

What's up with...Dale Funk?

## In 1970s, drag racer's team reached the top of Top Fuel Once 'Kentucky Moonshiner,' now tire dealer

By GARY MULLINS  
 gmullins@courier-journal.com  
 The Courier-Journal

Drag racing requires nerves of steel, quick reflexes, good equipment and a love for raw straight-line speed.

Valley Station's Dale Funk possessed all of that — and a team that made it to the top of the sport.

Funk started racing a b-dragster locally in 1963 at the age of 23 and continued competing until 1975 when he retired as one of the sport's most recognizable names in its Top Fuel division.

Along the way he won five International Hot Rod Association events, two National Hot Rod Association Top Fuel events and the 1974 IHRA Top Fuel World Championship. Twice during his career he set the NHRA national lap record, reaching speeds of 250 mph.

"We were racing against guys like Kenny Bernstein and Don Garlits," Funk said. "We're all old guys now, but back then we were young."

But it isn't Funk's racing accolades that he cherishes most. It was a partnership that blossomed into a friendship that he looks back on fondly.

"In 1967 Robert Frakes and I decided to build a car together," Funk said. "We had raced against each other for several years in mediocre cars. So we combined our money and built a better car. Robert was more mechanically inclined, so he built the cars and I drove. For the next nine years we practically lived together because of all the work that goes into racing at a high level."

By 1970, Frakes, formerly of Radcliff, Ky., and Funk had landed sponsorship from businessman Bill English. From then on the team was known as the English, Frakes & Funk Kentucky Moonshiner Car.

For the next six years they traveled all over the nation competing in IHRA and NHRA Top Fuel events, putting their winnings back into the car.

"We won the national title in '74 and got a check for \$1,500," Funk said with a laugh. "Now it pays something like \$400,000. The most we ever won was about \$25,000 at the Gator nationals in '75. But the expense of the car ate that up rather quickly."

One of Funk's favorite racing moments with Frakes came in 1974 when the Kentucky Moonshiner won the IHRA Spring Nationals in front of 104,000 spectators.

"We set the national record for top speed in that race," Funk said. "So that was a neat deal."



PHOTO BY NICK TOMECEK  
 Dale Funk, one of drag racing's Top Fuel stars in the mid-1970s, held a trophy from his 2001 hall of fame induction.

But after the '75 season, Funk decided it was time to move on, despite being near the top of his discipline.

"I just got tired of it," Funk said. "I needed to make some money instead of playing all my life."

Funk, 63, now owns four Big O Tire stores in Kentucky.

In 2001 the team was honored one more time by the sport they put so much into. English (who had passed away previously), Frakes and Funk were inducted into the International Drag Racing Hall of Fame.

"I guess it's not a big deal unless you like drag racing," Funk said. "But it was (a big deal) to us."

Nonetheless, he and Frakes remained loyal friends through the years until Frakes died of cancer two weeks ago.

"Robert was just a big part of me," Funk said. "The driver gets all the credit, but the truth is it's the crew chief that deserves it. He was a great mechanic. Drivers are just lucky enough to sit in the car. I just want people to know that."

Still, Funk looks back on his racing days with fond memories and plenty of smiles.

"I once told Robert that he tried to kill me for 10 years and didn't succeed," Funk said with a laugh. "We had a lot of fun. It was more fun and less serious than it is now."

[Home](#) · [News](#) · [Sports](#) · [Business](#) · [Features](#) · [Louisville Scene](#) · [Classifieds](#) · [Cars](#) · [Homes](#) · [Marketplace](#) · [Contact Us](#) · [Search](#)