



BY
**QUENTIN
HAINES**



Looking Back

with

Duffy Livingstone

and

Faye Pierson

By

Quentin Haines



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This photo and bottom center: Faye Pierson and Duffy Livingstone have been friends for a long time—a friendship forged in the early days of karting. The earlier photo here shows the two of them just as Duffy presented Faye with her trophy at the first Nationals held at Go Kart Raceway in 1959. The other photo was taken earlier this year at Faye's kitchen table as the two of them brought out the scrapbooks and reminisced.

LOOKING BACK WITH DUFFY LIVINGSTONE and FAYE PIERSON

Two Karting Pioneers Reminse About the Sport and the Great Times it Brought

Fifty years ago if someone had told me that I would one day be sitting at Faye Pierson's kitchen table talking about the early days of karting with Faye and her fellow karting legend Duffy Livingstone, Well, I never would have believed it, not in a million years!

After all, in 1959 Faye and Duffy were THE two biggest names in the still-new sport of karting. Duffy was Go Kart. Faye was Bug.

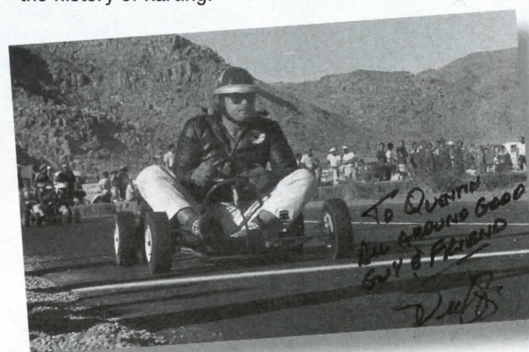
Go Kart Mfg. and Bug Engineering were the first two and by far the largest manufacturers of karts in the world and the unquestioned leaders of the sport. Sunny southern California was their home. Meanwhile, in 1959, I was just a little kid back in Ohio, crazy about the karts that I was seeing and reading about everywhere, but with only wishful dreams of ever being part of the karting scene.

Yet sometimes, when you hold on to your dreams, they do come true. For me, it was an honor and a privilege when I met with Duffy, Faye, and our mutual friend Tom Smith, on a Sunday afternoon in Faye's hilltop home in Covina, CA. Chatting with Faye and Duffy about how they got started in karting and



poring over the photos in their scrapbooks, Even in my middle age, was unbelievable.

What wonderful stories Faye and Duffy have to tell. Many of you probably already know about karting's earliest days. More of you probably do not. Either way, what follows is a first-hand account of some personal experiences of two people who actually lived the history of karting.



Classic Duffy Livingstone on a course near Apple Valley, CA, crossing the finish first in his "brain buster" helmet. Duffy sent me this photo in the early 1990's after regaling me with his wit and wisdom for over four hours on the telephone!

DUFFY LIVINGSTONE:

Frank "Duffy" Livingstone was born in Illinois, but at age one he moved with his family to Pasadena, California. As a kid, he worked in a model shop and made his own model cars and flew model airplanes. After serving in the Navy during World War II, he came back home and got wrapped up in the automotive excitement that was exploding in southern California at the time.

In the early 1950's, Duffy built a sports car for himself out of a Model T Ford. He named it the Eliminator and successfully competed against many of the high-priced imported roadrace cars—think Ferrari and Jaguar—running in those days. Because of what it was

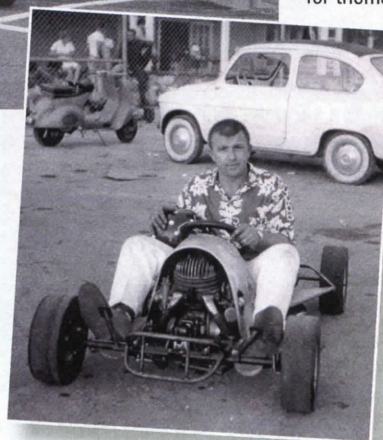


—a Model T and because of Duffy's success with it, the Eliminator, like Duffy, became something of a legend in the roadrace world. (Today nearly sixty years later, the car has been completely restored and is owned and shown by automotive journalist Brock Yates.)

While racing sports cars was a hobby for Duffy, his bread and butter was the muffler business. Together with partner Roy Desbrow, he owned Duff and Roy's Muffler Shop in Monrovia, California, which they renamed GP Muffler when they took on a third partner and started making glass pack mufflers. They eventually expanded to three shops.

It was during those days--say, early 1957--that Duffy stopped by his friend Art Ingels's shop and saw for the first time a tiny car that Art was building. Recalls Duffy, "It was a cute little thing and just up my alley. I asked Art if he would mind

Above: This photo of an early parking lot race deserves a close look. Leading the pack (in his sunglasses) is Art Ingels, builder of the first kart. Just off the edge of Art's right shoulder (and in the middle of the picture) is Duffy Livingstone. Note that the guy in the very back is wearing a football helmet! And get this. Marvin Patchen, the one in the striped shirt, is actually the flagman for the race. He gave the green flag, then hopped into his kart and raced until he got tired, then parked his kart, got off and threw the checkered flag. Those guys knew how to have fun!



Right: Duffy and the "pooch" in Funky Nassau. Duffy Livingstone built many one-of-a-kind karts and the one shown here may be the most unique. Resting between his legs on this kart is an Austrian 250cc Puch cycle engine. Duffy drove this kart in one of the 50-mile "World Championship" races held during the annual Nassau Speed Weeks in the Bahamas.

if I built one like it. He said 'No, no. The more the merrier!' So Art's little car was the first to be built, and my childhood buddy, Dick Vandever, and I built the next two. They didn't have a name yet; to us they were just little cars.

"When my partner Roy saw what I was building, he says, 'I've got to build one of those!' and so he and a friend, Tom Noel, built a couple of the little cars for themselves. Soon thereafter, a surplus salesman named Bill Rowles came into the muffler shop, saw the little car, and got excited and stated he could shag the parts for the cars if we would build them. So that's how we--Roy, Bill and myself--got into the business of manufacturing the little cars.

"The first time I drove my little car was at the parking lot at Santa Anita Race Track, and I blew a rod right through the side of its little West Bend engine. The first time I got in it I got hooked on the thing. All of

us who had little cars took them over to the Rose Bowl parking lot and raced around. People saw them and wanted one for themselves. I went to Art Ingels and told him that people were wanting them and said why don't you start making them. He said that he couldn't see a way to do it profitably so I

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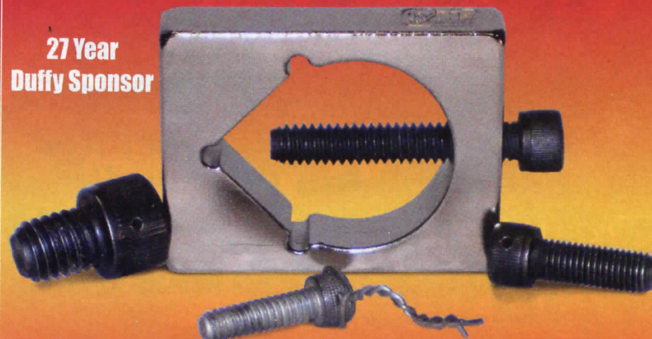
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On his way to winning the first of three national championships, Duffy is shown here in 1960 powering his Konig-powered Go Kart through a corner just ahead of second-place finisher Chuck Balsiger and his 250cc Yamaha Special.

asked him if he would mind if we tried, and he said, 'Sure, go ahead.'

"It got really big really fast, and it got to the point where we either had to choose between the little cars or the muffler business. So we forgot the mufflers and went into making the little cars. Tom Noel had introduced me to Lynn Wineland who worked at Peterson Publishing [the automotive magazine publisher], and Lynn started coming around the shop. We asked him to do some advertising for us. He said he would but that we needed a name for the thing, and it was Lynn who suggested the name "Go Kart"--with a "k"--to us. We all agreed that that sounded like the way to go so we started making and selling the first Go Karts as assemble-it-yourself kits."

Before long, the Go Kart Manufacturing Co. had outgrown the muffler shop in Monrovia so the business was relocated to a big corrugated tin building on N. Irwindale Ave., in Azusa, CA. "It was a really spooky place," Duffy recalled. "It was large, 100 feet square I would say. I'd go out there at night and you could hear the rats running around in the place. And it was all dark except for this one light bulb hanging down over my bench." From this location thousands of Go Kart kits were shipped.



Driving the Eliminator, his most unlikely sports car which he built from a Model T, Duffy Livingstone leads road race legend and Hall of Famer Ken Miles (#50) through the turns of a temporary course set up in Santa Barbara, CA.

Unfortunately, about this same time, late 1958, the karters in southern California had just about exhausted the list of places where they were welcome to drive their karts. Whether it was due to the noise of the karts, the zoning laws, or just some people being jealous of seeing other people having fun, the public officials were pressured to say "No more!" to karting on vacant parking lots.

With their business fortunes resting in the balance, Duffy and the folks at Go Kart stepped forward and built what is arguably the first-ever kart-specific track in a field beside their factory. The Go Kart Raceway --a paved, four tenths of a mile (plus 15 feet per Duffy) road course--opened in January, 1959, and with the construction of that track, and others like it which soon followed, the future of karting was secured.

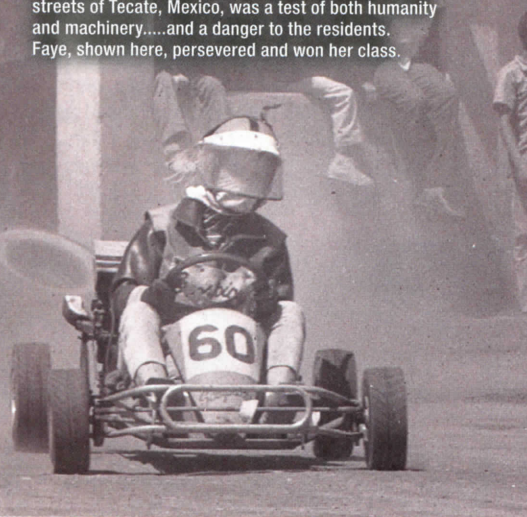
FAYE PIERSON:

Faye was the only female driver for the United States Racing Team which raced throughout Europe in 1961.



It was one of Duffy's kit Go Karts that Faye Pierson's neighbor in West Covina, CA bought, assembled and gave to his son for Christmas in 1957. When that kart hit the streets on Christmas Day the whole neighborhood came to watch and ride. Faye Pierson rode the neighbor kid's kart that day and she wouldn't get off it. Like Duffy, she too was instantly hooked. "It was exhilarating. You put

Running an endurance race through the bumpy, dusty streets of Tecate, Mexico, was a test of both humanity and machinery.....and a danger to the residents. Faye, shown here, persevered and won her class.



your foot on it and off you'd go," Faye recalled.

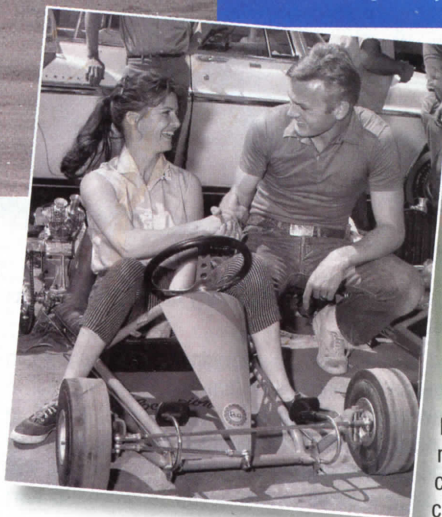
During the thirties and forties, Faye Pierson, then known as Faye Marye Greer, grew up on an acre of land in then-rural West Arcadia, CA. Her father was a CPA who worked in the City of Los Angeles, and he wanted some open space for himself and his family. As a youngster, Faye knew the joys and freedom of living in the fresh air of a small town. In West Arcadia, you could ride your bike anywhere you wanted at anytime you wanted, and in her words, it was wonderful.

As a school girl, Faye met and fell in love with Tom Pierson, who although had little formal education, seemed like he could do anything he set his mind to. "Tom was brilliant. Although he was mostly self-taught, I thought there was

nothing he couldn't do--and I was right! He could figure anything out." Faye said with a smile.

Faye and Tom married in the mid-forties and endured the hard times of many young newlyweds. But by the time their neighbor boy got his Go Kart for Christmas in 1957, the Piersons were a thriving and happy family with two young boys, Tommy and Jon. Along the way, the Piersons had acquired a newspaper dealership for the LA Times. "It was the BEST job! I learned how to drive by making newspaper deliveries around southern California in a Triumph TR2!"

Below: Stars from all different fields of endeavor run into each other in southern California. Here karting star Faye Pierson takes a moment to shake hands and smile with Hollywood star Tab Hunter at the kart track in Bakersfield.



So taken were the Piersons--and especially Faye--with the neighbor boy's kart, that they decided to build some karts of their own. And who better to build them than Tom Pierson, the guy who could do anything. So, along with a friend, Dick Geer, and another neighbor, Tom built six karts in early 1958, one being especially for Faye. And like Duffy's original Go Karts, as soon as people saw and rode the Piersons' karts, they wanted one for themselves.

It didn't take much for Tom, Dick and their neighbor to decide to go into the kart manufacturing business. All three had the skills and enthusiasm to do it. And Faye's dad, the CPA, had the business knowledge to help get them started right. Bug Engineering, as the new business was called, became karting's second commercial manufacturer, and the karts themselves were called "Bugs" (of all types).

Funny story though. The new three-way business partnership didn't last very long. The neighbor who had joined Tom and Dick to start the business, well, it turned out that he had some gambling issues. One night the Piersons got a call from Las Vegas. It was their neighbor/business



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Tom Pierson, shown here in his office at the Bug factory, was a leader of the karting industry for over forty years.....but more importantly, he was a loving husband to Faye for well over fifty years. Greatly missed, Tom passed away in 2000.



partner and he needed money and he needed it fast. He offered to exchange his share in the new kart business for the amount of cash he needed. "We did that deal and it was the best money we ever spent," Faye recalled with a chuckle.

It wasn't too long thereafter that Dick Geer also decided to get out of kart manufacturing, so Tom and Faye purchased his interest as well. But even after he left the company, Dick remained close to the Piersons. In fact, in the summer of 1959, Dick was crowned as the first overall Grand National Champion of karting while driving for the Bug racing team.

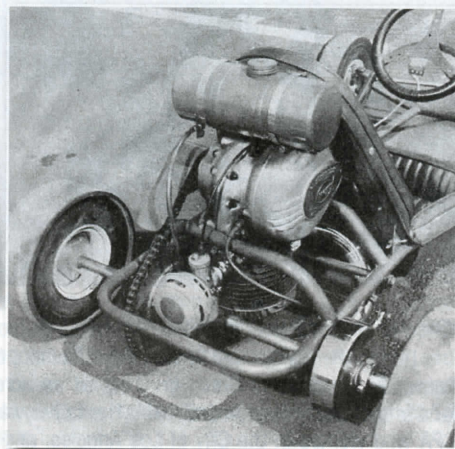
With Dick no longer a part of the company, the karting business was the Piersons to make or break. "At first, I was just along for the ride. But then I went in and began to run the office, and I was successful at it because I hired people smarter than I was," Faye remembered with a knowing grin. "Tom was very creative and brought

many innovations to the early karts. Our business boomed."

By early 1959, Bug Engineering had outgrown several locations, and Tom and Faye had built a new plant of their own at 330 S. Irwindale Ave. in Azusa, CA, two blocks south of the Go Kart factory and racetrack. From that short distance--just two blocks--a fierce rivalry began between Go Kart and Bug.

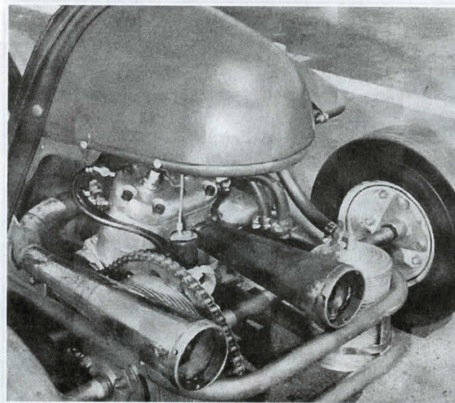
For the next three years, Bug and Go Kart, practically neighbors, went head-to-head at every level of the karting sport. With Faye and Duffy at the forefront of their respective companies, they formed racing teams and competed in all the national events. They competed against each other in Mexico, in Nassau during the famous Speed Weeks events, in sprints, in 50 and 100-mile endurance events and in advertising. They also competed for customers.

After Bug built its new building, Go Kart built its own new factory. Both companies purchased highway-sized buses to transport their racing teams and equipment, and they also raced the buses on the way to the track. They raced against each other to be the first to market a mini-bike. For three years, they competed in every way imaginable.



Above: Duffy was famous for his ingenuity. This special sports an English-made Villiers mounted upside down (case at the top, sparkplug at the bottom). The Villiers rep from England saw it and said it wouldn't work that way. Of course, it did --and very well!

Below: Duffy won a National Championship in 1960 with this water-cooled German Konig in a duel with Chuck Balsiger in his Yamaha-powered KART Magazine Special. Some call their on-track battle the 'Greatest Race in the History of Karting.'



There never was a clear winner in Go Kart/Bug rivalry. And by 1963, unfortunately, there was not only no winner to declare, there was no longer a rivalry, only a survivor. Seemingly overnight, karting had grown from two manufacturers a mile apart to hundreds of manufacturers around the world. The karting market had become saturated and when demand fell off, so did many of the manufacturers who had jumped on the karting bandwagon. Sadly, Go Kart Manufacturing was the most prominent casualty of the big downturn.

Duffy spoke philosophically and without apparent regret about the demise of Go Kart. "I was never a businessman. I did all the research and development, designing and testing and I worked on the karts. I put the racing team together and built the cars. I had my own little room in the back and didn't know how the business was going



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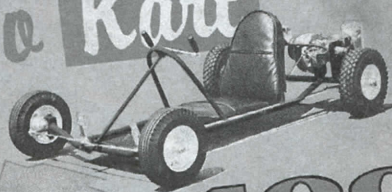
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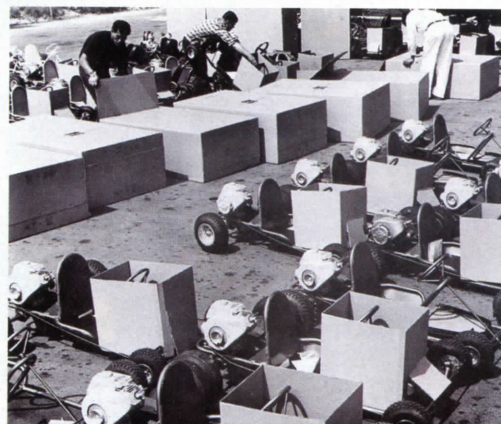
By mid-year 1958, both Go Kart Mfg. and Bug Eng. were placing full-page ads in the "rodding" magazines. Here are a couple of examples.

other than we were making a lot of money and spending a lot. And we were having a lot of fun! We started to diversify, building mini-bikes and an industrial cart, which we called the flying carpet. While we were dinking around with that thing, karting seemed to take a nosedive over just a few weeks; it just went straight down and we went right down with it. We were spread too thin and we went downs the tubes. So I went back over to my muffler shop in Monrovia and worked there."

Due to the fact that it was owned and managed by one close-knit family, Bug Engineering survived the 1963 downturn but not without some heavy-duty belt tightening. Faye recalled that, "At the height of our karting business we were manufacturing and shipping over 300 karts a day. When the slump hit, we were caught off guard as much as anybody, but Tom managed to get us downsized without too much pain, and we were able to keep the doors open and recover." And recover they did. The Pierson family is still in the karting business in 2009.

Thankfully, in spite of the fierce competition between

their two companies, Faye Pierson and Duffy Livingstone today remain the warmest of friends. In addition to annual reunions at vintage karting events around the country, in 2008 they traveled together to Australia as honored guests of the vintage karters of that island continent.



Here is part of one days production of karts being prepared for shipment from the Bug plant at 330 S. Irwindale Ave. in 1960.

Time marches on. Faye and Duffy are now both in their eighties. After a decade of heart issues, Tom Pierson died in 2000. Faye continues to live in the house she and Tom built and shared on the hilltop in Covina. Duffy and wife DeeDee, both in good health, recently moved from Grants Pass, OR, to Chattanooga, TN, to be closer to her family. 🌻

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