

WILLIAM R. "BILL" BURKE

SEP. 23, 1918 – NOV. 25, 2015

Bill Burke, once known as "Mr. Hotrod," passed suddenly from a massive stroke. An unquestioned pioneer of the early California hot rod car culture that gave rise to racing on the California dry lakes and the streets of Los Angeles in the 1930s, he was best known for creating the first belly tank race car, which led



to a class of racers known as "lakesters." He is also credited with building the 3rd covered-wheel streamliner, the first to employ a fiberglass body powered by a motorcycle engine. Road racing meccas like Torrey Pines and Laguna Seca saw Bill race his hand-built fiberglass-bodied sport cars giving the 1.9-liter Ferraris something to worry about.



A member of the Road Rebels Car Club, Bill, together with the group, helped found the Western Timing Association, and was an early supporter of the Southern California Timing Association, as well as the first hotrod magazine, *Throttle*. He later worked with Robert E. "Pete" Petersen as the advertising manager for *Hot Rod Magazine*. Pete also had him manage some of the first auto shows in Los Angeles, Detroit and New York. He was a close friend and colleague of Wally Parks who founded the National Hot Rod Association.

He was there on the salt when it all began, volunteering at the inaugural 1949 Bonneville Nationals, now known as "Speed Week" in Utah, as the starter as well as driving his belly tank lakester. By 1960, he had built a new style fiberglass-bodied streamliner that mimicked a squashed torpedo called "The Pumpkin Seed" setting a 205.949 mph record that earned him life membership in the Bonneville 200 MPH Club. Later, with a different motor he set another record at 264 mph.



Partnering with racers who built engines for his many cars, including Don Francisco, Mickey Thompson, Clark Cagle, Les Leggitt, Doug Cook and his son Mike. Bill raced at Bonneville every year for 60 years setting a number of records. He modified an Avanti, which was driven by his son, Steve, and had the pleasure of welcoming him into the same "2 Club" posting a 239.208 mph record. Bill's grandchildren continue the Burke family speed legacy hoping to race their way into the historic speed club someday.

Bill served during World War II in the Coast Guard/Navy from 1942 through 1945, first patrolling the California coast to prevent an invasion, and for most of the war captaining a PT boat in the South Pacific.

An active athlete all his life, Bill was a swimmer and lifeguard at Hermosa Beach and on Catalina Island and competed in Masters events in later life. He played professional football with the Los Angeles Bulldogs and enjoyed playing amateur rugby, lacrosse and baseball. Often a participant in Masters Track and Field, at age 65, he was national champion in the Decathlon and with three others set a record in the 4 by 100 relay. When his knees got bad, he continued in Master's Track winning medals in field events and weight lifting. He won the baseball throw when he was 90 and was a pitcher in slow pitch baseball into his 80s.

Bill was born in Los Angeles at the home of grandmother on Slauson Avenue near Figueroa. He was a happy, gentle man who was loved by all who knew him. He is survived by his wife Catherine, sons William and Steve, daughter Luana, four grandchildren – Krista Meyers, Kier Shapiro, Joshua Burke and Jennifer Burke as well as and two great-grand children Penelope Meyers and Nicole Burke.