

Mallat has checkered career

Successful stock car racer inducted in local raceway's hall of fame

BY MARY CATON
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A long successful run in stock car racing began modestly enough for Don Mallat when he plunked down \$10 for the shell of a 1957 Pontiac.

"It had no motor and it was sitting on its roof," Mallat said. "I rolled it over and hauled it away. I built the whole car in three months."

Mallat worked adjacent to the family-owned garage, so all the necessary tools and torches were close at hand.

"His brother, a mechanic, would wander outside occasionally to inspect his progress and once casually mentioned how no one would ever beat the local driving star of the day, Stan Earish.

"I looked at him and said I could," Mallat said.

"I said I'd be the track champion in three years, that was my goal."

His brother got quite a chuckle out of the brash comments of his 21-year-old kid brother but it was Mallat who had the last laugh.

He did beat Earish and win the track championship at Checker Flag in his third season.

More victories followed on the famous south Windsor oval, leading to his recent induction into the Checker Flag Raceway hall of fame.

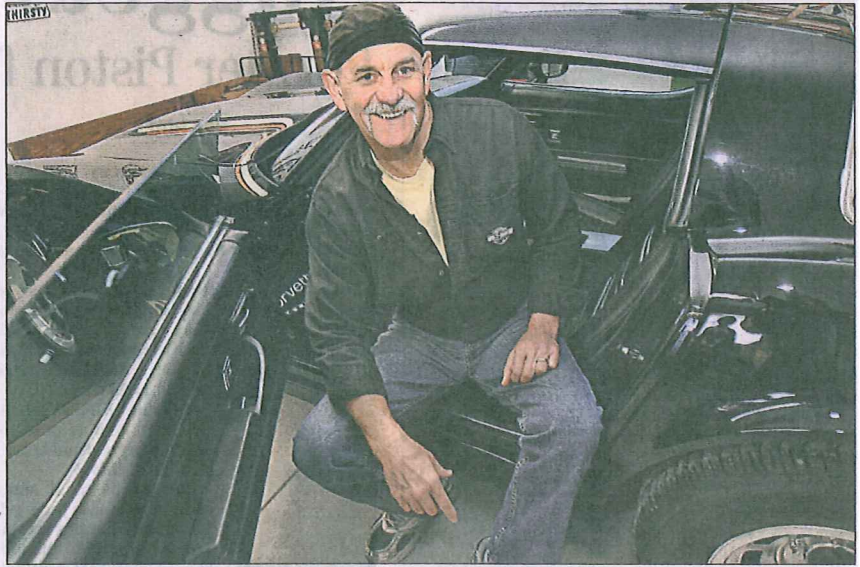
Career highlight

The hall recognized the achievements of 11 drivers at its third annual reunion, including Claude Coates, Len Couvillon, Barry Brush, Don Dame, John Fahringer, Leo Lucier, Louis Beaulieu, Gary Parent, Ray Morneau and Ray Deco.

Mallat raced there and elsewhere from 1968 until Checker Flag closed the doors in 1992. He continued to run the CASCAR circuit for six more seasons.

A highlight was certainly 1978 (ironically 78 was the number that adorned his cars) when he was the track champion at Checker Flag, Toledo and Mt. Clemens.

Without benefit of a major sponsor, Mallat did most of his own work on the cars.



ON THE FAST TRACK: Don Mallat's success on the track has led to his induction in the Checker Flag Raceway hall of fame.

Star photo: Dan Janisse

"It was crazy all the hard work that went into it," he said. "Especially since it's not like you had insurance on the cars. When you tore them up, it took your money to fix it."

A fierce competitor who didn't shy away from a challenge on the track or in the pit, Mallat said he had one goal in mind at each race.

"I wanted to try and make some money so I would be able to afford to go to the race the next day," the 60-year-old GM retiree said.

"If I put four new tires on you could look and see in

the results that'd I won the feature the day before. You had to try and be smart about it."

Mallat says he'd probably still own a race car if there was still a track locally.

"If someone did open one, I tell you it would be a gold mine," he said.

If you put a race track near the 401 it would be right in the hub, not too far away from Windsor, Leamington, Amherstburg and Detroit."

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