

BILL SIMPSON

It was in 1958, when an 18-year old Bill Simpson broke both arms in a drag racing crash. He later said, "Until then, I was like most drivers. The only time I thought about safety was after I was hurt. This time, it was bad enough to do a lot of thinking."

And with that thinking, it is Bill Simpson who should be thanked by every driver after walking away from what may have been a crash, fatal or otherwise.

Simpson passed away in mid-December last year but not before leaving behind a legacy which has transformed the motorsports industry into a very safe endeavor.

Eventually driving almost everything from midgets to sprint cars and even boats, including a stint in the Indianapolis 500, Simpson first began producing parachutes for drag cars. He followed that up with firesuits; demonstrating the effectiveness of them by literally setting himself on fire while wearing one. With that, Simpson Performance Products originated.

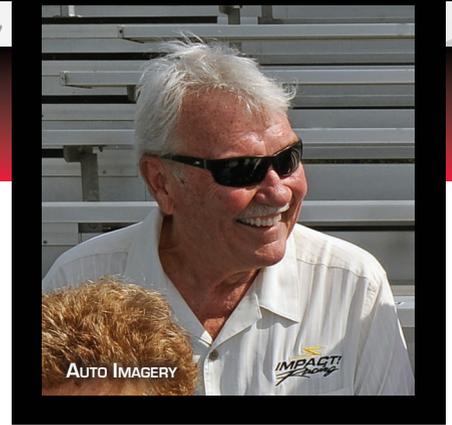
Simpson once said, "I saw things happen that didn't need to. It seemed like every weekend someone was getting killed. Back in the '60s, 400-500 people a year



were being killed. Now, even though we have 10 to 20 times more people racing, there are only about 25 deaths a year. That's progress."

Today, no longer a part of the company he founded, the Simpson name is still worn by drivers in all forms of motorsports, from helmets, gloves, restraints, and of course firesuits. Upon resigning from Simpson Performance Products in 2001, Bill Simpson remained a big part of the safety industry, having been inducted into several Hall of Fames for his sweeping dedication to safety in the sport. But there was so much more to the man than that.

A friend since the '80s, Kenny Koldsbaek said, "Bill marched to his own drum but he lived a dozen lives. All very full



with so many friends."

A true rags-to-riches story, Simpson grew up in California right along with the hot rodding industry, but he traveled the world in pursuit of race wins all the while with safety as a second thought. One of the first to utilize a parachute to help stop his dragster, Simpson's safety-conscience mind didn't stop there. In the 1960s he was introduced a relatively new product, Nomex, then developed by the Dupont Corporation. With its excellent thermal, chemical and radiation resistance, Simpson saw its benefits to the auto racing industry and the rest is just history.

He was sometimes rough and impatient, but he could also be charming. Regardless of any of those attributes, Bill Simpson was true pioneer in our sport and more than worthy to be called a *Hedman Hedders High Performer*.



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The High Performer Award is given to the individual who has contributed unselfishly to the overall betterment of the sport of Drag Racing.