

Class of 2019

Frank 'Butch' Arciero Jr | Lynn Chenoweth | Bobby Ferro
Robby Gordon | David Higgins | Steve Morris



Bobby Ferro

Competition – Off-Road Racing

In 1973 automotive journalist Hal Higdon published his book “Finding the Groove”. This book was based on 27 interviews of the greatest race car drivers of the time and included drivers like Mario Andretti, Richard Petty, Don Garlits, Bobby and Al Unser, and Don Prudhomme. Selected to represent off-road racing was Bobby Ferro. How did he earn this distinction?

It all started in 1963 at Bud Ekins’ Triumph motorcycle shop in Sherman Oaks, California. (Bud Ekins was inducted into the Hall of Fame in 1979.) Ferro started working at the shop as a mechanic when he was just 16 years old. That same year, racing a Triumph Tiger Cub, 16-year-old Ferro entered his first race, a Checkers MC District 37 event, where he finished 109th.

Ferro wrenched on bikes during the day and rode his Triumph through the Santa Monica Mountains the rest of the time, where he honed his skills blasting along the fire roads and jumping his way through newly subdivided land in the hills. Riding with Ekins, and often joined by Hollywood legend Steve McQueen (McQueen was inducted into the Hall of Fame in the inaugural Class of 1978), Ferro became a member of the fastest desert club, the Checkers. Soon Ferro was winning desert races. His last race on a bike in 1970 was the World’s Championship Checkers Hare and Hound, where he finished 1st by twelve minutes.



Bobby Ferro racing a 100 Lap TT at Ascot, 1970

In 1970 Ferro purchased a bare Funco Wampus Kitty chassis from Ekins and built the car himself, entering his homebuilt rig in the 1970 Baja 500. By the halfway point, he was leading overall on time, but a rollover put him back to 4th at the finish. Not a bad showing for his first race on four wheels. Ferro went on to enter the 1970 Mexican 1000, where he finished 2nd.



In 1971, before there was an Ironman award, the NORRA Mexican 1000 required a driver change at the halfway point. Ferro petitioned NORRA to let him drive solo. Ferro got the go-ahead, and proceeded to win the race, becoming the first driver to ever solo the 1000.

Ferro's performance got the attention of Scott McKenzie (ORMHOF Class of 2005), who asked him to join the Sandmaster team. Driving a Funco SS1 manufactured by Gil George (ORMHOF Class of 2007), the Sandmaster team with Ferro behind the wheel was the team to beat in off-road racing throughout the 1970s. After McKenzie sold Sandmaster, Ferro moved to the Modern Motors Team and later would be reunited with McKenzie at the Tracy Valenta (ORMHOF Class of 2016) Party Ice team.

During the 1970s Bobby Ferro would become one of the most dominant racers our sport has ever seen, with twenty-five 4-wheel overall wins. There wasn't a major race that Ferro didn't win, including two Mexican 1000s, four Baja 500s, two Mint 400s, three California 400s, and the 1974 SCORE Championship.

In 1976 one of Bobby's sponsors suggested letting a relatively unknown driver share driving duties at the Baja 500. Ferro agreed to give the driver a shot, and the two of them went on to overall the race, helping to launch the driver's career. That driver's name? Ivan Stewart (ORMHOF Class of 2006).

Ferro broke new ground when he asked journalist and racer Judy Smith (ORMHOF Class of 2008) to race the 1978 Mexicali 350 with him in a two-seat buggy. While not an unknown commodity – Judy had been the first woman to solo the 1000 in 1972 – not too many drivers were looking for women as their co-riders. Bobby Ferro respected Judy as a smart and tough



L-R: Team owner Tracy Valenta, Bobby Ferro, race organizer Sal Fish (ORMHOF Class of 2006) and Judy Smith at the 1978 Mexicali 350 awards ceremony.

woman who could handle it. That fact that she weighed 90 pounds didn't hurt either, and the two went on to a historic overall victory in the Tracy Valenta Party Ice Class 2 Funco.



Bobby Ferro and Johnny Johnson (ORMHOF Class of 2010) on Ensenada's Walk of Fame. The duo won the 1973 Baja 1000.

Besides winning, Ferro was also a strong safety advocate. His day job as a Hollywood stunt man made him especially interested in safety. After seeing Sprint car drivers killed or seriously injured and losing arms in rollovers, Ferro started racing with leather straps tied to his arms which he later replaced with window nets. Ferro petitioned race organizers to make arm restraints and window nets mandatory. He persisted until the improved safety measures were put into effect.