

## 2012 EL PASO ATHLETIC HALL OF FAME NOMINEE

### Frank Pedregon Sr. (Posthumous)

### Motor Sports – Drag Racing

Candidate

Sports Classification

Date: March 5, 2012

Proposed by: Eddie Cordero

Personal Information:

Family: Wife – Dora Pedregon

Sons – Cruz Pedregon

Tony Pedregon

Frank Pedregon Jr

From time to time there comes along a person who accomplished so much during his lifetime in a sport considered so extreme that many El Pasoans would be surprised to discover where his roots actually began. Sometimes those accomplishments may have easily been overlooked because in this case many El Pasoans may have never witnessed or experienced firsthand the things he had become famous for. This is exactly what has happened to a former El Pasoan who raced during the 1960s in the extreme sport of Nitro Fuel drag racing.

Names of legendary racers have often been mentioned as examples of people who contributed significantly to improve the sport of racing or in their endeavors of becoming pioneers in the sport. Frank Pedregon Sr, is a prime example of that individual who did so much early in drag racing, but sadly enough has not received the accolades he so richly deserves for his years spent racing in Nitro Fuel class. Nitro Fuel racing in the 1960s was the upper echelon of drag racing during the infancy of the sport. Today it is simply known in the National Hot Rod Association (NHRA) as Top Fuel dragsters and Fuel Funny Cars. This is the elite professional class that runs what's called the poor man's rocket fuel known as Nitro Methane.

Frank was born in 1940 in El Paso and grew up in the lower valley. Frank literally spent most of his formative years in El Paso, during the early 1950s, where competitive drag racing had not yet reached any height of popularity. He worked many odd jobs but learned to be a craftsman and make do with very little. He had the uncanny ability to fix and fabricate parts with what he had at his disposal and often made things work just as good as if they were new. This obviously carried over into his love of racing and his own cars and making them perform better than others. During his early adult life Frank left El Paso as his love of the sport of organized drag

racing was still in its infancy in El Paso and had not reached any level of competitive racing. He moved to San Antonio where he met and married his wife Dora. His up and coming trucking business finally had him move out of San Antonio and settle down in California.

As his business got off the ground so did his desire to race in the Nitro Fuel class. His budget was limited as Frank would have to simply build the engine and chassis to his front engine Fiat Coupe even down to the trailer he towed it with. Nitro Fuel drag racing during the 1960s was considered an extreme sport due to the fact that not much was first known regarding the dangers and challenges drivers were faced with while piloting these dragsters. His Fiat Coupe though has been well documented throughout the early years of drag racing in record books and the internet.

His competitiveness had him begin racing in match races throughout Southern California and began making a name for himself. He was nicknamed "Flamin Frank" Pedregon by his fans because of his forever held secret of the way he would set his rear tires afire during his runs down the 1/4 mile drag strip. Nobody could ever duplicate this remarkable stunt that only Frank could do.

He was also known for his macabre sense of humor in a race car. One race in San Fernando Raceway in 1964, Frank's car ran off the end of the track into a fence and out into the weeds in a ball of dust. When emergency staff and track officials rushed to where the dragster had finally stopped tumbling they were accosted by a grisly sight, Frank was found lying face down with arms stretched out. As they reached Frank, he jumped to his feet with a roar and begins laughing, pointing and howling how he had fooled them faking his own death to his own wicked amusement.

Frank also was so proud of this Mexican heritage that he called his car the "Taco Taster" and even billed himself as the "World's Fastest Mexican".

By the mid 1970s, Flamin Frank had hung up his fire suit and began concentrating on his trucking business. His connections ran from Texas to California and even into Mexico and he had taken use of a private place for these business trips. On a particular trip into Mexico in the early 1980s, Frank's plane crashed near a highway that led into a villa. The crash had severed his arm, and he bled profusely, yet he managed to make it to the highway, whereupon he had to make a decision. Unfortunately, in his confusion, Frank took the road less traveled, walking away from any possible medical help in the nearby town. This time he didn't fake his death and the era of an El Pasoan that had made a his name known in professional drag racing came to an end.

Fans of the sport remember Flamin Frank Pedregon from his 1960s heyday, a man who wowed many fans with his fiery hi-jinks on the racetrack but inevitably died much too young in a plane crash. While his life was cut short at a much too young age, the legacy that Frank Pedregon Sr, left behind is what is so amazing.

And while the life of a father inevitably influences that of his sons, no one could have predicted that "Flamin Frank's" sons – Cruz, Tony and Frank Jr, - would someday each own independent race teams and drive their own NHRA Full Throttle Series' Funny Car entries backed by corporate sponsors on drag strips throughout the country.

His sons began their careers in racing by starting out as crewmen on different Nitro teams learning from the bottom up and climbing the ladder to become some of the most respected and feared Funny Car drivers in the sport today.

Memories, dreams and admiration also drove Cruz and Tony to honor the achievements of their innovative father's dragster. A vision that might have come out of nowhere, as Frank literally spent most of his formative years in El Paso, during the early 1950s, where competitive drag racing had not yet reached any height of popularity. Then in 2005 Cruz & Tony used the same hard work and determination they were instilled with as children to help re-create their father's dream – The legendary front engine Fiat Coupe. The care has since been displayed at many racetracks around the country to remind the fans of the car that propelled Frank into the record books.

As further testament to the pedigree of Frank Sr, his sons Cruz and Tony are former NHRA Fuel Funny Car World Champions! Cruz won his championships in 1992 and 2008 and Tony won his championships in 2003 and 2007. Both brothers won their first championships while driving for other team owners but their second championship titles were even sweeter as they won them as independent owners/drivers of their respective teams. This caliber of championship supremacy is the equivalent of the glory and glamour of winning the Super Bowl in football or the World Series in baseball but instead it's in the awe-inspiring, earth-shaking, mind-boggling, ear-splitting 8000 horsepower sport of Nitro-burning Drag Racing. In comparison to racing this is the same as a driver winning the NASCAR championship.

As another example of the legacy that Frank's bloodline has left in this sport: From 1990 to 2008, only four men have won the Nitro Funny Car Championship and two of those men just so happen to be the sons of Frank Pedregon Sr. This is an NHRA record that only the Pedregon family can claim.

So for the many things Frank Pedregon Sr, accomplished during his lifetime and of the work ethic and determination he passed on to his children that helped mold them into becoming World Champions, it would only be fitting to honor this legendary El Pasoan in the El Paso Athletic Hall of Fame and make the city of El Paso even prouder.

The following is an excerpt of the plaque that was posthumously awarded to Frank Sr, after being inducted into the International Drag Racing Hall of Fame, on March 6, 1997 in Gainesville, Florida:

*Although he was almost exclusively a local Southern California racer, nearly every fan of drag racing in the '60s has heard the legend of "Flamin Frank" Pedregon. Frank's "Taco Taster" competition coupe (actually a fuel dragster thinly disguised with a radically chopped Fiat body) would often produce flames completely filling the rear wheel wells and surround the slick in a ring of fire as the Chrysler powered coupe thundered down the strip at Lions or San Fernando. Showmanship was coming into the sport and eventually gasoline and other additives were used to produce short but spectacular "fire burnouts". Pedregon apparently used no chemicals and often produced fire nearly the entire length of the strip. Frank was not just a showman but a hard racer on a limited budget. He built his own engines, chassis and even the trailers they were hauled on. Fiercely proud of his Mexican ancestry, he billed himself as "the World's Fastest Mexican" and wore t-shirts advertising "Genuine Mexican Parts". The flames, he claimed, were caused by "just good old Mexican horsepower". He later teamed up to drive Joe Winter's top fuel dragsters, but when Winter's health began to fail and he eventually lost his battle with cancer, Frank lost his desire to race. Pedregon subsequently lost his life in a private plane crash but left the sport a tremendous legacy of three fine racers in their own right, sons Frank, Jr, Cruz and Tony."*

*Tommy Pedregon*

*Tommy Cruz*

*Frank Jr.*

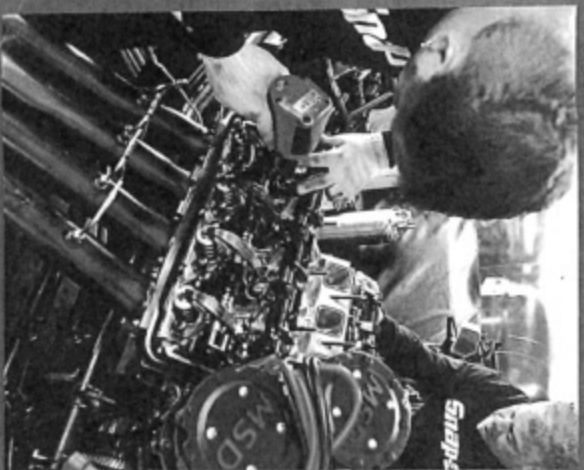


Jim Kelly photo

# Match Race Madness Collection

"Flaming Frank" Pedregon  
Back when his sons Cruz, Tony, and Frank  
Jr. were much too young to drive, "Flaming  
Frank" was lighting the fires all the way  
down the quarter-mile. Fans who were lucky  
enough to see him do it are still talking  
about it.





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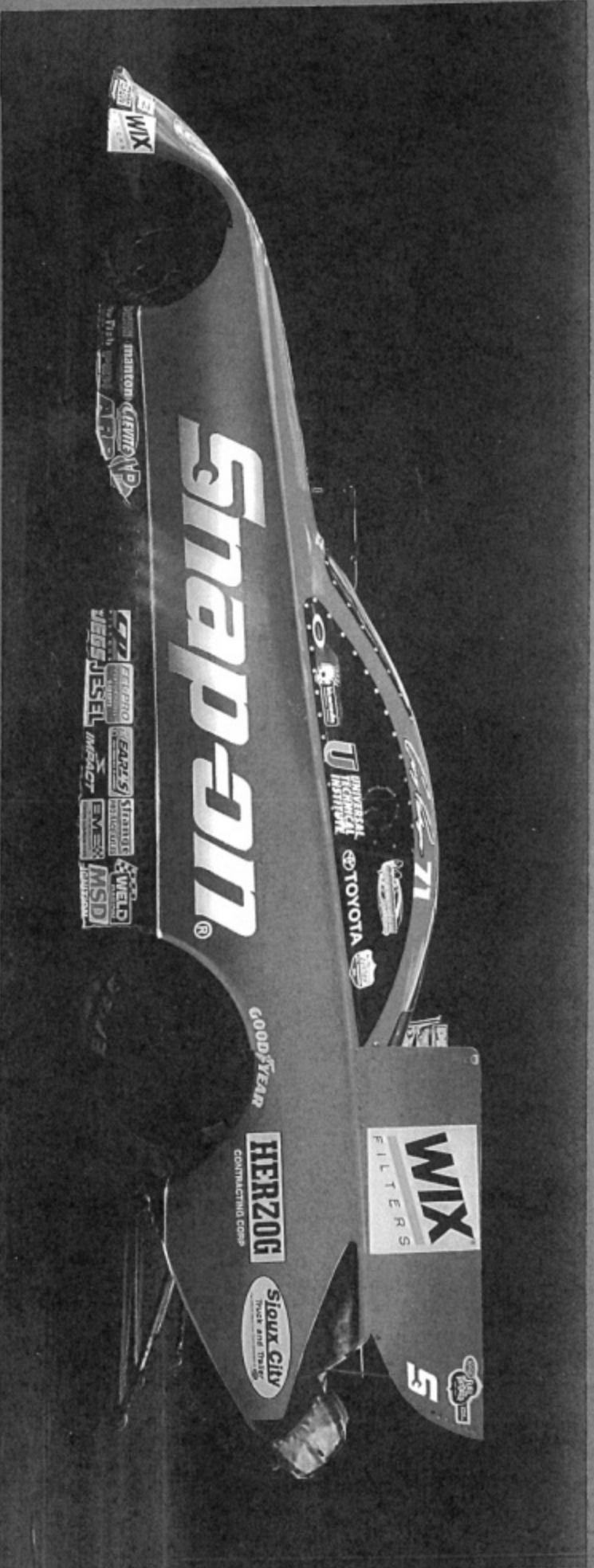


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