

## Buster Burt – An Improbable Racing Career



Arthur "Buster" Burt is living proof that the racers from the far north can compete on an equal footing with the southern "hot shoes". During his induction into the Maine Motorsports Hall of Fame in 2006, Buster was described as being "the first Maine driver to make it in the South," a fitting tag line to his long history of success on Florida's short tracks in the 1950s, 1960s, and 1970s. But one of the most interesting aspects of his decades-long racing career is the incident that started it all, back in 1949. Buster and a few friends had travelled to Oxford, Maine's Norway Fairgrounds Speedway for a regular night of racing, and his attention was caught by an announcement that, since there were only a few cars signed up for the race, anyone in the stands willing to run their car in the feature was welcomed to join the field. Bolting from the stands, Buster wheeled his 1940 Ford Coupe to the starting line, and roared

to a fifth place finish. More importantly, from that point on, he was hooked! In fact, that same day, on the way home from the track, he purchased his first stock car—a 1935 Ford that he set up to run on a variety of Maine dirt tracks, including Norway, Lewiston, Windsor, and Oxford Plains. He built a highly-respected track record at these tracks during the 1949-1951 period.

In 1951, at the end of the racing season, Buster joined the Air Force-Strategic Air Command, and his racing career took a major turn. With his immediate relocation to Orlando, Buster quickly became acquainted with the legendary tracks of Central Florida. Being an aircraft mechanic meant frequent periods of inactivity, so Buster and a group of friends naturally began to investigate local racing venues, eventually building a car to race at tracks like Sunbrock, Eau Gallie, Lakeland, Ocala, and Deland. It was at Deland that he became acquainted with legendary Florida racer Glenn "Fireball" Roberts, and it was this experience that enabled Buster to continue his success in a climate far different from Maine!

During his 20 year military career, Buster was able to race intermittently, although his frequent deployments to overseas operations prohibited him from making a championship bid at any of the tracks he ran. He continued to race whenever he could, and he continued to build a resume of success against such Florida standouts of the time as Phil Orr, Dick Joslin, Bobby Dawson, Rosebud Flowers, and Buzzie and Emil Reutimann. Buster's career included racing on the Daytona International Speedway's predecessor track—the four mile combination beach/road course. He drove there in 1956, 1957, and 1958 and, in fact, drove the last race on that course. He then drove in 1959 in the first race on the newly constructed super speedway, piloting a Smokey Yunick-prepared Plymouth.

One of the all-time highlights of Buster's career was a 1956 win at Lakeland Speedway, when he bested the likes of Emil Reutimann and Phil Orr in a 100-lap event in which he was the only flathead stock car in a field of modifieds. Because he was under-classed, he was assigned to start on the pole and, with a light rain falling, Buster was able to hug the lower line and avoid sliding, while the high-powered modifieds

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could not get the traction to pass him. He paced the field for the full 100 laps, winning \$100 (a big purse in those days) over a frustrated field of big block drivers.

Buster retired from stock car racing in the late 1980s, but he didn't retire from the sport. In 1990 and 1991, he and his wife Zoe Ann joined the Roush Racing organization and signed on to drive the hauler for Mark Martin's No. 6 show car. On one of the show stops, Buster's eye caught something called a "Legend Car" and, once again, the race was on. He bought a Legend car and competed in the Maine Legend Circuit for several years and in 1996, after a serious accident and substantial injury, he assumed the position of Race Director for the Maine Association of Legend Cars and Racing, a position he held for several years.

These days, Buster is still active in racing, serving on the Board of Directors of The Villages Motor Racing Fan Club. He was inducted into that organization's Hall of Fame in 2006, and still has that "drive to drive." In fact, at this writing, he is contemplating a return to the track in a go-kart as part of racing club event this spring. As Buster says, "Once you have the racing bug, you never lose it!"



Buster Burt is known as one of the sport's true gentlemen and a pioneer of the early days of stock car racing in Florida and his home state of Maine.