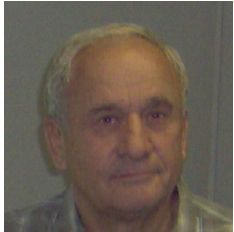


## Whatever Happened To Ed Howe?

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Ed Howe

“My mother wouldn’t let me race cars until I turned twenty-one.” For Ed Howe that year came in 1959 and as the saying goes, the rest is...well, still being made. Over countless tracks, hot laps and feature races, Ed Howe did manage to become one of the best short-track drivers in stock car racing history.

From his ability to make cars go fast, Ed started his own company, Howe Racing Enterprises, on Lyle Road in Beaverton in 1971, which has evolved into one of the largest distributors of racing parts in North America. Having turned the daily operations over to his son Chas, Ed remains active in the development of newer, faster and safer racing components.

If you’ve watched an ARCA Truck, Busch Series, Short-track or Nextel Cup stock car race in the last 30 years, you’ve witnessed many Howe racing parts going around the track. What started as a garage business has grown to a 45,000 sq. ft. facility, still on Lyle Rd. that also includes a 1/6-mile testing track outback.

“One aspect of our business is making precision custom parts for race teams and we prefer not to share that information with anyone,” Chas stated. “Secrecy is a big part of a race team’s success.” When Bobby Labonte won the Winston Cup Championship (now the Nextel Cup) he was using disguised Howe ball joints. Matt Kenseth won the Championship (2003) with the Howe part but NASCAR discovered the cover-up. They also discovered nearly 75% of the racecars were using them. With minor adjustments, NASCAR certified the part.

The reason you rarely see a Howe decal on racecars is simple – money. Each sticker on those cars costs a LOT of money. Howe’s primary source of advertising comes from producing winners.

“Probably 90% of our business is out of state and south of Beaverton,” said Chas Howe, President of Howe Racing. “We focus primarily on short track racing. Our family had a chance to move the whole operation to Tennessee a few years back which would have put us much closer to the bulk of our customer base.” Ed added, “My wife put a stop to the move. She likes it here and didn’t want to go south. So here we stay.”

Howe admitted his racing career began by being in the right place at the right time. That place was the Chevrolet dealership in Ewart, Michigan. When their local race driver wanted to retire, Ed was ready to take over behind the wheel of the dealership’s 1933 Chevy Coupe and winning races quickly became a habit.

Racing primarily at the Mt. Pleasant and Cadillac racetracks, Howe soon established a reputation as the driver to beat. The Championships began to roll in year after year to the point where he was not very popular. “During a two year stretch, we won every feature race at Mt. Pleasant except one,” Howe recalled, “they hated us there. One of my front wheels came off the night I lost. They cheered that night.”

By 1961 Howe began racing on his own. In 1962 he married his high school sweetheart Joan and on her recommendation they moved to Beaverton where Ed took a job with Brown Industries. “I was working on cars and racing nights and weekends,” said Howe, “until finally in 1971 my boss said ‘Howe make up your mind – it’s us or racing.’ I guess you could say I fired myself.”

No one really knows how many feature races Ed Howe has won. When he was elected into the Michigan Motor Sports Hall of Fame in 1988, they stated he had won “over 200.” He may have been hated at many racetracks but he was also an entertainer. Many of his ‘special’ fast cars came right from the parking lot at Brown’s. He excelled at winning features with cars that still had the license plates on them.

Before tracks banned the practice he won many races with a passenger sitting beside him. “I welded a steering wheel over there so they’d have something to hang on to,” chuckled Howe, “then I’d paint Driver Ed on the side of my car.”

He attributes his winning formula to running his cars like a business. “I was always focused and never partied,” Howe remembered. “It’s easy to beat drivers that are hungover. Also I raced where I could win money. Figuring 3<sup>rd</sup> place would pay my expenses then 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> was profit, if the track, my car and the competition didn’t add up to at least third, I didn’t go. But there weren’t very many I couldn’t beat.”

“When I raced,” added Chas, “I could find the groove after a few practice laps. My Dad could look at any track and see the groove.”

One other factor was the superstitious nature of racecar drivers. Ed Howe feasted on that superstition. Many people remember the ugly green cars he drove, a very superstitious color in the auto industry. Why green? First, Brown was discarding a 5-gallon pail of industrial green paint. Howe thinned it with gasoline and brushed it on his car with a broom. Second, no one wanted to pit near his green cars, which meant no congestion to deal with on pit stops.

From the headers and exhaust that Howe was using at the time came a high-pitched buzzing sound much like an Indy car would make. The nickname of the *Green Hornet* soon followed.



Ed Howe and his Brand X car

Because of his success, many times he was asked about moving up to *‘the big time’*. “I never saw it that way- when I raced it was called the Grand National and honestly the fear would have held me back,” stated Howe. “Not the fear of driving but rather a fear of knowing the unsafe conditions at those bigger tracks especially at the speeds they were going. Today I wouldn’t have that fear because they’re racing so much safer now.”

“To a racecar driver fear is an inability to lie to yourself,” said Chas. “In those days, many drivers lied to themselves, thinking everything would be all right. There is a fine line between fear and intelligence. My father, a mechanically minded person, could see the potential to die and refused to lie to himself. Sadly, the death of Dale Earnhardt,” added Chas, “made it cool to be safe on the track these days. Everyone thought he was bulletproof.”

Howe climbed out of his racecar for the last time at Auto City Speedway in Flint in 1991 and says he doesn’t miss it at all. “I finished second to Chas that night,” recalled Howe, “I’d been wanting to get out for a few years so I thought it was a perfect time to quit. I’ve had my day, quite a few great days in racing actually.”

So what does the future hold for Ed Howe and Howe Racing Enterprises? “In the 60’s, I could buy a high performance V-8 for \$280,” Howe stated, “I could run that engine all season and sell it for a profit at years end. Now a Hendricks or Yates engine cost \$50,000. We used to have a two-year waiting list for Howe headers or a chassis. Now you’re lucky if a customer is willing to wait two weeks. Chas has it tougher than I ever did. But he’s also a much better diplomat than I was.”

Recently, Stock Car Magazine voted Ed Howe one of the top 25 most influential drivers/innovators in the history of stock car racing. “He may be semi-retired but we still pick his brain,” said Chas. Howe’s latest project is fitting a GTO performance package under a ’57 Chevy body. “I like taking something old and making it better,” said Howe. “I appreciate a nice riding car.”



Ed Howe and his ’57 Chevy