

Penny Faust  
-Todd Spadt

Remember the days when most of us spent Saturday nights at Dorney Park Speedway for a doubleheader? The men were drivers and crew members, the children ran around pushing their plastic race cars we all bought at the track, and the women filled the stands cheering on their spouses or favorite drivers, selling T-shirts, or keeping children fed with snacks. But one place you didn't often see women back then was behind the wheel.

That brings us to our next Legends driver, Penny Faust of Wescosville. Penny paved the way for females in our sport, especially at Mahoning Valley Speedway Park.

Kudos to the women who stepped into a male-dominated sport, and to the four-cylinder class, which was one of the most competitive divisions from the late '80s through the '90s.

Penny grew up in Dorneyville, right near the Dorney Park racetrack. She attended races every week sometimes by herself, and sometimes with Beverly Kressley.

She got the itch for speed after growing up around a junkyard, used car lot, and gas station, she was always surrounded by cars. Watching the drivers at the track only fueled her curiosity and desire to get behind the wheel.

She got her first taste of racing in an enduro car at the now-defunct ½-mile Nazareth Speedway. Penny remembers finishing in the top 10, which was a great feat, especially considering she started 2nd one time and 126th in another. Yes, you read that right...126th. Some of those races had fields of up to 200 cars. Her sister Peggy served as her scorer, sticking it out through the full three-hour endurance races.

Initially, Penny went to Mahoning as a fan, cheering on the late, great multi-time champion Billy Teel, as well as "Rocket" Rod Christman, now the father of two racers himself. Penny decided it looked like fun and decided to build one for herself. She picked the 4-cylindery division because it was an entry-level class and more cost effective to get started. Donny "Huffy" Hoffman was instrumental in getting the car race ready and he formed a relationship with Rod Christman. As Penny put it, "We leaned heavily on Rod—he had the knowledge of both the class and the track."

Penny made her debut in 1989 in her #29 Ford Pinto and raced for four seasons. She liked Cale Yarborough and he ran a #29. Penny doesn't recall the way her season started, but she remembers she had to do some learning on asphalt and figuring out the fast way around MVSP. Her goals were to finish in the top 10. That was no easy task, considering the division boasted the highest car counts. Weekly fields often reached into the 30s and 40s, with as many as sometimes 4 heats and a now unheard of consi. They often put on the best show of the night.

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Penny had a goal of finishing 10<sup>th</sup> in driver points and during the 1990 season she got it the last night of the season in a story of all stories. Head wrench, Donny Hoffman, and Penny were going to Syracuse for Super Dirt week, but Penny wanted to race at Mahoning. "We went to Syracuse but came home Saturday for Mahoning." Peggy and Rick brought the #29 up to the track and Penny got behind the wheel. She finished 10<sup>th</sup>. After the race Penny and Donny drove right back up to Syracuse, a 4-hr. ride, while Peggy and Rick drove the racecar home.

"It was important to get 10<sup>th</sup> but also because Ward Crozier didn't have point funds for the 4 cylinder class. So anyone in the top 10 in points got in free the entire next season, which equaled quite the savings."

In 1991, after a year of learning, Penny was ready to run with the big boys (no pun intended.) She won her first main event on May 25<sup>th</sup> becoming the first female driver to win a race at Mahoning. "Yeah, that was special."

This was a year which Penny won an astounding 3 heats having to come from the back in the heats due to handicapping. "I also finished 2<sup>nd</sup> in points that year to Glen Anderson." It was a dream year in only her 2<sup>nd</sup> year of MVS she won the coveted Most Popular Driver. She finished an impressive 19 out of 21 races in the top 10, which was against a full feature field of 24 cars. What a symbol and model of consistency!!

1992 was another impressive campaign at Mahoning for Penny. A year where she won an incredible 7 heat race wins and 3 consis.

"I also won a feature up at Evergreen in 1993 when I would run some races up there."

Penny attributes all her success to a crew that paid full attention to detail. "They had knowledge, experience, and worked hard every week to make sure the car was fast." Her crew consisted of Donny and Dale Hoffman, Glen 'Bipper' Eberwein, Jerry Hoffman and last but not least sister, Peggy, and brother-in-law, Dorney Park Hotshoe, Rick Karpeuk. Plus, so many people that would help "here and there."

Donny was the head wrench who raced himself in sprints across the east coast having a friendship with Dave Kelly and Bup Christman. So Donny was no stranger to getting a car dialed in. Penny's motor was a 2300 CC motor with Holley carb. Donny said he dismantled the motor went over everything and credited that work ethic to Penny's success.

Donny added intriguing insight to the fast way around Mahoning. He stated "although dirt tracks are known to change during the course of the night Mahoning was just as temperamental in itself. With the everchanging temps and the moisture off the nearby creek you always had to adjust as the night went on. If you didn't it may have been the difference between 1<sup>st</sup> and 5<sup>th</sup> place."

█ Penny was drawn to the tight ¼-mile track, describing it as a fun, competitive place to race.

“The fans were right on top of you, and the stands were jammed week in and week out.”

A funny moment at Mahoning for Penny came one night in the pits.

“We had a little scuffle going on, and I remember thinking, ‘What the heck I’m right in the middle of this!’”

Family has always been very important to Penny. One of her favorite memories was letting her sister Peggy race her car in the powder puff races, where women competed against women—and Peggy did quite well.

When asked if she ever felt her ride was threatened by her sister, Peggy—also known as “Silly”—Penny laughed and said, “C’mon, she was good... but not that good.” Still, Peggy proved herself with an impressive second-place finish.

My most memorable racing memory was “winning my first feature and seeing the happiness of my crew in Victory Lane against a tough field of cars.”

A special moment at MVS was when Penny’s parents, Sonny and Mary, “were there to witness and celebrate with me after my win.”

“My biggest competitors were Rod Christman and Glen Anderson. When I asked Penny if the pupil(her) was able to outrun her mentor (Rod) she humbly said “no he was too fast.”

Penny also raced against fellow women racers, Betty Christman and Tammy Marsh, who she still hangs with today.

Penny also raced at Linda’s and said “I actually thought racing on the dirt was really fun but the crew wasn’t keen on the dirt, mud cleanup. Plus a late Friday night with racing Mahoning the next night.” She also remembers one week she wrecked the car pretty good too.

█ Penny admits that over the years, many female fans and drivers have come to her for advice; asking for her opinions and tips on racing against the guys.

Her pre-race ritual was simple: make sure the car was ready. She laughed while recalling just how nervous she used to get on race days.

“I wouldn’t eat a thing all day, but once I qualified, I’d relax and make a beeline to the refreshment stand.”

After the races, she enjoyed spending time in the pits with fans and her crew. Penny is quick to give credit where it’s due, emphasizing that her team played a huge role in her success by making sure her car was always capable of running up front.

Penny and Donny credit the team’s success with having sponsors such as family-owned Faust Junkyard and Towing, Gross Pheasant Farm, Leibensberger’s School Buses, Wolf’s Head Motor Oil, Jost Iron Works Ted Meyer Dist., Kelly Racing Fuel, and the Tire-Man. Owning a junkyard the team didn’t have to go far for parts. █

Penny did dabble for a few races after her Mahoning career was over at local dirt track, Grandview Speedway. She ran Clarence Ruppert’s #3 late model for a few races and would warm up Carl Ruppert’s late model as well from time to time. █

Something the racing circle didn’t know about Penny was she worked at the family junkyard Faust Used Auto Parts & Towing stripping cars right alongside her brothers and drove the tow truck all hours of the night to accident scenes which Penny remembers “weren’t always pleasant.” █

Penny offers this insight for upcoming drivers entering the sport at Mahoning. “Get to the track early, talk to the drivers, ask for advice... most if not all will help you. Study the drivers and their techniques, learn the set up on the cars so you and the crew can have valuable communication to see what the car is doing “ █

On November 5, 2023 Penny was inducted into the Mahoning Valley Hall of Fame. She stated, “that was quite the honor as this track goes way back.” █

Penny follows racing and can be seen every week at Grandview and Big Diamond helping her ultra successful godson Brett “The Threat” Kressley. █

Penny retired from the towing and junkyard business in 2019. █ Her greatest addiction may be the Dallas Cowboys. Talk about dedication she just doesn’t watch every game she attends every game home or away and has rubbed shoulders and talked with many of the football greats including Cowboy’s owner, Jerry Jones. Penny loves riding her side-by-side Can Am and Ninja motorcycles. Penny is still getting her “need for speed.” She loves her cats who she often talks about.

So, when you go to Mahoning and watch the females race competitively against the guys... know that the road may well have been paved 36 yrs earlier with the Mahoning Hall of Famer Penny Faust. █