

AT YOUR REQUEST

Dear Geoff: What was the first race track you ran on, when was your first win and what type of race car did you drive?

**Chris Johnson
Summerfield, NC**

Dear Chris: Thank you for your question: The answer is easy. The first racetrack I ran on and won was my Dad's track, Chemung Speedrome (Chemung, NY).

I drove a micro-midget, which was a home-made gocart with a lawn mower engine, at the Speedrome, in 1957. We ran on a small track that was built in the infield of the bigger racetrack. I think it was one-tenth of a mile long.

The first racetrack that I ran in a regular racecar was also at Chemung, in the late model division. It was the car I sing about in the recording I made a few years ago.

My grandparents gave me an old Plymouth they had. I took it out behind my house, stripped it down and built a racecar out of it. I worked in a garage that I made in an old chicken barn. Then, I pulled it up to my Uncle Maynard's "Bodine Brothers Garage," where they had torches and welding equipment. They let me work on the car there at night when the business day was over and inside or outside during the day depending on how busy they were. That's how I built my first racecar, at their garage.

My first race with that car was at Chemung Speedrome, which was a dirt track back then, in the beginning of June 1967. I had turned 18 that April which made me old enough to run in the six cylinder class.

That first car had a Chrysler slant six engine, a '58 Plymouth body, carried number 99 and was painted Petty blue. Richard Petty was my hero back then, so I liked blue. He was running Chryslers and so was my Uncle Earl who was also my local racing hero, so it was only natural that I would run a Chrysler engine.

The number came about because my Uncle Earl ran #88 which made me like double-digit numbers. He was still running under that number so I felt it would be wrong for me to use it. I had been thinking about using #43 because even back then, a Winston Cup career, called Grand Nationals at that time, was my goal. But I realized I needed my own identity. At that time, Grand National driver Paul Goldsmith, whose number was 99, had just retired. He had driven a Plymouth too, so I picked the #99. Also, I felt it kind of rhymed with Bodine.

My Uncle Maynard was the engine-builder of the family and he taught me how to build engines. I helped him by grinding the cylinder heads, but he did all the important work that first year. I didn't start building engines myself until 1971 when we switched over to the NASCAR Modified Division and ran Chevrolets.

I finished second in that first race in June 1967. Because I was a new car entering the

handicapping point system, I had to start in the rear of the field. I qualified for the main event and started 18th with all of the good regulars up in front of me.

After the race, the regulars complained because I finished so well the first time out. They accused me of practicing on the track during the week and cheating, but it wasn't true. Dad went to great lengths to be sure I never received any special advantages or privileges. I stood on the pit sign-in line just like everyone else, paid my entry fee and got to practice only when the track was open for all the competitors. I had a lot of second place finishes that year, but I didn't win a main event.

In the last race of the year, a championship event, I was in the lead when the carburetor linkage broke and I didn't even

finish. No wins that first season.

The following year we switched the car over to a V-8 engine which I bought from Brian Osgood who was a regular competitor at Chemung Speedrome. We used the same chassis but put a '64 Plymouth body on it and ran bigger tires. I won the first race I ran with that car, the 1968 season-opener at the Speedrome. I think I won 10 or 12 features that year.

Geoff

At Your Request appears frequently in the Geoff Bodine Fan Club News featuring your racing questions for Geoff. If your question is selected for use in the News you will receive an autographed Geoff Bodine Racing Cap. Send your questions to: At Your Request, c/o Geoff Bodine Fan Club, P.O. Box 377, Suffield, CT 06078.



Eight-year-old Geoff (car #17 left) with his fellow competitors and father Eli (standing, right) in 1957.

Family Photo

Souvenirs (cont'd)

Geoff Bodine Headband:

White tube knit 85% orlon/15% nylon/5% elastic headband with knitted-in design in gold and brown-Geoff Bodine, a star and #5. A perfect gift for the jogger, exerciser or athlete on your shopping list!

\$4.00 (CT residents please add .23 sales tax)

Geoff Bodine Key Chain:

Soft, pliable plastic key chain, die cut in the shape of the Levi Garrett #5 Winston Cup racecar imprinted in full color. Lettering on reverse: Levi Garrett Racing. A special stocking stuffer!

\$3.00 (CT residents please add .19 sales tax)

Geoff Bodine Levi Garrett #5 Racecar Decal:

9" X 2 1/2" full color peel-and-stick decal die-cut to shape of the racecar.

\$2.00 (CT residents please add .11 sales tax)

Geoff Bodine Silver Coin:

99.5% pure silver coin, 1 1/2" diameter, 1/8" thick; double-struck raised image of Geoff (head to shoulders), lettered "Geoff Bodine." Reverse displays left front of the Levi Garrett #5 racecar in high relief, lettered with Geoff's autograph and a list of Geoff's Winston Cup career victories and his

IROC XI Championship and IROC wins. Complete with its own protective plastic slip case and certificate of authenticity. A must for every Geoff Bodine Fan's collection!

\$30.00 (CT residents please add \$2.10 sales tax)

Miller High Life 500 Victory Photo by David Chobat:

8" X 10" color photo of Geoff and crew chief Waddell Wilson in Pocono Raceway's Victory Circle on June 19, 1988.

\$7.00 (CT residents please add .45 sales tax)

Geoff Bodine/Levi Garrett Racing License Plate:

12" W X 6" H aluminum license plate with four bolt slots, white enamel background imprinted with the Levi Garrett #5 Winston Cup racecar and Geoff's autograph.

\$6.00 (CT residents please add .38 sales tax)

Music Cassette:

Geoff and 21 other Winston Cup drivers sing country-style songs about their racing careers written just for them by Nashville's greatest song writers. Long-playing cassette equal to two 33 1/3 records.

\$10.00 (CT residents please add .68 sales tax)