

Hewitt Entertains Crowd at Villages Club

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By Steve Trivett

Jack Hewitt kept the crowd on the edge of their seats for much of his stellar auto-racing career.

He had them rolling in the aisles during a meeting of The Villages Motor Racing Fan Club on Wednesday evening at Colony Cottage Recreation Center.

"Before I say anything, I need to warn you that I'm not rated G and I'm not politically correct," said Hewitt, one of the most famous names in the history of United States Auto Club racing. "But I've stories up the ying-yang."

Yes, he does – much to the delight of the crowd of more than 100 that filled the room. And he told most of them.

To say that Hewitt is a throwback is to say that belonging to the auto racing fraternity is not for the faint of heart.

He's had his neck broken twice.

On at least one occasion, he's caught on fire – that's right, on fire.

"We were running at the Fairgrounds at Indianapolis when something blew and there were flames everywhere," he recalled. "The fire-fighting guys came over and turned all of their extinguishers on the car.

"I had gotten out and I'm yelling, 'But what about me!' The only part of my neck that wasn't burned was where the strap of my helmet went under my chin, and my feet were on fire. But I'm still here to tell about it."

Tell you about it he will – and he's one of those who can talk the talk because he walked the walk.

In 1998, he won the USAC Sprint Car, USAC Midget Car, USAC Silver Crown and UMP Modified at Eldora (Ohio) Speedway to become the first and only driver to win all four divisions of racing at the 4-Crown Nationals.

That same year, he also ran the Indianapolis 500, where he finished 12th.

"That was my only time at the 500," Hewitt said. "I said a couple of things I guess they thought weren't politically correct and they didn't invite me back."

But that didn't stop him from being inducted into the National Sprint Car Hall of Fame in 2002.

And despite the fact that his injuries have limited his physical mobility, he can't bring himself to officially retire.

"A lot of people think I've had a stroke, said Hewitt, who has lost function in his right arm and limbs on his right leg when he walks. "But I didn't. It all came from those broken necks."

He last drove in competition in September – "I put honey on the steering wheel so I could steer with just one hand" – but most of the time now gets his behind-the-wheel fix horsing a two-seater sprint car where his passengers get the thrill of sliding through corners and eating dirt.

"Eating dirt must be good for you," he said. "Because I've eaten enough of it."



Peter Trivett / Daily Sun
Legendary driver Jack Hewitt chats with members of The Villages Motor Racing Fan Club at Colony Cottage Recreation Center on Wednesday.

But the biggest surprise of the evening came when Villagers Billy and Kim Garcia approached Hewitt carrying a scrapbook that dated back to the early 1980s.

And there in living color were Billy and Jack going all out wheel-to-wheel in competition.

“He raced mostly in the East and I was running out West,” said Billy. “But we ran into each other a couple times at the Circuit of Champions in the World of Outlaws series. We had a lot of good times together.”

And the good times haven’t stopped for Hewitt.

“If I had a chance to go back and do it all again I wouldn’t change a thing,” Hewitt said. “When you decided to race cars, you know what might be coming.”

“A lot of things don’t work the way they once did, but I’m still grinning.”

And still talking – telling those stories that racing fans want to hear.

“I could be the slowest guy on the track right now but I would still have the biggest smile,” he said.

“I’ve broken my neck twice and that has caused other physical problems, but the jaw still works.”

Yes, it does.