

## 2006 inductee Nebraska Auto Sports Hall of Fame

### Jack Beck

A Nebraska native, Jack was born August 21, 1945 in Loup City, Nebraska and grew up near Litchfield. While he was attending Litchfield High School he got hooked on cars reading Car and Driver Magazine in the school library. In 1966, he bought a Triumph Spitfire and began attending Autocrosses with the Central Nebraska Sports Car Club in Grand Island, Nebraska. After meeting his wife Judy while in college, in 1967 they fooled the banker and bought a 1966 Shelby GT 350 that they ran in autocrosses. In 1968 they bought their first Mini Cooper, followed by another Mini Cooper in 1969 and Jack followed this up by attending SCCA Drivers Schools in Salina, Kansas and Castle Rock, Colorado.



In 1971, Jack raced his first SCCA National Race at MidAmerica Raceway near Wentzville, Missouri and went on to qualify for the SCCA National Championship race then called the American Road Race of Champions (ARRC) which was held at Road Atlanta in Gainesville, Georgia over thanksgiving. With a new engine in the car, Jack ran well but an incident on track involving a lapped car resulted in his disqualification. Jack would run the Mini Cooper thru the 1974 season.

In the spring of 1975 Jack and Judy bought the 1971 C Sedan National Championship winning Alfa Romeo GTA Junior from Dick Davenport. On the 4<sup>th</sup> of July weekend of 1975 Jack won his first SCCA National Race at Ponca City Oklahoma. He would race this car until 1978 when he built an Alfa Romeo Spider Junior for the G Production Class. Driving the Spider Junior Jack won the June Sprints at Road America in both 1979 and 1982. He also finished on the podium at the SCCA Nationals with third place finishes in 1981 and again in 1983. In 1984 after wrecking the car at the memorial day weekend races at Riverside, California, they rebuilt the GTA Jr. in eight days and went on to win 4 SCCA GT5 national races in 1984.

Jack decided to build a car for the newly created GT5 class which would allow space frame construction. With the help of Alex MacLean, a mechanical engineer and Formula Atlantic driver, and a good friend Mike Holland they built the car that would become synonymous with Jack Beck, the Alfa Romeo. In June 1985 the combination of Jack Beck and his newly completed Alfa Romeo won their first race together. For the next 21 seasons this car with multiple changes remained competitive. In 1989 the combination won the June Sprints at Road America, they would finish on the podium at the SCCA Runoffs in 3<sup>rd</sup> place 3 times and would win a whole host of Midwest Division GT5 National Championships. The GT Junior was retired August 21, 2005 setting a qualifying record, a track record and winning the Production and GT Race at Mid America Raceway in Pacific Junction, Iowa. It also just happened to be Jack's 60<sup>th</sup> birthday.

In his racing career, Jack would win 20 Midwest Division National Points Championships, 3 with the NEOKLA region of the division and the last 17 with the Nebraska region. In addition, Jack finished on the podium 5 times at the SCCA National Runoffs won the June Sprints three times, as was selected 6 times as the Nebraska Regions National Competition Driver of the Year.

Jack said that he could have not made it happen without his wife and soul mate Judy, who in addition to being quite a race driver herself (winning several Regional Championships, herself), did most of the driving of the two vehicles during the nights on the road as well as timing, scoring and radio communications to the driver. She also took spares and supplies to the hot pits and fed the crew as well. There was also Rick Young, who built the body work and crewed for Beck for years, Alex MacLean who designed the chassis and suspension, Bill Preheim who fabricated the chassis built the suspension and still helps out, Mike Holland who helped out for years, Gary Segatti the best hired gun Jack has ever met, the late Bob Hubbard, Gary Goracke who helped clients to multiple championships, John Cullen, Jack's long time assistant, Bill Vice who does the machining and cylinder head work, Rick Romans who prepared the crankshafts and Curt Westland who worked for Jack for many years, as well as a host of others.

But driving is only part of the Jack Beck story. In 1986 on moving to Omaha, Jack incorporated Orion Engineering. His success in racing had resulted in requests for engines, gearboxes, and suspension components from fellow racers. While holding a full time job at AMOCO, Jack's moonlighting of building components for others had gotten to be a bit overwhelming, and so Orion was formed.

Orion began to do car preparation, transport and trackside service for Vintage Racing Clients. They restored and prepared several cars for clients such as Courtney Whitlock of Springfield, Missouri and Bob Baker of Omaha. This service quickly grew to include other vintage racers. Throughout the 1990's, Orion provided the car preparation, transport and trackside services for multiple clients both in the vintage racing area and also for SCCA Club racers as well and they did as many as 23 event weekends at tracks from one coast to the other.

SCCA Clients included Dick Salem of Lincoln and Paul Lerman of St. Louis, Missouri. Orion's SCCA club racing clients won multiple Midwest Division National Championships. In 2000 wanting to downsize from a hectic schedule, Orion reduced it's participation to a few Vintage events for fewer clients while continuing to support Dick Salem's SCCA Porsche 911 through the 2002 season. In 2000, Orion started to do the race preparation, transportation, and trackside service for the MG Midget of Dick Davis of Fulton, Missouri. Dick raced the MG Midget through the 2005 season winning four SCCA Midwest Division National Championships and finishing on the podium at the SCCA Runoffs.

In thirty-six years of racing Jack says he has been blessed with many accomplishments. Being able to perform at a high level, both in his own racing and on behalf of his customers. Being able to master left foot braking at the young age of 55. Being able to visit and race on most of the premier Road Race Circuits in the United States has been an honor in itself. Surviving the hundreds of thousands of transport miles through the nights, rainstorms, heat and blizzards without a wreck or damage to a customers' car.

Some of the highlights of his career that stand out are: Winning his first National race at Ponca City, Oklahoma in 1975. Winning the June Sprints for the first time in 1979 in the Alfa Romeo Spider that had been involved in a serious wreck the week before at Hutchinson, Kansas. Watching his wife Judy winning the reopening race at Continental Divide Raceway in 1980. Being involved with the Ferrari owned by Bob Baker. Jack was responsible for

maintaining the car and also along with his wife Judy transporting the car to the 1994 Monterey Historic Races. Jack said, "I felt like we were transporting the Crown Jewels in a brown paper bag." This car was the marquee attraction at the historical races that year and was the first Ferrari to win the 24 hours of LeMans. Jack with Judy at his side actually got to drive the car around the historic Laguna Seca race course. Jack said "what a way to take your first laps around such a famous course."

The 2002 SSCA Runoffs, running in the GT-5 class. Despite being involved in an accident on the race track Jack was able to get back on the track and with a tremendous drive end up with a podium finish.

Today, Jack still operates Orion Motorsports on North 168<sup>th</sup> Street in the Northwest Suburbs of Omaha. Orion continues to supply engines, gearboxes, racing components and services for racing clients throughout the country.

For more on Jack see Exhaust Notes January 2006 pg.6 and November 2006 pg.2



Lake Garnett - 1972



MidAmerica Raceway 1976



Hallet - 1977



RunOffs 1996



MidAmerica Motorplex  
August 2005



MidAmerica Motorplex  
August 2005