified Track Champion eight times. He won the Garden State Classic four times, and three Turkey Derbies. Hearne hung up his helmet in 1993. He is currently enjoying retirement with his wife, Carol and helping his son Jason, who competes at Wall and PA's Mountain Speedway.

Fred Harbach competed in the League for Islip in 1967, '68, and '69.

Harbach was one of Long Island's native sons, hailing from Huntington Station. He had one of the most unique nicknames – "The Flying Dutchman". Harbach began his career in the Jalopy division at Freeport Stadium in 1952, at just 15 years of age (although his dad fibbed, listing him as 16). He was a skilled racer on dirt as well as asphalt tracks. By the time he retired in 1992, he accumulated 20 track championships, including at three Long Island asphalt tracks – Freeport, Riverhead, and Islip. Harbach won the first All Star race, held at Albany-Saratoga Speedway. It's interesting to note that Harbach also won the Larry Mendelsohn Memorial race held at Islip in 1977. Mendelsohn was one of the originators of the All Star League and was a friend of Harbach.

Harbach is also remembered as a fun-loving guy. After the races, he would wait to load the race car on its trailer so that kids could sit in the car and have their pictures taken. He brought food and drinks to share. After racing ended on the last night of Islip Speedway, he brought a juke box. The party lasted into the wee hours.

As would be expected, Fred and wife Gerry's kids were raised in racing. Daughter Joanne continues to support the sport with her husband, Alex Kitzen, who crewed for Harbach and now has two of

Harbach's restored cars. Sons Alan and Richard also had successful racing careers.

Fred Harbach passed away in 1995 at age 58. He was a local legend, gone too soon, but not forgotten.

Pat Moon raced on the Islip team for the 1967 season.

Moon, also a Huntington resident, was a Long Island racing scene regular. The Modified driver started racing in the late 1950s. He was skilled at racing the bullrings of the Island – Freeport, Islip, Dexter Park - along with fellow teammate Al Hansen. Moon also left the Island to race elsewhere. He tied with Rene Charland for the 1965 Old Bridge Speedway (NJ) points championship. Records show Pat Moon listed in the Grand National ranks in the 1957, 1959, 1960, and 1961 seasons.

Moon's racing career lasted into the early 1980s.

The All Star League racing series began in 1967 with a great idea: participating tracks made up a team of three racers each; the series was run at each of the tracks. Races were held mid-week. Versatility was in demand here, as the tour stopped at dirt and asphalt tracks, from 1/5 mile to 5/8-mile lengths, from Pennsylvania, New Jersey, New York, Massachusetts and Vermont. The first two years enjoyed the most success. The series ended with the 1973 season. The Energy Crisis began in 1974, making it difficult to buy fuel for traveling. Dirt and asphalt cars became more specialized. Also, by 1974, Lou Figari and Larry Mendelsohn, two of the founders of the series, had passed away.

The All Star Stock Car Racing League came along at just the right time to make heroes out of local racers and legends out of team hot shoes. At least the photos, mementos and helmets remain of an exciting touring series.

Contributions to this piece by: www.catamountstadium.com; www.longislandjam.com - "All Star League" by Dwight Clock; Marty Himes, www.thehimesmuseum.com; www.thirdturn.com; and Gil Hearne.