

## CY FAIRCHILD

### A Racing Hall Of Fame Farmer

03/07/07



Cy Fairchild, Michigan Motorsports Hall of Fame

*Being a quiet farmer, with cattle and a few buffalo seems about right for Cy Fairchild, the 70-year-old resident of Gladwin County, because that's what he is. It's those early years on his resume that makes you scratch your head.*

*Cy Fairchild never changed a tire, never turned a wrench and never owned his own race car. But by his teens he was a race driver for hire – have helmet, will travel and his skills got him elected to the Michigan Motor Sports Hall of Fame in 1988.*

*In 1958, Fairchild won six different track championships in one season on his way to winning 54 Features (main events) in Sprint car racing. During the 1950's he won 52 or more Features in four seasons including a streak of 26 in a row.*

*In the 60's, Fairchild was consistently one of the top USAC (United States Auto Club) drivers competing against such standouts as Gordon Johncock, Gary Bettenhausen, Parnelli Jones and Johnny Parsons. He even drove for the legendary A J Foyt in the late 60's and early 70's.*

*At age 13, Fairchild left Bridgeport, Michigan by sticking out his thumb and hitting the road for adventures beyond the family farm. Figuring*

*there was too much going on out there to stay home, Fairchild's thumb took him to Oklahoma where he landed a job at Honest Abe's Junkyard.*

*Fairchild enticed Abe to let him drive the '32 Chevy coupe that was collecting dust in the yard. Before hauling the car to the local racetrack, Abe asked if Cy had ever driven a stock car before and Fairchild exclaimed, "Sure, I ran in a bunch of races back in Michigan."*

*After a raggedy start he finished second in the Feature and with money in hand Fairchild headed for home. His driving career began in Michigan when him exclaiming to a local car owner, "I won lots of races in Oklahoma" and his traveling days were just beginning.*



Cy Fairchild in open-wheel roadsters on pavement and on dirt tracks

*Fairchild would go on to eventually win Features in 37 states and 5 countries. He finally hung up his helmet and goggles for good in 1971 and decided to go back to farming. His current 100-acre farm (leasing an additional 300 acres) was bought at auction 23 years ago.*

*Along the way, he's done many commercials (Brille Cream, Allstate, Standard Oil, Firestone and remember those mustached milk commercials – Cy was one of the first). He's also done bit parts in Hollywood movies, did a stint as a promoter/track owner and co-hosted one of the most popular radio shows in Michigan called Inside Racing at WFDF in Flint.*

*To say Cy Fairchild is an interesting interview would be an injustice to his colorful career. Quick with a laugh, a straight shooter, Cy Fairchild lives by the motto 'Run what you brought and hope you brought enough.'*

**ROR: Starting a career racing at age 14, you must have picked up those driving skills quickly.**

**Cy:** My dad always said, ‘if you’re running your mouth you’re not learning.’ So I watched and listened and studied my opponents. I walked every inch of every track I ever raced at including Daytona and the Indianapolis Speedway. I learned fast or I didn’t eat.

**ROR: When you returned to Michigan who did you drive for?**

**Cy:** I told Clair Jackson about my great driving feats in Oklahoma and he must have been impressed. He put me in his stock car and I won the Feature at Dixie Speedway, which back in the late 40’s and 50’s was one of the greatest racetracks in America. Clair fired me the next week (I crashed) for abusing his equipment. I thought winning was more important than trying to save the equipment. Then Larry McCloskey asked me to drive one of his cars and we won a bunch of championships.

**ROR: Have you ever had an embarrassing moment in racing?**

**Cy:** My Dad had heard from the neighbors that I had been racing and when he asked me about it I had told him ‘no way, I don’t know where you’ve been hearing that stuff.’ Well that was a big mistake (laughing) – you didn’t lie to my father. After the 3<sup>rd</sup> Feature I won at Dixie Speedway, when the checkered flag dropped, my Dad came down to the winner’s circle and gave me a whipping right in front of the grandstands. That story made the rounds for years. I loved my dad – he taught me a lot about life but he just didn’t understand – I had to race.

**ROR: Your dad didn’t approve of you being a race driver?**

**Cy:** In 1952 (age 16) I paid cash for a brand new Lincoln but my dad and all the other farmers around thought I was a bum – no steady job – no paycheck. I could make more in one night than all of them put together in a month but I was still a bum.

**ROR: Obviously times got better.**

**Cy:** Oh yeah, everyone’s attitude eventually changed. Open wheel racing was my life – USAC was it – they had the premier drivers and the best races. I could win more money in a 100-lap sprint race than going 500 miles in a Grand National race (the precursor to NASCAR).

**ROR: When did NASCAR get so big?**

**Cy:** They started building new tracks – the super speedways. Then the baseball strike came along. Network TV started putting on Winston Cup

races as a replacement and they discovered they were getting better ratings, drawing a bigger audience than baseball ever did. That’s when it really took off.

**ROR: You had a shot at qualifying at the Daytona 500 and the Indy 500 in the same year (1969) but you never made the show. What happened?**

**Cy:** Mechanical problems, bad driving, rain delays; you name it (laughing). I got caught in a transitional period. Rear engine cars were coming in and sponsors wanted veteran drivers. Then when I got some experience they wanted younger drivers. I had several what I call ‘kiss and miss’ contracts.

**ROR: Did you ever say to yourself – this is nuts?**

**Cy:** Yes, the day I quit racing. I had already come back from several bad accidents. I had some money saved up and thought the time was right to hang it up. No regrets – racing was very good to me and I don’t really miss it.

**ROR: Did you ever have any fear out on the racetrack?**

**Cy:** To be honest I’ve never been afraid of anything. Butterflies, yes, from that adrenaline rush. For a long time, we never had 4-wheelers or snowmobiles around the farm. If I’m on something, my brain is short-wired to go wide open. I’ve toned it down a bit now though.

**ROR: You owned Tri-City Speedway for a while in the 80’s?**

**Cy:** Three of the most miserable years of my life. I’m not a promoter – everyone would come whining to me about getting bumped. I’d tell ‘em to get back out there and race – stop complaining. Back in the day, you moved over or got moved. I’d never make it in racing these days.

**ROR: After racing you got into the cattle and buffalo business. Why buffalo?**

**Cy:** I’ve always thought they were fascinating and I like to watch them run around. I’ll get up in the morning, sit with my cup of coffee and watch my buffalo roam.

**ROR: So now you've got another racer in the family. Your nephew Alex has taken up the torch. What's it like watching him race?**

**Cy:** Alex is a natural. He's finished first and second in his first two seasons of racing at the Go-cart Nationals. They won't let me near that go-cart. I'm used to cars with springs and shocks, which go-carts don't have. He's blown up an engine or two but I just can't tell him to save the equipment.

**ROR: You can't win if you're trying to save the equipment. Run with what you brought and hope you brought enough. Thanks Cy.**



**Cy Fairchild and his Wall of Fame**