

INDUCTEE PROFILE

Racing to glory

Lingenfelter was 'great pioneer' of his sport

By **Walt Frank**
Altoona Mirror

An East Freedom native will become the first race car driver inducted into the Blair County Sports Hall of Fame.

John Lingenfelter was critically injured during an National Hot Rod Association Summit Sports Compact drag racing event in Pomona, Calif., in 2002 and died from those injuries in 2003 at age 58. He will be inducted posthumously.

"John Lingenfelter will be remembered as one of the great pioneers, innovators, creators and drivers in the history of racing and not just drag racing," said former NHRA event announcer and drag racing historian Bob Frey, who will be Lingenfelter's presenter. "There was a saying when John showed up everyone was running for second place."

Lingenfelter achieved prominence as one of the world's most prolific drivers, engine builders and tuners in motorsports. He won 15 NHRA events and finished second twice in the Pro Stock Truck standings.

Lingenfelter graduated from Central High School in 1963 and obtained an associate degree in drafting and design technology from Penn State Altoona.

He started street racing in high school. His first car was a 1940 Ford. Eventually his desire to become a serious racer led to his famous Super Stock '69 Camaro convertible with which he won his first NHRA National event in 1972 in Indianapolis, the biggest event in drag racing.

Shortly thereafter, he became a full-time drag racer and enjoyed significant success in many drag racing classes venues, both in National Hot Rod Association and International Hot

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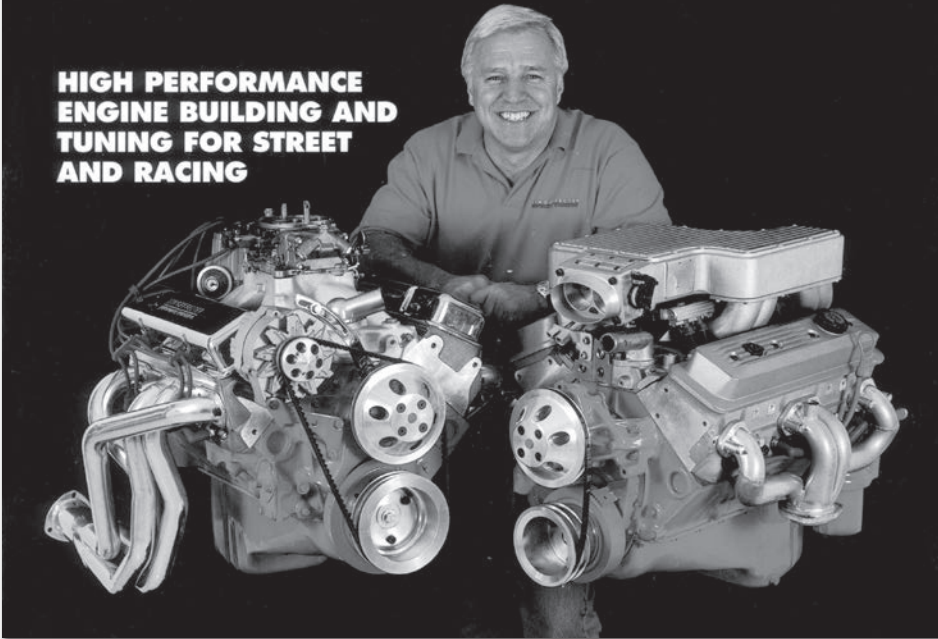


John, who won 15 National Hot Rod Association events, is the first auto racer to be inducted into the Blair County Sports Hall of Fame.

JOHN LINGENFELTER

ON MODIFYING SMALL-BLOCK CHEVY ENGINES

**HIGH PERFORMANCE
ENGINE BUILDING AND
TUNING FOR STREET
AND RACING**



In 1989, John raced a Pontiac Firebird Trans Am to 298 miles per hour.

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Rod Association.

As his career progressed, he moved up to more challenging competition categories from Stock Eliminator, Super Stock, Competition Eliminator, Pro Modified and Sport Compact, Pro Stock and Pro Stock Truck.

Lingenfelter's biggest moment came at the U.S. Nationals in 1986. It was there that he would qualify number one at the top of the quickest Indy Comp field in history, and then he would go on to win the race.

It was also at that race that Lingenfelter ran a spectacular 6.962, which made him the first driver in Competition Eliminator history to take a gasoline burning, carbureted car into the six second zone, said Frey, who was the announcer at that race.

"He won the U.S. Nationals, which is like our Super Bowl, three times in our most competitive class," Frey said. "Only three guys have won it more than once. He was as great as anybody who competed. On a personal

basis, it was a joy to be with him. To announce with a guy like that in it, it was a thrill to watch. He was the nicest guy. John had a great personality. He was always smiling like the Chesire Cat."

If based strictly on speed, his greatest accomplishment was in 1989 when he took a Pontiac Firebird Trans Am for which he built the engine and proceeded to go 298 mph at the Bonneville Salt Flats.

His goal was to drive the first production sedan to hit 300 mph.

"He burned with an internal fire that could only be harnessed by intense competition. When it came to high speeds, he was absolutely fearless," wrote

Csaba Csere, the editor in chief of Car and Driver magazine.

Fellow racers David Fiore of Altoona and Bellemead native Herb Kutz remember Lingenfelter well.

"John was a very likable guy," Fiore said. "He had a great personality and was very charismatic. He was a very smart man. He had a knack for finding horsepower, finding the right car to have an advantage over the competition. Guys loved drag racing. If we needed help, we could pick his brain. He was always available to us and a friend to everybody. He was a bigger-than-life guy."

"When I got into racing, I met John, and he helped me a lot in the beginning," said Kutz, who now lives in Laguna Niguel, Calif., and has worked at Royal Purple in the auto aftermarket for 21 years. "He always thought about ways to make his car go faster. He was more about making the fastest car, about setting records. He always wanted to be the best. John was truly an innovator in the sport of drag racing."

To support his racing, Lingenfelter founded Lingenfelter Performance Engineering, which is a globally recognized brand in the performance engineering industry.

The company offers engine building, engine and chassis tuning components and installation for vehicle owners, component product development, services to manufacturers, aftermarket and original equipment suppliers, prototype and preparation of product development vehicles, late product life-cycle performance improvements, durability testing and show and media event vehicles.



Lingenfelter bio

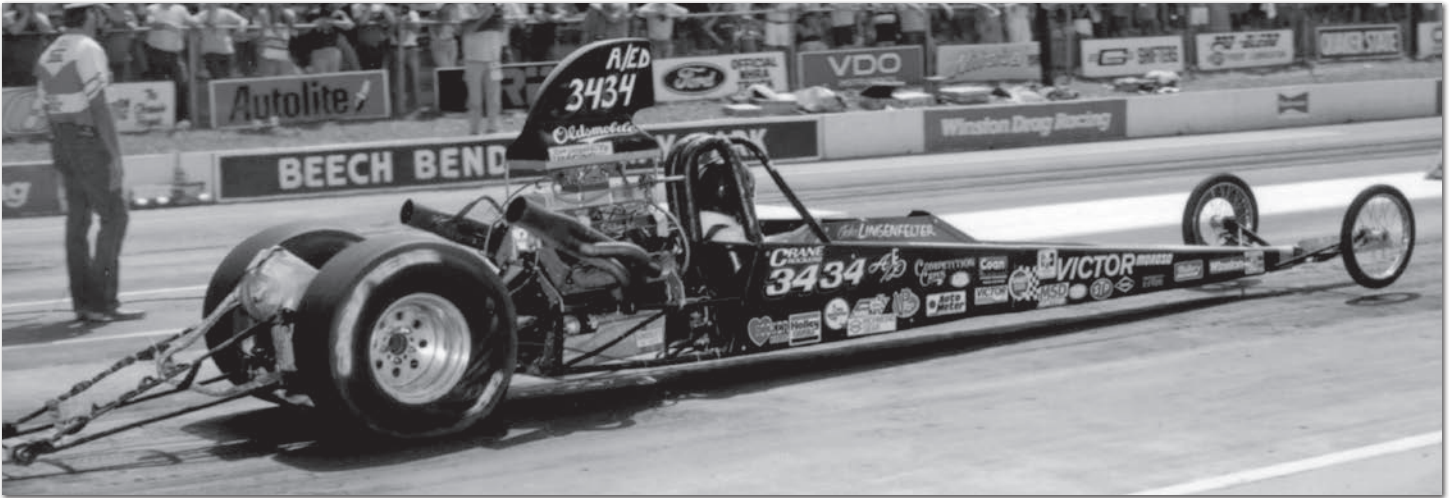
Sport: Auto racing

High school: Central

College: Penn State

Hall of Fame achievement: Won 15 National Hot Rod Association (NHRA) events and recognized worldwide as one of the most prolific drivers, engine builders and tuners in motorsports.

Current residence: Deceased



In addition to his racing prowess, John founded Lingenfelter Performance Engineering, which became a leader in the auto racing industry.

Lingenfelter became well known for building engines.

"As an engine builder there was no equal," Frey said. "He was the best. He was excellent at everything he built. As a builder there was no equal. John wrote the book on small block engines."

Lingenfelter actually did write a book "John Lingenfelter on Modifying Small Block Chevy Engines," in 1996.

"This book became the bible for anyone who wanted to build or improve a small block Chevrolet," Frey said. Lingenfelter also published books and

had many magazine articles written sharing the wealth of his knowledge.

His expertise in the internal combustion engine and his intuitive feel for maximizing engine and vehicle performance led Lingenfelter Performance Engineering in the mid-80s into the development of enhanced fuel injection and engine performance packages for the Corvette, Firebird and Camaro.

Seventeen years after his passing, LPE continues to strive and excel in the automotive performance industry. The long time company veterans have risen to the challenge and continue to exemplify Lingenfelter's excellence in service, performance and ethics.

Lingenfelter is missed, but his influence and reputation will be cherished and remembered through his motorsports accomplishments and the success of the company he founded, according to the company website.

Jason Haines, now Senior Powertrain Engineer for Nostrum Energy, had worked for LPE for nine years prior to Lingenfelter's death.

"He was a very driven and focused person. He was very hard working and expected the same of others. Not afraid to get his hands dirty. No job too small for anyone," Haines said. "Driving a race car was his passion but also his escape. When in racing mode he didn't have time to think about day to day business activities. He was a very competitive person. Everything was a race or a competition — an official drag race event or just a few of us at the track testing a car, he

wanted to win and beat the other person or team."

Lingenfelter was inducted into the Corvette Hall of Fame in 2006, and in 2019, the Indiana Racing Memorial Association unveiled a historical marker in northeast Indiana honoring him and his company.

"When you think of Corvette aftermarket performance tuning, one of the first names that will come to mind is John Lingenfelter. John was definitely an icon in the field of motorsports and racing," Corvette Hall of Fame spokeswoman Katie Ellison said.

Lingenfelter's family is pleased to see him inducted into Blair County Sports Hall of Fame.

He has two daughters and five grandchildren, and two of his sisters, Jayne Longenecker and Mary Ellen Claycomb, still live in Roaring Spring. His brother, Charlie, who resides in Charlotte, will accept the award. Another brother, Jerry, is deceased.

"It's an honor for John's family, many of whom still live in Blair County, to see him be recognized for his significant motorsports accomplishments by the Blair County Sports Hall of Fame," Charlie Lingenfelter said. "It is also with great admiration that he joins over 100 of the most accomplished athletes and teams who have previously been recognized for their significant accomplishments. It is very satisfying that John will be one of the first motorsport athletes to be recognized. Our family is very grateful to the Blair County Sports Hall of Fame."



Following his 2003 death from injuries suffered in an NHRA event a year earlier, John was inducted into the Corvette Hall of Fame.