



Introduction:

Leonard Janke joined Nebraska Region in August 1956 and went racing. He raced a Chev-Healey or an Austin Healey (green), EP #77, in club racing at Greenwood Roadway and Lake Garnett. Later he ran a Camaro in the 1970's (yellow-orange). (see photo pages)

Leonard also drove USSRC in 1968 in a McLaren at Riverside, Laguna Seca, Bridgehampton and Mid Ohio. He also drove CanAm in 1968 and 1969 in a Lola T1 and the McLaren at Watkins Glen, Edmonton, Road America, Michigan, Riverside and Texas International. He is even listed in Wikipedia as a

Can Am Driver of that period. The web says he also raced a 750 Monza. He has raced in England (stationed there while in the Air Force), as well as the USA.

“The McLaren MK3 was red-orange. Numbers varied - whatever they assigned. I remember running 33 and 77 and maybe numbers in the 50's to #56. I also drove MK8.”

He and his wife, Bonnie have kept in contact with their friends from the Can Am days and still love racing.

Are they retired? Not really. You see them both at MAM from time to time with son Harold, who is also a driver in club racing. Bonnie works hospitality and we even got her to work tech in 2008. And Leonard, occasionally drives the pace car.

For more on Leonard see Exhaust Notes, August 2001 pg.1



Leonard Janke

Driver

by Leonard Janke

Born April 16, 1930, the youngest of seven kids by eight years, on a family farm south of Winside, NE., I lived a fairly secluded childhood. In the late 1930s I got my first taste of racing when I was able to accompany my parents, sister and brother-in-law to the Nebraska State Fair in Lincoln. Although the family did not spend the money to attend the races, I could hear the roar of the engines and actually was hit by mud thrown over the fence. The sound and fury instilled in me a passion to be a part of racing that I have never lost to this day.

During my high school years I faithfully read *Popular Science*, which had Tom McCall's automotive tests and flamboyant accounts of great races like the 24 hours of Le Mans, which kept fueling my racing desire. I also drove the family car much faster than my father ever realized and had some friendly run-ins with Gerald Bruggeman, a Nebraska Auto Racing Hall of Fame inductee.

In March of 1951, I enlisted in the Air Force. At Sandia AFB in Albuquerque, NM., most every weekend we attended the stock car races, with the Unser brothers the main attractions. In November I was shipped to England for new duties. Knowing that the Le Mans race was in June, I decided to attend. Briggs Cunningham was competing in the C-5 cars, and with passes for the walkway above the pit boxes, I was able to observe Briggs and his drivers, John Fitch,



Bill Spear and Phil Walter, and also my favorite writer, Tom McCall. The race was unreal to me, with the very high speeds, especially on the Mulsanne straight at night when the cars' headlights were the only light.

Some time after returning from Le Mans, I purchased a 1952 Morris Minor and joined some English motor clubs and started to compete in speed trials and rallies and ran my first road race at the famed Goodwood track. I also raced at Silverstone, where at these events, people like Sterling Moss and Mike Hawthorne were also racing. In the course of these events I was able to win the American Challenge trophy and London Motor Club London Rally, England's major rally at that time. At the Motor Club's year-end awards banquet I was awarded the Challenge Cup by Mrs. Sidney Allard. I became an honorary member of the Cambridge University Motor Club and friends with Brian Lister, Archie Scott Brown and Don Moore.

Also during my English tour, an American, Mr. Pugh, put together the first stock car race ever to be held in London. Because of my English motorsports activities, I was recruited as a driver. I was running second in the feature race and gaining on the leader with a few laps to go when attempting to get by a pileup, I cut

down a tire.

When assigned back in the states in December 1955, I was mentioned in England Autosport Magazine for my racing efforts.

Just a few months before returning to the U.S., I sold the Morris and purchased an Austin Healey 100, which I still have.

I was discharged from the Air Force in February 1955 and upon returning to Nebraska, I met Loyal Katskee, an inductee in the Nebraska Auto Racing Hall of Fame. Katskee suggested I join the local SCCA club. I did some SCCA racing in the Austin Healey. I was able to win a few races and run high enough to finish somewhere in the top 10 in the National rankings most every year.

Then, in 1968, we purchased a two-year-old McLaren Mk. III and started competing against the best drivers in the world. We raced a SCCA National race in Texas first to get the feel of the car and after a cautious start worked through the field and won the race. The next race was Riverside, CA., and I was somewhat intimidated coming down the back straight at about 180 mph then entering the last turn. I drove as hard as I could and finished ninth in my first big-time pro start. A week later, Laguna Seca yielded an 11th, then a fourth at Bridgehampton, NY.

In 1969 I ran nine of the 11 Can-Am races against a great field of competitors and finished 16th in both points and money earned. My best race was the last of the season, due largely to some super tires Firestone had come up with for Mario Andretti and myself. I finished ninth behind Bruce McLaren, George Eaton, Jack Brabham, Jo Siffert, Chuck Parsons, Lothar Motschenbacher, Dave Clausey and Tony Dean.

In 1970 I purchased a 454 engine for the McLaren Mk. III. At Mid-Ohio I was running well up in the pack when I went by the pits and

forgot to shut off for turn one and stuffed the Mk. III into a guard rail. This put a stop to our Can-Am racing for 1970, since we did not have the finances to regroup. We then purchased a 1968 Camaro and ran it a few times, doing well enough to win the regional championship in 1973.

Then the desire hit and another McLaren was acquired, and we ran several more Can-Am races with it, but by this time, the Porsche 917s had taken over. We were lured to a wildcat Can-Am race in Guadalajara, Mexico, on September 28, 1975. I was able to win there, with the local papers giving me the top billing over Muhammad Ali, who had won a championship fight the night before.

Can-Am then changed the rules to five-liter engines and the McLaren was not competitive with the lighter, single-seat cars that were winning, so we sold it and purchased a single-seat Lola, which ran pretty well until I crashed in Edmonton, Canada.

This brought about the last chapter in my racing career, as we purchased a Buick Somerset Trans-Am car.

In June 1957 I married my wife, Bonnie, and in May 1959 we had a daughter, Kristen. In November 1960 we had a son, Harold. Bonnie became the business manager for my car dealership and became a valuable asset to both the business and our racing efforts, as she has been with me at all the races and many times acted as crew chief. Harold and I took turns driving the Buick Somerset in Tran-Am races and Harold won a SCCA race at Glenwood, IA., in the car in 2002.

I have been on the track with most of the great drivers of the 1960s and 1970s. It's been an awesome drive.



1964 Greenwood Races



1964
Garnett
Races



Lake Garnett - 1972



Leonard's
McLaren
without the body



Leonard Patc Bonnie
and yes, the boy is Harold