

By Scott Kindberg
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Film On Racing Legend To Premiere May 31

Randy Anderson is a lifelong fan of auto racing and arguably the area's most noted historian on the subject. So when the Lakewood resident was asked earlier this week who he most wanted to see during his weekly treks to Stateline Speedway during his formative years, the answer was a no-brainer.

"Bob Schnars was my hero as a kid," said Anderson, 65, "because he won all the time. That's what every fan wants. You want to be on the winning team, don't you?"

Boy, was Schnars ever a winner.

Although he competed at many other race tracks from 1955-77, Schnars' main focus was at the Kortwright Road oval in Busti and its sister track, Eriez Speedway in Hammett, Pa. In two decades of racing, Schnars racked up 181 feature race victories and 25 track championships on the Stateline-Eriez circuit.

"When you're talking about 'The King' of Stateline it will always be Bob as far as I'm concerned," Anderson said. "I think Dick (Barton) would say that, too. Dick doesn't want to be known as 'The King' of Stateline. I think he wants to be known as the guy who beat 'The King' (wins) record, but he doesn't want to be the 'The King'."

After all, the figurative throne has room for only one person.

The Robert H. Jackson Center, located at 305 E. 4th St. in Jamestown, will premier "Busti Bobby," a documentary film chronicling Schnars' legendary career, at 2 p.m., Sunday May 31. The movie, written and produced by Anderson and fellow Lakewood residents Greg Peterson and Randy Sweeney, highlights Schnars' achievements at Stateline.

Using videotaped interviews with Schnars, his former pit crew, dozens of other racers, the priceless picture collections of racing photographers Gordon Mahan and Olen Seidler, plus vintage home movies, the filmmakers have brought to the screen the fantastic racing years of the man known far and wide for his talent behind the steering wheel of his famous M-1 car.

The three local men, who have previously produced "Stateline Speedway: The First 10 Years" and "Squirt" Johns, finished work on the Schnars movie over the winter, with assistance from Jay Crosby of PC Projects in Jamestown.

“It was only natural that we go to Bob Schnars next,” Anderson said. “We went to Squirt second because we had done a two-hour interview with him so we had a ton of material and it was a relatively easy one to do. We didn’t have as much material on Bob in the can, but we have since interviewed him and his crew, and we now felt we did have enough material to do that.

“You can’t tell the story of Stateline Speedway without telling the story of Bob Schnars. He has a huge following. The guy hasn’t raced up there for 35 years, but when you go up to Stateline and you say ‘Bobby,’ you don’t even have to say his last name, because everyone knows who you are talking about.”

Anderson had never met Schnars during the latter’s racing days. In fact, their first personal contact was nearly 20 years after Schnars’ retirement.

“Dick Barton introduced me to Bob (in 1996),” Anderson said. “To me, (Schnars) was like on some mountaintop, like he was unapproachable.”

Anderson, who was part of Barton’s race team for years, quickly discovered that Schnars has always been among the most approachable guys around.

“Our race team was sponsored by McFadden Ford at the time,” Anderson recalled, “and I was trying to think of a way to activate our McFadden sponsorship at the race track. I thought, ‘Well, if you try and do a big event, what would generate a lot of interest?’”

Guess what?

Anything with Bob Schnars name attached to it was a big thing, so with Barton’s cooperation, the two racing legends competed in a match race at Stateline.

“The people loved it,” Anderson said.

He also thinks the racing fans who attend the “Busti Bobby” documentary premier on May 31 will love it, too. Admission at the Jackson Center that day will be free. Seventy-two minutes in length, the film will be followed by a question-and-answer session. DVDs, priced at \$20, will also be available for sale. All proceeds from the sale go back into the Stateline Legacy Fund, which is managed at the Chautauqua Region Community Foundation.

“Even casual sports fans are going to have some recollection of the name Bob Schnars,” Anderson said. “Why should they (attend the premiere)? You’re hearing about somebody’s career in their own words. You can’t beat that. You aren’t picking up a book, you don’t have some voice-over guy talking about what Bob did. You’ve got Bob saying, ‘I did this,’ his crew saying, ‘We did this’ and you’ve got his competitors saying, ‘Bobby did this, because I was in the race and I know he did these things.’”

“It’s first-person oral history and that’s what every historian is after. Randy, Greg and I have great interest in history in general and the history of Stateline Speedway in particular.”