



Harry Groessel

"Granddad of El Paso Drag Racing"

Nominating Speech for Harry Groessel

It is time we looked at other sports criteria. We have never had a drag racer in the Hall of Fame.

It is my pleasure to nominate Harry Groessel for the El Paso Athletic Hall of Fame. Harry Groessel, the Grandfather of El Paso Drag Racing is an athlete who has competed in his sport continuously for 51 years without missing a single season and always as a top contender in his sport of drag racing. With a passionate interest in mechanical things and speed, drag racing was a very good fit for him.

As a part of El Paso County history, Harry started Drag Racing at El Paso's first sanctioned drag strip in 1957 – Enchantment Park, located behind the present-day horse track. His first racing cars were Hudsons. In fact, he raced a 1954 Hudson Hornet until 1973. In 1973, he began to race a 1972 yellow Javelin which he continued to race for 35 consecutive years. This is a world record for continuous seasons for a drag racing car. As far as it is possible to ascertain, 51 continuous years of drag racing is also a world record.

El Paso Drag racing is almost as old as the El Paso Athletic Hall of Fame. Drag racing is supported and enjoyed by many El Paso fans. As many as 4,000 spectators watched anywhere from 35 to 150 drivers in the drag races in El Paso that Harry took part in. Many companies and individuals sponsor some racecars. Fans love to see their family and friends race and love the fast starts and the speed of the cars on one-eighth and one-quarter mile tracks. Harry loves the competition and the fast speeds but he liked winning more than he did going fast. Currently, drag racing can be seen on ESPN-2 on TV. The closest drag strip is the El Paso MetroPlex at Clint.

When Harry also raced at the Texas MotorPlex in Ennis, Texas, where there were over 700 drivers all together.

He dominated the sport in El Paso and the southwest area for 35 years.

6 Time Texas Champion – NHRA (National Hot Rod Association)

6 Time New Mexico Champion – NHRA

7 time NHRA "Division 4" Champion

He won 18 Track Championships – - And, on 3 occasions he was track champion at 2 different tracks the same year.

At the age of 76, he finished 4th for the 2004 season of the SDRA (Southwest Drag Racing Association).

He has won about 200 trophies most of which he gave to neighborhood children or recycled back to the trophy company.

He is passionate about track drag racing and just as passionately against street racing. He has talked to young people and given them drag racing tips to try to get them to use the tracks instead of the streets. He additionally encourages all of the women he can to drag race and has trained several women to compete in the sport. He helps anyone who asks for help. He feels the sport is richer with more participants so he motivates and encourages anyone who wants to try.

Harry also raced at Holloman Air Force Base for about twenty-five years. In the early 1990's, Holloman had an Officer's challenge. Harry loaned his Javelin to a Colonel who had never raced before. Harry trained the Colonel who went on to win the officer's challenge while racing the Javelin and the officer won a very large trophy for his efforts.

Harry considers himself a role model for the young people who like drag racing and as such he has never consumed alcohol, smoked, or used any kind of controlled substance.

It is time to branch out and take in other sports just as this group did when we nominated the equestrian, Camille Whitfield horse rider in 1985. No drag racer has ever been elected to the Hall of Fame.

We would appreciate it if you would consider him for your vote for the athlete category.

Thank you.

EL PASO ATHLETIC HALL OF FAME

Candidate Information Sheet

Harry F. Groessel (Please check one)
Name living
() Deceased

Athletic
Sport Classification

9311 Daugherty Drive
Home Address

E. Barnard Polk
Submitted By

Retired from E. P. Fire Dept.
Business Address

3-4-2013
Date Submitted

El Paso, TX 79925
(915) 591-0466
City/State/Telephone No.

Date of Committee Approval

Personal Information

*(Family, friends, business associates available for information)
(Use additional sheet if needed & attach)*

Ray Griffin – El Paso Mazda (915-526-0453)
Ron Comeau – Mack Massey Jeep (915-584-9393)
Ben Guthrie – Guthrie Transmissions (915-584-6917)
Rick Peterson – Show-N-Go Auto (915-821-7277)

Sports Background

*(School(s) attended, sports honors and awards, records set, names of coaches, teammates, non-school teams played for, post school record-amateur or professional, sports club affiliations, etc.)
(Use additional sheet if needed & attach)*

Professional Drag Racing

48 Consecutive years of drag racing.

Dominated the southwest area for 35 years.

6 Time Texas Champion - NHRA

6 Time New Mexico Champion – NHRA

7 time NHRA "Division 4" Champion

18 Track Championships – 3 times he was track champion at 2 different tracks the same year.

DRAG RACING – In 1957, Harry started Drag Racing at El Paso's first sanctioned drag strip – Enchantment Park, located behind the present-day horse track. He is the only person in drag racing history to win a race by one ten thousands of a second - .0001. The year was 1992. In 2004, Harry completed his 48th consecutive year of drag racing competition and he is still competing in drag racing and shooting for 50 years.

General Information

Born November 19, 1928, in Marinette, WI. Moved to El Paso in April, 1945.
Graduated from Ysleta High School in 1947.

Sports Background, continued

DRAG RACING, continued. Since 1961 he has only had 2 race cars, a 1954 Hudson and a 1972 Javelin. His Javelin just finished its 32nd consecutive year of racing, which is a world record for a car. Harry has won about 200 trophies, some of which he donated to neighborhood children and friends and others which he donated back to the trophy shop for recycling. In fact, he just won a trophy for 4th place for 2004 racing season for SDRA (Southwest Drag Racing Association).

He was always interested in anything mechanical, cars, speed, and he is passionate about drag racing. He has always built his own engines and set up his own cars for racing. He has always helped new racers get started and gave them racing tips and pointers. He is just as passionate in hating street racing and tries to talk young people into racing at sanctioned tracks instead.

Athletic History

- | | |
|---------------------------------------|--|
| St. Mary's High School, Burlington WI | - BOXING TEAMS - Undefeated Freshman & Sophomore years |
| Ysleta High School, Ysleta, TX | - FOOTBALL – Half-back (running back), District Champion team of 1946. [Intercepted 4 passes as safety in one game.]
[At that time the teams played both ways, offense & defense.]
Played for Coach Gene Jordan. |
| | TRACK - 440 yard dash in 49 seconds; 440 relay anchor & one (1) mile relay anchor.

(Junior year ineligible for varsity sports due to transfer) |
| El Paso Natural Gas Co. | SOFTBALL – Short Stop, old industrial league. In one game 1950's with 4 times at bat, Harry hit 3 home runs and a triple. |
| El Paso Fire Department
1950's | SOFTBALL – Center field, old industrial league. One of his home run balls hit the lights on the left field light pole. He accounted for two of the outs of a triple play. |
| Amateurs Sports
1964-1989 | VOLLEY BALL – Organized a neighborhood volleyball team.
Harry continued to play until age 61. Played in an Industrial League. |
| Other Athletics | Several years of league bowling. Played hockey. Ice skating and roller skating. His whole life has been dedicated to various sports. |

General Information, continued

Married on December 16, 1950, to Connie Reynolds. He has 2 sons who are civil engineers. They and their families live out of state. He has 5 grand children and 7 great grandchildren.

Worked for the El Paso Natural Gas Company in 1952 - 1953, building the world's first turbine pumping stations at Cornudas and Hueco.

Went to work for the El Paso Fire Department in 1954 and retired in 1981. Spent six (6) years as Fire Department dispatcher. Harry worked as an instructor at the Fire Department training academy lecturing personnel, giving fire prevention speeches at area schools, training and/or retraining department personnel. Worked in the Fire Marshall's office as an investigator and inspector. He also worked as an officer on an engine company.

General Information, continued

In 1967, Harry invented a family board game, ARAY.

Also in 1967, he organized and was elected first President of the local chapter of the Hudson-Essex-Terraplane Club which has over 3,000 members worldwide. He served as President on several additional occasions and is currently vice president of this group. In 2001, the local chapter hosted its first Regional Meet which was attended by the National President and members from 11 states. Harry conducted a four (4) hour seminar on Performance Tuning the Hudson Hornet. The group President said this was the high light of the meet.

Harry is one of the organizers and leaders of the Ysleta Reunion Planning Committee. This began in 1997 with the class's 50th Reunion and has continued with annual reunions which have grown to include the 1930's, 1940's, and 1950's.

HARRY GROESSEL

Harry Groessel is the number one drag racer in El Paso County history!

For the first 56 years of the El Paso Athletic Hall of Fame, no athlete has ever been inducted into the Hall as a drag racer and drag racing has been legal and sanctioned in El Paso, County for the Past 56 years. Thousands of people have participated in drag racing in our County over the past 56 years.

Harry Groessel has participated in drag racing more years than any other El Pasoan. After more than 57 years of the Hall of Fame, we have the opportunity to recognize the sport of drag racing, as a significant part of athletics in our County of El Paso. **As many as 4,000 spectators regularly have attended the drag racing sessions; this is more than many sports including some football, basketball, baseball, softball, soccer volleyball games played throughout our County on the high school level.** This exceeds the attendance of the El Paso Sun Kings and the El Paso Diablos for the vast majority of their games.

Our high school sports are popular with us and the drag racing fans have been enthusiastic about this sport. High School and College sports have been coexisting along with drag racing in El Paso County for the past 55 years. Countless numbers of fans and participants have enjoyed drag racing as other fans have enjoyed high school, college and professional sports in our County.

Harry Groessel likes speed, but it is winning he loves. **Harry is referred to as the Grandfather of El Paso drag racing.** Harry began racing in 1957 at the age of 28, he is now 84. **He raced continuously for 51 years...without missing a year.** He developed a style that has allowed him to rack up hundreds of first-place trophies since he started racing in 1957. At first he gave the trophies to neighborhood children. When the pile got out of hand, he scooped them up and donated them to a store to reuse.

The funding for drag racing is private and from people who enjoy the sport of drag racing and want other people to enjoy it as well. **Drag racing is a sport which men and women can be participants and which can be enjoyable to all.**

This is not a sport which shows how fast you can drive your car on Dyer Street in El Paso against another driver at midnight on Friday before police officers arrive on the scene. This is a organized, legal and sanctioned sport competition to be enjoyed by both drivers and those who come to watch them in competition

In **Elapsed Time Bracket Racing**, you decide how fast your car will run before you make your first pass, which is called the "dial-in" time. You are not racing against the other driver... you are racing to make the time you estimated as close as possible

As drivers win races, they attain points. Some tracks name a champion every year based on points earned.

Groessel has collected 18 track championships. Three times, he was champion at two tracks in the same year.

He started out racing a Hudson. In 1973, he bought an American Motors' Javelin with 10,000 miles on it from a rental car agency. Those cars are pictured on the front of the resume. Each of them also served as his daily get-around-town cars.

Other racers put their precious cars into enclosed trailers and towed them to the track. Groessel bolted a towing hitch on the back of the Javelin so he could pull a small trailer carrying his racing tires and tools.

In 35 consecutive years of racing, driving to tracks as far away as Wisconsin and California, he has totaled 235,000 miles on the yellow Javelin.

His winning record, even with underpowered cars, is possible because he competes in bracket racing. The rules for bracket racing provide an equalizing handicap system allowing four-door Plymouths to match up with heavily modified muscle cars. The system rewards drivers who know their cars' capabilities and can shave tenths or thousandths of a second off the start.

Even though Harry has raced for 51 years he **dominated the southwest area of drag racing for 40 years.**

Harry is the first and only person in the country to win by one ten thousandth of a second! That record stood for 20 years!

People have said of Harry:

"I've raced (top fuel) dragsters. I've raced everything," Groessel said matter-of-factly. "I beat them all."

Over the years, track owners have asked him not to show up for races.

Refer to your resumes to the many articles that have been published about Harry. Even the **USA Today featured Harry with an article titled: "Granddad of El Paso racing still speedy at 80".**

Camille Whitfield who was inducted into the Hall of Fame in 1985 in the athlete category as an equestrian; was very deserving of Hall of Fame recognition and almost entirely in a class all her own. We believe now in 2013, that Harry Groessel is also very deserving of Hall of Fame recognition and entirely in a class all his own. He has been the most successful drag racer in El Paso over the past 51 years.

Camille earned her place in the hall of fame riding her horse so well and we believe that now Harry has earned his place in the hall of fame driving his car so well. Camille and Harry are outstanding athletes who were along for the "ride" on their way to the hall of fame. This year we believe it is Harry's turn to cross the finish line as a member of the El Paso Athletic Hall of Fame in the athlete category. The very best of the equestrian athletes in El Paso and the very best of the drag racers in El Paso both deserve their place in the El Paso Athletic Hall of Fame. Camille and Harry are the very best.

His resume describes his life and successes. Harry has kept his eyes on the road and stayed on track to the El Paso Athletic Hall of Fame. He has met the elapsed time and has won because he is the best.

Quick Facts about the History of El Paso Drag Racing

- **The first sanctioned drag strip in El Paso appeared in 1957. It was called Enchantment Park and was located in the Upper Valley Bosque about a mile from the present horse track.**
- **About 1960 Enchantment Park became Sunland Dragway and closed in 1964.**
- **In 1961 there was a track at Ascarate Park, but it did not last long.**
- **In 1967 John Barnett turned his private landing strip into a drag strip located on Montana-close to the Hueco Mountains. It was called El Paso Dragway and later, Thunder Alley. It closed in 2006.**
- **Presently, the only track is located off I-10 at the Clint exit. The next closest being in Deming, NM.**

EL PASO RETIRED FIREFIGHTERS ASSOCIATION

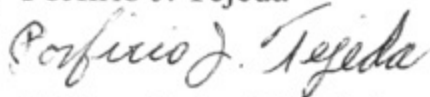
CHARTERED 1983

To Whom It May Concern:

I have known Harry F. Groessel over 40 years; first as an active firefighter and more closely since retirement. We have worked together on various things beneficial to the retirees. He has also helped the Northeast Firefighters Civic Organization in their involvement with Circus Gatti. The organization uses the proceeds of their activities to benefit civic projects, especially those involving children. He is an honorable and hard-working person.

Sincerely,

(PILLO) Porfirio J. Tejeda



El Paso Retired Firefighters, President

4930 Mc Gregor Dr.

El Paso, TX 79904

To whom it may concern

Dear To whom it may concern,

I have known Harry Groessel for just about 10 years, in those years both Harry and I have been drag racing at the local race tracks and or in New Mexico, either racing against each other or racing as a team for the El Paso track against other race track teams and are associated with the Southwest Drag Racing Association (SDRA) as members and as past President and Vice Presidents.

With the SDRA we have supported various fund raisers for the Child Crisis Center and the Candle Lighters both in El Paso, at anytime that any task has come up or some need for help has come up Harry has always offered his time without hesitation, ask him to do anything and he will get it done, both myself and the SDRA can count on Harry to be there to lend a helping hand.

Harry Groessel as I call it is "old school" his personal character speaks for it self, takes pride in what he does and how he carries himself as a gentleman. You only have a handful of friends in your lifetime and I am honored that I can consider Harry one of those in that handful.

Sincerely,



Ron Comeau



EITHER HAT FITS—Harry Groessel is equally at home wearing one of the two hats he's holding. On the job, he's Lieutenant Groessel of the El Paso

Fire Department Station No. 20. Off duty, he's Dragracer Groessel, at 49, one of the oldest active dragracers in the country. —(Times staff photo)

Groessel Top Dragracer

By FLIP MORIN
Times Sports Writer

If you'd stop Harry Groessel's speedy 1972 Javelin and yell "where's the fire" he'd probably take off his racing helmet and say "10028 Galveston Street, and I'm on my way!"

Groessel, at age 49, is usually the first man to cross the finish line at El Paso Dragway, and he's usually one of the first men at the scene of a fire.

He's one of the oldest active dragracers in the business, and with more than 20 years service with the El Paso Fire Department, considered a veteran civil servant.

But he's as eager about both careers as a bright newcomer.

Groessel recently became the overall high-point winner at the dragway, and leaves El Paso Thursday to compete in the Super Street Class at the National Drag Show the end of the month in St. Louis, Mo.

He moved to El Paso from Wisconsin 33 years ago and has been racing 21 of those years. When the old Sunland Dragway (Ehchantment Park), Ascarate Park and Juarez were in their prime, Groessel and his 4-door 1954 Hudson Hornet were crossing finish lines first. He's collected so many trophies he's been forced to pile them in the garage and give them away to youth clubs.

The Hudson, 4,000 pounds of style and power, won him New Mexico State Champion honors, Texas State Champion and Regional Champion from 1961-65 in both American and National Hot Rod Association circles. He even drove the Hudson to national competitions and shows. The car is still around and has more than 230,000 miles on the odometer, but he's gone to something more modern.

"I drive the 1972 Javelin, which incidentally was the last year they made them," Groessel says. "It hasn't been souped up at all, has a 304 cubic engine, two barrel carb with automatic transmission. I tune it up myself and keep it ready for races. One fellow recently asked me if I'd sell it because it's become a collector's piece, but I'm going to keep on racing it."

Groessel ran up 1,120 points for the season at El

Paso Dragway, Paul McManaway his closest rival, scored 730 points. "I won six or seven times and finished in the top three in several other races," Groessel said. "This is the first time I've ever elected to go race in the nationals but I've had more points than this and won high-point honors three times."

Although he's been driving in races for more than 21 years, he's never been involved in any accident. "Actually drag racing is a very safe sport," he says. "Now I'm talking about the classes like mine, not those funny cars that go 200 miles-per-hour. Anybody who drives a car can come out and enter these races if he's confident the car is in good condition. They are inspected though before any race. Who knows, the guy might win some bucks, or at least a trophy."

Groessel's Hudson proves that one doesn't need a souped-up dragster that goes 200 mph to win. In the Super Street Class, his best times were 77 mph at the 1/4-mile track, covering the distance in 17.80 seconds. "Actually the more speed a driver looks for the more money it's going to cost him," Groessel points out. "If somebody wants to get into racing, all he needs is a car that is both dependable and consistent."

Groessel has nothing but praise for the El Paso Dragway, pointing out local drivers can hold their own against anyone. "Our facility isn't as fancy and big-name as places like Tucson and Phoenix, but our drivers have taken on national cars here and blown them off the track," he said. "El Paso just isn't a racing town, at least not yet. Kids do all their racing on side streets on their own, when they should be supervised at places like EPD."

"The fire engine may look big and cumbersome but we can get 40-45 mph out of it on the way to a fire," Groessel said. "The biggest problem on the streets is people want to race us to the fire, or they just won't get out of the way and stay right ahead of us."

However, Groessel's problem at the nationals won't be drivers ahead of him, it'll be the guy alongside of him trying to cross the finish line first and collect that \$1,000 first prize.

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Season opener produces large turnout of racers and fans



Don Tyler, far lane, came from behind in his Flatliner digger to take a close double-breakout win from Jim Callaway's '68 Nova, 9.195 (9.20) to 11.065 (11.07).

ROSWELL DRAGWAY, Roswell, N.M. (March 22) — The opening event of the '92 season at Roswell Dragway is now in the books, and history certainly was made. A colossal turnout of spectators crowded the track to watch the day's competition, which featured 30 modified entries and nearly three dozen Pro bracket contenders. Several new cars made their competition debuts after the winter layoff, most with positive results.

In third-round Pro bracket action, Jerry Callaway's '66 Nova took a win against Darrell Mummert's '67 Camaro, 10.87 (10.79 dial-in) to 9.50 (9.43). Don Tyler's dragster then recorded a 9.21 (9.15) to vanquish the 11.93 (11.96) breakout of Ray Callaway's Monza.

Yet another Callaway entered the fray. Jim Callaway Jr. denied Juan Sandoval from advancing to the semi's. Callaway, at the wheel of Jim Lile's '68 Chevy Nova, ran an 11.08 (11.05), and the Sandoval Bros. blown Chevy digger broke out with a 7.89 (7.91). Eddie Gilbert then drove his Austin Bantam altered to a win over Robbie Ferbrache's Camaro for the last pass into the semifinals by virtue of a red-light.

The semifinal rounds began with Tyler's new Flatliner Neil & Parks-built dragster tak-

ing a win over Jerry Callaway's '66 Nova. Tyler ran 9.25 (9.15) to deny Callaway's 10.91 (10.79). Jim Callaway then drove his '68 Nova past Gilbert's Bantam altered, 11.08 (11.05) to 10.62 (10.48).

With the purse at stake, all stops were pulled for the final. Both drivers broke out, each by .005-second. It proved to be a match of reaction-time prowess. Tyler's rail recorded a 9.195 (9.20) with a .413 R.T. to defeat Callaway's 11.065 (11.07) after a .469 reaction time.

A quartet of tough customers withstood their preliminary bouts to make for a thrilling set of Modified semifinals. Scott Elkins met William East, and Lester Deason was paired against Harry Groessel. Elkins advanced into the final by virtue of a red-light by East. Elkins' '68 Camaro eased to a 14.87 (12.18) after seeing East's plight in his Gas Attack Nova. Deason, aboard a Kawasaki KZ 1000, fouled away his shot at the final, handing the win to Groessel and his '72 AMX.

The stage was set for a thriller of a final; Elkins and Groessel are previous Modified winners, several times each. Groessel's Javelin, out first, recorded a 15.586 (15.53) with a .474 reaction time. Elkins' catchup bid produced an E.T. of 12.248



In a clash of Modified bracket kingpins, Harry Groessel, near lane, powered his AMC muscle car past Scott Elkins' Camaro to take the win by ten-thousandths of a second.

(12.18) with a .462 reaction time. Groessel took the win by a mere ten-thousandths of a second.

Sandoval made the quickest run of the day with a breakout pass of 7.89 at 163 mph at the wheel of his supercharged small-block Chevy-powered Esparza-built

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Notorious

Harry Groessel's 230,000-plus-mile AMC

HEMMINGS
MUSCLE MACHINES
JULY 2006

It's 33 years and counting since Harry Groessel starting racing his '72 Javelin, but that's only about half of his racing career. "This upcoming year will be year 50," He told us. "Don Carlits is three years younger than me. I'm of Connie Kalitta and his generation."

Unless you count his Plymouth Acclaim (which he's been known to race when it's too wet to drive the Javelin to the track), Groessel's only had one other race car since 1961, a 1954 Hornet. Oh, he did OK in the 17-second, 77 mph Hudson, as a six-time NHRA Texas champion, six-time NHRA New Mexico champion and seven-time NHRA Division 4 champion. At the old Sunland Dragway, Ascarare Park and Juarez Dragway, his name was legend. He bought the Javelin as a new car in '72 and with it put together 18 track championships, three times at two different tracks in the same year. He's taken home more than 200 trophies over the years, and, after letting them pile up in the garage, started giving them to local

youth clubs, and returning them to the trophy shop for recycling.

After moving around a little as a kid, Groessel settled in El Paso, Texas in the mid-1940s. He says that back in the day, he and his buddies would race at the local Air Force base, with the condition that the officers got a turn behind the wheel. On the track, he's been the living embodiment of the importance of reaction time and consistency in bracket racing. The Hudson was built for speed, but the only thing that isn't stock in the Javelin is the exhaust manifold, although it is on it's third 304. It runs the stock 3.15:1 rear end, sports the factory two-barrel and automatic transmission and comes to the track pulling a trailer with his race slicks on it. "Other guys show up with their car on a trailer," he says. "I show up in my race car pulling one."

It's not slow, running in the mid-15s, but one of his proudest moments has nothing to do with low E.T.s, and everything to do with hitting his time.

The race on March 22, 1992, for the Modified semifinals at Roswell Dragway in New Mexico wasn't anything special, and Groessel was staged against Scott Elkin's '68 Camaro in the left lane. Elkins and Groessel were both already Modified winners, and Elkins had recorded a 14.87 on his 12.18 dial-in in his last run. Groessel left the line first, with a .474 reaction time and recorded 15.586 seconds (15.53). Elkins' catch-up bid gave him an E.T. of 12.248 with a .462 reaction time. Groessel says the track showed them tied to the 1/1,000th, so they took the results to the tower. In the end, Groessel won by 1/10,000th of a second, and as far as he knows, he's the only person in drag history to win by that margin. (If you know different, let him know.)

He also thinks his 49-and-counting continuous years of racing are unparalleled, not to mention 33 in the same car, and if you have any thoughts of reaching for his records, we warn you: He's shooting for 50 more, if they'll let him.

"I got 'hometowned' at my hometown track," he told us. "I was asked on several occasions not to race. I had to threaten the owner of the raceway with a lawsuit!"

Given his success, it's not surprising he's a big advocate of bracket racing. In an old interview, he once said, "Drag racing is a very safe sport. Anybody who drives a car can come out and enter these races if he's confident the car is in good condition."

"The more speed a driver looks for, the more money it's going to cost him. If somebody wants to get into racing, all he needs is a car that is both dependable and consistent." But he says he's just as passionate about hating street racing as he is about the drag strip, and helps get new racers started on the straight-and-narrow, giving out his hard-won racing tips and pointers. He says he's always built his own engines and set up his own cars, and was always interested in anything mechanical... or fast. Back in his Hudson days, he was elected as first president of his local chapter of the Hudson-Essex-Terraplane club, and remains vice-president today.

"A lot of guys I'm racing against now, their fathers brought them out to the track to see me race when they were kids," he said. "We're famous, and notorious throughout the Southwest." 🍀



Groessel with Greg Shenauff and Christina Vilchis, owner of the Thunder Alley Dragway in El Paso, Texas, in 1999. At Arroyo Seco Raceway in Deming, New Mexico, Groessel is currently the 2006 overall points leader in all classes.

WEEKEND WARRIOR

Harry's Hudson connection goes way back to the early '50's. In 1952 he was working for El Paso natural gas helping build a turbine station 60 miles out in the desert. He bought a used '48 Hudson for \$800 for the commute. The guys working at the site carpooled, and Harry ran an easy 80 mph in southwest Texas heat with 6 coworkers aboard. Not surprisingly, before long they all wanted Hudsons.

In '54 he blew the '48's engine when he lost a fan belt outside Douglas, Arizona. Checking around the local dealership and garages for a replacement, he found a 7X engine in a crate...for \$361, as well as an overdrive tranny and Twin-H setup for \$20 each. (Ah, the good old days!)

Harry started his racing at local tracks, and soon switched to a '54 four-door sedan, using the same built 7X.

He notes that it was a real factor relieved, 1/2-inch studs, strength block, etc.

Over the next ten years Harry raced the '54 all over the Southwest tracks like Enchantment Sunland Drag Strip and in Carl

1963,
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HARRY GROESSEL HUDSON RACER

By Sam Jackson

Harry Groessel has been drag racing for 50 years. More importantly, he's been winning for 50 years...and winning and winning.

Hobbs, Albuquerque, Penwell, Dallas, Roswell...anywhere there was a race he could drive to. That's right, drive to. Harry has never trailered a car to a race. In fact, he pulls a trailer with his slicks and equipment aboard.

During this time, Harry was Texas State Champion 6 times, New Mexico State Champion 6 times, and NHRA Division 4 Champion 7 times in his class. During one 5-year period he never lost a race. And remember, this was "heads up" racing...bracket racing came later. He won so often that it discouraged the competition, and tracks actually asked him not to race so they could have a bigger field in the class.

Hudson lovers in the El Paso/Southeast New Mexico area were a tight knit group, just as they are today. There was lots of collaboration, and most mechanical work was done in home shops. Although this was before

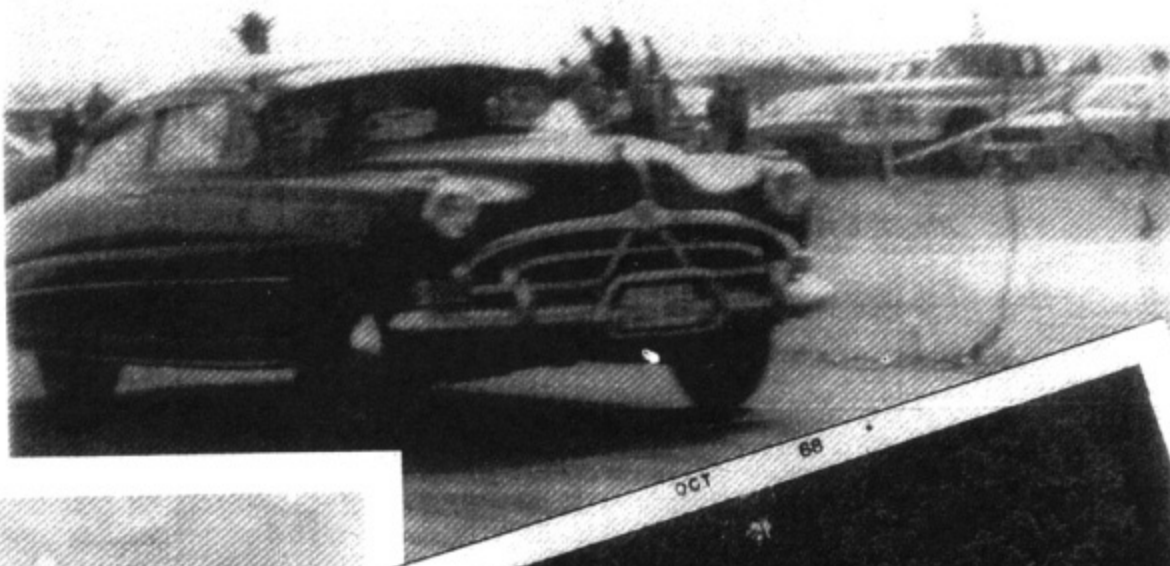
he retired from a distinguished career as an El Paso Firefighter, Harry built his own engines and even developed headers, exhaust systems, manifolds, and other parts on his own. His headers were well known as the best design around, much to the late, lamented Jack Clifford's chagrin. On one memorable trip, Harry and the boys went all the way to Lion's Dragway in Orange County, California just to race ol' Jack. Harry beat him, and when Jack took a run with Harry's headers on his car, he shaved more than a second off his time. Needless to say, a few of Harry's ideas slipped into Jack's products uncredited.

Among many other projects, Harry helped Jay Allen build a '41 Hudson coupe with a 308 and many Groessel mods, including a 3-carb manifold setup he built and loaned to Jay. Jay moved to California and sold the car

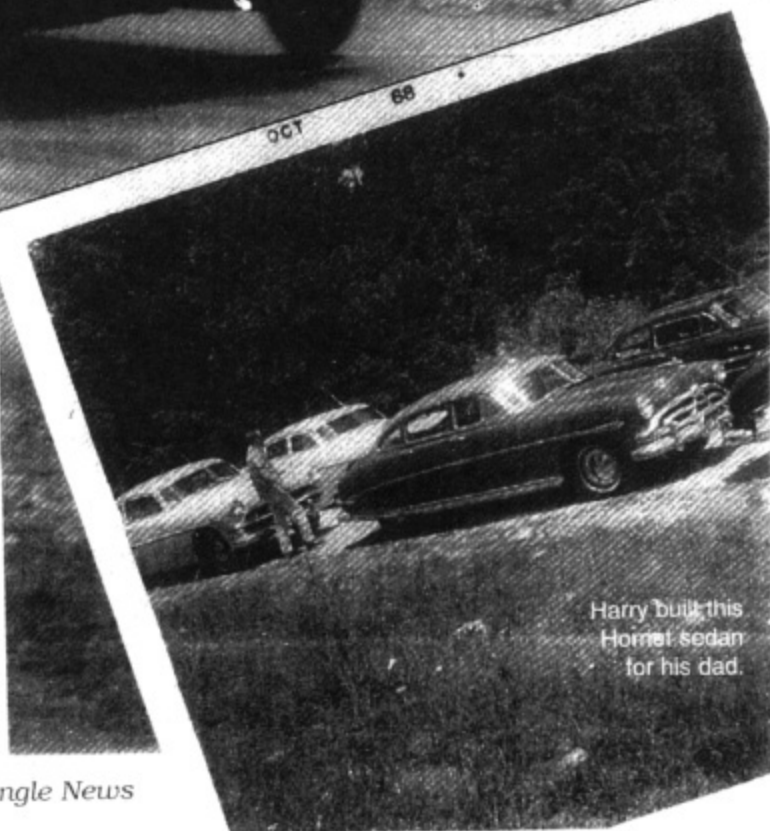
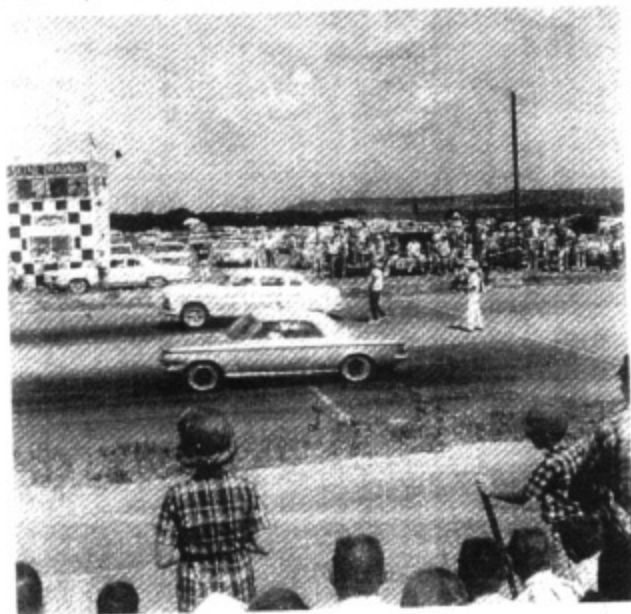
with the loaner manifold still on it. It changed hands a couple of times, and is now owned by Dany Spring, who has built it up and runs it very successfully in local drags. Harry's 3-carb manifold was gone when Dany got the car, and is rumored to be on a stepdown in Bill Albright's stable.

Harry used his Hudson as a daily driver. His wife had a '54 as well, and he built a beautiful silver Jet during this period. He also built up a '51 sedan as a gift for his dad, who enjoyed the car for many years. In 1969 he was invited, along with other Hornet owners, to participate in the festivities held in conjunction with National Championship stock car race at State Fair Park Speedway in Milwaukee, Wisconsin. Harry drove his racer (now with 232,000 miles on it) there and back, and it was one of the hits of the show.

Harry wins against Rudy Bennett's '51 Brougham 1969, El Paso International Dragway.



Abeline, Texas, 1965



Harry built this Hornet sedan for his dad.

In 1972 Harry parked his Hudson and purchased a new Javelin. This was his daily driver for many years and has been his racecar since new. His winning ways continued, now in bracket racing, where consistency, experience and reaction times are everything. He still drives the Javelin to the track. It's got over 230,000 miles on it, and he's run the stock 304 it came with, followed by a later AMC 360 and now the final version...an AMC 401. *Hemmings Muscle Machines* featured an full-page article on Harry and the Javelin, titled "Nortorious," in the July 2006, issue. And he made it into the NHRA's *National Dragster* in 1992, when he beat a '68 Camaro by 1-10,000 of a second at Roswell, New Mexico. And at 79, he plans to keep racing...and winning...for a few more years yet.

I spoke with Dale Ham, former NHRA Division 4 Director now a happi-

ly retired artist in Amarillo, Texas, and he remembers those early racing days fondly. Dale and his wife were among the legendary Division directors who built the NHRA from scratch, adding and certifying race tracks, making and enforcing safety rules, and creating a playground for real racers like Harry.

Dale recalls that the non-professional classes were dominated by guys who worked on their own cars, innovating as they went along. It made for some great racing and helped grow the NHRA into the powerhouse it is today. Harry often raced on the same card as pros like Don Garlits and Connie Kalitta, and remembers fondly when "TV Tommy" Ivo brought his 4-engined Buick dragster to El Paso for an exhibition run. He also saw a lot of fellow Texan Sloane McCauley and his Jet.

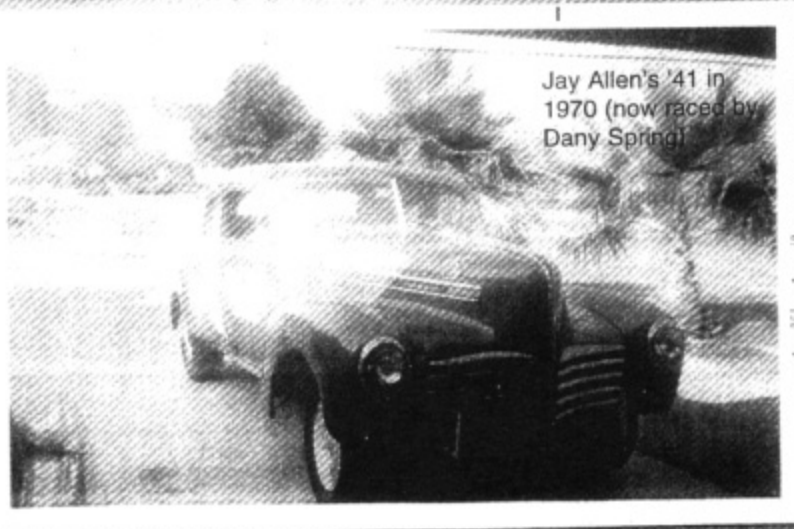
The late McCauley's racecar is now on display at the Don Garlits Museum in Ocala, Florida.

As for Harry's racing Hudson, it is, unfortunately, long gone. The 7X engine went over to Juarez for some machine work at a shop used often by Harry and other racers. When he came to pick it up, the building was empty. Nobody ever found out what happened to all the works in progress.

But Harry's still active in the Ocotillo Chapter (currently serving as Vice-President), and he has a Hudson project currently at his friend and fellow Club Member Carl Bell's spacious shop. Harry's been a winning racer, an innovator, part of a great group of friends, and is still racing. We should all be so lucky...



Center right: Harry showing off the header he designed and fabricated.



Jay Allen's '41 in 1970 (now raced by Dany Spring)

Grandfather of El Paso racing still living the fast life at 80

By Chris Roberts / El Paso Times

Posted: 09/08/2009 12:00:00 AM MDT



Harry Groessel stands next to the AMC Javelin he bought in 1973 with 10,000 miles on it. The car's odometer now reads 215,000 miles.

EL PASO -- Harry Groessel likes speed. But it's winning he loves.

Groessel, referred to by some as the grandfather of El Paso drag racing, developed a style that has allowed him to rack up hundreds of first-place trophies since he started racing in 1957. At first he gave them to neighborhood children. When the pile got out of hand, he scooped them up and donated them to a store to reuse.

Groessel, 80 years old and retired from the El Paso Fire Department, still races at least once a year.

"He's the only one who has made money drag racing," said Robert Martin, 33. Both Martin and his father have raced Groessel over the years.

Groessel, unlike most drivers, doesn't spend large amounts of cash to extract every last bit of power from



Longtime drag racer Harry Groessel is reflected in the mirror of his AMC Javelin. The car is one of three that Groessel has raced for 35 years, winning 18 track championships. (Photos by Victor Calzada / El Paso Times)

his dragster's engine.

"I've probably spent in a month what Harry's spent in 10 years," said Ray Griffin, a longtime El Paso racer and Groessel's friend.

Drag racing pits cars head to head on a straight, quarter-mile track. In the old days, a flagman would start the race. Now there is a pole with colored lights on it called a Christmas tree. When the last light in the sequence flashes, it's time to go, smoke pouring from the tires.

As drivers win races, they attain points. Some tracks name a champion every year based on points earned.

Groessel has collected 18 track championships. Three times, he was champion at two tracks in the same year.

He started out racing a Hudson. In 1973, he bought an American Motors' Javelin with 10,000

miles on it from a rental car agency. Now he races a four-door Plymouth Acclaim. Each of them also served as his daily get-around-town cars.

Other racers put their precious cars into enclosed trailers and towed them to the track. Groessel bolted a towing hitch on the back of the Javelin so he could pull a small trailer carrying his racing tires and tools.

In 35 consecutive years of racing, driving to tracks as far away as Wisconsin and California, he has totaled 235,000 miles on the yellow Javelin.

But don't get the impression that Groessel doesn't still love that car, which sits in his driveway.

During one race, the driver in front of him, after a bad start, in frustration threw his car into reverse, smashing into the Javelin. Groessel grabbed the only thing he could find, a small hammer, and started smashing the offender's dragster.

After the driver's crew subdued him, Groessel was hauled off by police and charged with assault.

Groessel had to pay for the other driver's repairs before the charges were dropped. It cost him about \$11,000, he said, including the lawyer's fees.

Does he have regrets?

"I just wished I'd used a bigger hammer," Groessel said.

When his head is in the race, he is hard to beat.

His winning record, even with underpowered cars, is possible because he competes in bracket racing. The rules for bracket racing provide an equalizing handicap system allowing four-door Plymouths to match up with heavily modified muscle cars. The system rewards drivers who know their cars' capabilities and can shave tenths or thousandths of a second off the start.

"I've raced (top fuel) dragsters. I've raced everything," Groessel said matter-of-factly. "I beat them all."

Over the years, track owners have asked him not to show up for races. Groessel told one of the owners to put a bounty on his head. The driver who beat him would take the bounty. The track owner declined.

"You just couldn't beat the guy on a consistent basis," Griffin said. "If Harry had been a professional racer when he was young, he would have been very successful."

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