

NATIONAL SPRINT CAR HALL of FAME & MUSEUM

LEO KRASEK

Leo Krasek, who was born on November 15, 1893, was a master machinist who lived in the Chicago (Ill.) area. He built, wrenched and owned 'big cars' in the 1920's, '30s and '40s, mostly utilizing engines of his own construction. They were numbered K-4, they weren't particularly attractive, but they were fast on the 'big car' circuits of the time.

During the Twenties, at a race at Crown Point (Ind.), Leo's hand-crafted car, piloted by "Cowboy" Hardy, turned third fastest time, won the second heat and won the main event over cars like Frank Swigert in Arthur Chevrolet's D.O. Fronty and Gus Schrader in the Kinsey D.O. Fronty.

In fact, it is said that the engine he built with an Overland block and his own single overhead cam Fronty regularly beat the 'factory' Fronty's. And his DOHC engine designed from the Gallivan patterns regularly beat the Gallivan-powered cars. However, the engine that he is most noted for is his single overhead cam, 4-cylinder 212 cubic inch

powerplant with its 12:1 compression. The crank and rods were machined by Krasek, with the dry sump supplied by a 4-gallon tank in the cowl, and a built-in oil cooler on the intake side of engine. The Krasek cam was twisted by gears, not a chain, and the Winfield carbs were modified by Leo.

Melvin "Slim" Rutherford was one of many drivers who achieved success driving for Leo "For Christ Sake" Krasek. Other drivers included Bill Schindler, D.D. Morris, "Cowboy" Hardy, Pete Romceovich, Louis Tomei, Harris Insinger, Walt Trevelyan, Les Ford, Everett Rice, Howard "Speed" Adams, Howard "Buck" Whitmer, "Tex" Petersen, and Mike Szalai (a.k.a. Mike Szaloi or Mike Salay). His last driver in the early 1950's, after Leo experimented with torsion bars on the rear and a cross-spring on the front of his K-4, was Don Freeland. It is said that in scouting new driving talent, Krasek always looked for the strongest boy behind the plow.

His most successful seasons were in 1931 and '32, with Bryan Saulpaugh of Rock Island (Ill.) behind the wheel. In 1946, at a Central States Racing Association (CSRA) 100-lapper at Mitchell (Ind.), Krasek's driver "Fritz" Tegtmeier had a two-lap lead on the field at the end. And at an event at Jungle Park Speedway in Rockville (Ind.), Gus Schrader won a thriller over Mike Salay by inches!

Not only did Krasek compete in the Midwest, but he also took his cars to the coasts. Both Bob Carey and Al Gordon drove for Leo in winter appearances at Legion Ascot in California.

Leo Krasek held several patents for his automotive designs and would often go to court to battle "infringements" by other mechanics on his ideas.

Krasek was also a positive influence on both Andy and Vince Granatelli, who live but a half-block away, across the street from Leo. Krasek, who died on January 18, 1971, was buried at the Bohemian National Cemetery in Chicago.