

FLASHBACK



ONE DAY AT CAIRO

Kenny Shoemaker (L) greets Hully after his win. (Coastal 181 Photo)

By Lew Boyd

On a Sunday afternoon in the summer of '74, Dick Berggren, Bruce Cohen, and I took a modified we shared to an open competition at the newly opened Cairo Fairgrounds in upstate New York. It was high-noon for the East Coast center-steer big blocks.

The facility was built and promoted by Kenny Shoemaker, an aging but bruisingly fast competitor in his own right. We wanted to support him. So did a pit full of top-notch teams from far and wide. A gleaming sun attracted a standing-room-only crowd, psyched to see what would happen—especially in an extra feature for old-time drivers from the great stock car days of the '50s in the Empire State.

Our modified was a wrinkled coach on a '54 Chevy frame with a water-pipe cage and a largely stock 427, all outdated and underfunded. Dick Berggren and I had both won with it in New England in earlier years, but no dice with the much stiffer competition in New York. We were certainly taken aback when, late in the afternoon, a tall, lanky, soft-spoken guy

wandered over and asked if he could drive it in the old-timer feature. When he introduced himself as Hully Bunn, we all stood at immediate attention.

A Connecticut native born in 1920, Hully Bunn had been ready for the bugle call in 1941, and off to the European theatre he went. As we got to know one another over time in more recent years, he confided how horribly unforgettable the conflict was, most particularly the Battle of the Bulge.

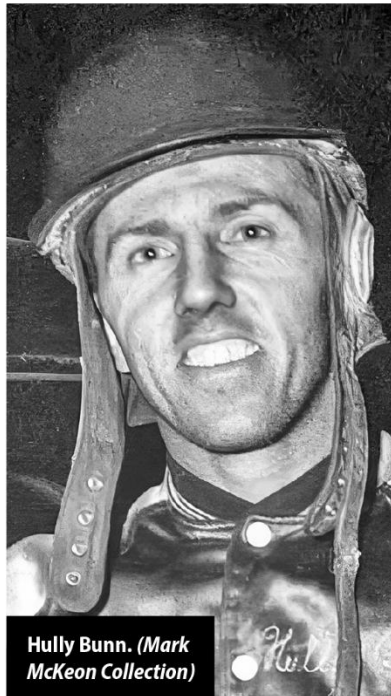
He had come home with a raft of medical problems. No question there was some "shell shock," now labeled PTSD. When back home, he looked for something unpredictable, loud, and dangerous, hoping that could help redirect—and calm—his soul. That something became midgets and then stock cars.

Hully's need to prove he could survive in chaos was likely key to his racing success right from the start. A decade before enterprising Bobby Brack and Will Cagle motored north to chase purses, while New Englanders Eddie Flemke and Denny Zimmerman toured the Southlands as the Eastern Bandits, Hully had become a traveler, competing far and

wide. He had wins at Bainbridge, Ohio; Morristown, New Jersey; Tampa, Florida; opening day at Lebanon Valley, New York, and on and on, often aboard his infamous #X coupe. His mastery of long races was renowned. He won the inaugural Race of Champions at Langhorne, dodging all the fire-filled devastation. During the 100-miler, he nonchalantly poured quarts of oil into a radiator-type hose running from the cockpit to the oil pan. He had purposely gone down there with a flathead that was "nice and loose."

Hully claimed to have made a good living out on the dusty road for almost 20 years until expense and technology creep overwhelmed him. The tipping point was a spectacular rollover at Lebanon Valley in 1965. He hurt his back, and it ended his career. Almost.

On that day years later at Cairo, Hully was really something. Over 20 enthusiastic old-time heroes were huffin' and puffin', ready for battle, as in days of yore. Former New York State Champion Jeep Herbert, aboard Joe Leto's potent, state-of-the-art Pinto, egged them all on with wild broadslides during warm-ups early in the day on moistened clay.



Hully Bunn. (Mark McKeon Collection)

Come time for the actual race, it turned out to be no contest. Laid back and observant, Hully had watched that summer sun, and the surface go away. His concentration, as always, was on survival. Having had no warmups, asking not a single question about the car or set up, off he went in our unlikely #181.

With silky smoothness Hully cruised around the very bottom of the half-mile, deftly avoiding the sun-baked, crater-sized ruts. Meanwhile all the others bounced and rocked their way through, breaking equipment, desperately trying to outdo each other. Hully didn't look that fast, but in no time, he was in the lead. He won it handily by a quarter lap.

Dick, Bruce, and I were flabbergasted. When we rushed up and congratulated him for getting us our only win there, he was not up top stomping on the car roof. He just smiled. He thanked us. He said he had enjoyed himself, especially because he had brought along his son, who had never seen him race. And here's what he had to say about the car: "This thing is *great*. You don't need to do a thing to it, except maybe to look for a new driver."

Hully died at 91 in 2011. He was just in another league, like so many veterans from that "Greatest Generation." **FSW**
