



TV TOMMY IVO'S 80th BIRTHDAY BASH

Written and Photographed by Ken Latka

04/16/2016

On Saturday April 16, 2016 three-hundred friends and fans of legendary drag racer TV Tommy Ivo celebrated his 80th birthday at the NHRA Motorsports Museum in Pomona, California. The Television Motion Picture Car Club was honored to be part of the event, working with Larry Fisher and his team at the museum to make this a memorable day for Tommy and the attendees.

When you arrived, on display in front of the museum were five of Tommy's race cars, with his 1923 Ford T-Bucket parked right in the middle. On display off to the left was TV Tommy's Barnstormer front engine dragster, inside the recently restored Ivo plexi-glass sided trailer. After admiring the cars, people walked up the steps to enter the museum. Once you opened the door, you saw posters of two of the many films Tommy starred in, as well as a poster of one of his famous fire burnouts. After checking out the posters, you could pick up your ticket at the counter and proceed outside the back of the museum to enjoy food from "The Habit", as you sat in the shade, talking with friends and drag racing legends in the park like setting.

After lunch, NHRA announcer Bob Frey stepped to the podium and introduced a notable panel of folks that included Greg Sharp; Steve "The Hook" Gibbs; John "Tarzan" Austin; Bob Muravez (aka Floyd Lippencott); Tom "The Mongoose" McEwen and Don Rackemann. They shared stories and anecdotes about Ivo. Others who spoke during the event were Skip Torgerson; 2012 NHRA Funny Car Champion "Fast" Jack Beckman and Ivo's long time mechanic Terry Howland.

After everyone had the opportunity to share their stories, a video presentation of Tommy's television and motion picture career played, ending in the "Margie" opening title from the early sixties television series that Tommy appeared on. When the Margie theme finished on screen, three trumpeters played a few bars from the Margie theme as TMPCC President Ken Latka escorted actress Cynthia Pepper to the front of the stage. Cynthia was the lead actress in the Margie TV series and since we kept her appearance secret from Tommy during the planning of the event, he was completely surprised.

Bob Frey chatted with Cynthia and Tommy about their work on the show as well as one of her best known roles in the 1964 Elvis Presley movie "Kissing Cousins" where she played the character of Private First Class Midge Riley. Cynthia was also a regular on My Three Sons, playing Joan Pearson, the girlfriend of the oldest brother Mike Douglas (played by Tim Considine) on the show.

Then Tommy took the podium. He spoke about many things, including how one of his legendary practical jokes got him into trouble with Mongoose McEwen. Tom closed with an emotional thank you to everyone and as his voice started to break a bit, he said "this is a day I will never forget". It was very touching to see that the event had such an impact on him. A few seconds later a confetti canon launched an array of multi colored confetti that buried Tommy and everyone in the first few rows. After the explosion of confetti, we went outside to enjoy birthday cake and Doctor Bob's Gourmet Ice Cream. At this time we got to rub elbows with the father of the dragster Art Chrisman, Ed "Isky" Iskenderian and other legends of drag racing.

After dessert, Tommy and Cynthia signed posters reproduced from the Hot Rod Magazine cover they both appeared on in 1961 with his four engine behemoth "Showboat". A long line of people formed and even though it took more than an hour, Tom and Cynthia signed every poster asked of them.

At the end of the event, that famous Hot Rod Magazine cover was recreated, as Elana Scherr from Hot Rod Magazine photographed Cynthia and Tommy with the Showboat dragster (in its Wagonmaster configuration) in front of the museum. We also took advantage of the photo opportunity and stepped on the ladder to create the image you see at the very bottom of this article.

Since Tommy is a member of both the The Road Kings and the Television Motion Picture Car Club, it was great to see that members from both clubs showed up in respectable numbers to celebrate his birthday.

Amanda Busick and Lewis Bloom also interviewed Tommy for NHRA online and for an upcoming NHRA on Fox broadcast.

It was an absolutely wonderful and well organized event, but most importantly, it was one that Tommy and all who attended will never forget.

© 2016 TMPCC

TMPCC Media is a division of The Television Motion Picture Car Club, the world's only car club for those who work in or are affiliated with the entertainment industry. The club not only has members from the television and motion picture industry, but also includes those from music, radio, sports, motorsports and the automotive media. TMPCC has attracted some of the best automotive writers, reporters and photographers from print, radio and television not only here in the United States, but from around the world. With all that talent on board, in late 2013 TMPCC Media was founded to promote the automotive lifestyle.

