

NVRA Photographer Joe Cawley



- Born in Austin, Texas on November 15, 1945. His family moved to the Augusta, Georgia area when he was an infant. Joe's family resided on Sibley Road in Augusta from 1949 to 1999.
- In the mid 1960s, Gordon Hwy (US 278) was built, intersecting Sibley Road near Joe's home. Lawrence "Shorty" Palmer Jr. built Palmer's Service Station near that intersection, and the M&M Machine Shop was built near the service station. (A Smile Gas station is now at the site of Palmer's station, and a paint company now sits where the machine shop once stood.) In the late 1950s, several racecars were built at both sites. When the guys would crank up the cars, Joe and his brother Frank would go watch. The cars were sometimes tested up and down Sibley Road, or maybe in the clay pit behind the gas station and trailer park. Joe was hooked on racecars!
- Joe's interest in racecars continued as he graduated from Butler High School in 1963. Joe's graduating class also included future NASCAR car fabricator Mike Laughlin (who recently sold his shop in Simpsonville, S.C.), racer Lamar Ennis (who has now turned his car over to his daughter's husband, Kelly Guy), and Phillip Akeson (another racer who has his son Michael driving his car). Both teams are now racing Super Late Model Sportsmen on Augusta area dirt tracks.
- Joe saw his first stock car race in 1960 at Speedway Park, Martinez, Ga. where the Riverwatch Parkway and Hwy 28 intersect. It was a 1/4 mile flat oval. Racing on the track were drivers who went on to race NASCAR Winston Cup: H G Rosier, Weldon Adams, Rock Harn, Frank Warren and possibly Joe Penland. Joe's camera was with him there too as he poked it through the grandstand taking photos.
- He also attended Augusta International Speedway, whose drag strip opened on May 1, 1960. In 1961, the Augusta International Speedway opened the 1/2-mile stockcar track, and Joe went there too since his father also enjoyed going to the races. He would take the family to both stockcar and drag races whenever he could. The Augusta track was paved in 1965, and Joe continued to go. He was usually in the grandstands, but would go to the pits after the races. He always had a camera with him. Pictured below is a young Joe (around 1964) beside a couple of the sports cars that normally run at the Augusta road course.



- NASCAR races at Augusta were common in the early 1960s. Below (on the left) is a picture of Joe standing beside Buck Baker's car in 1965. On the right, he is beside Bobby Isaac's 1963 fastback Ford Galaxy in 1966.



- Joe was about to be drafted in 1966 and decided to join the Navy reserves. In 1967, he went on active duty a couple years, but did get to a few races in Hampton, Richmond and South Boston, VA, and in Wilson, N.C. Joe returned home from active duty in the fall of 1968 and continued to go to Augusta International Speedway's NASCAR Late Model Sportsman races, watching guys like Bruce Brantley, Al Smith, and Don Tomberlin (now NVRA members) compete until the track closed in 1970.
- After Augusta International closed, Joe started hitting the area dirt tracks located within a couple hours of his home in Augusta. As always, he continued taking pictures. In the early 70's, one of the local drivers, Big John Arrington, insisted on paying Joe for some photos and told him he should sell his photos. After that, Joe started selling pictures at the races. John also advised him to label the pictures as to who was in them, the date, and the track. Joe's collection of pictures is now historical information to numerous racing organizations.
- In the mid 70's, Joe would get the *Swainsboro Forest Blade* newspaper and other papers from the area. He started to mail the race results to *Fun Car & Southern Racing News* in Florida. They talked Joe into writing the racing stories for them. He found a crash course in writing, took it, and was soon sending articles and photos by "snail mail" to the paper. The paper would also have him cover the NASCAR Winston Cup races in Atlanta, Darlington, and other area tracks. After the Florida paper folded, Joe continued to do the same for other papers around the Southeast.
- In 1981, Gordon Park Speedway opened and Joe went to work for them doing the presswork. He worked at the track quite often over the next 20 years. He also worked some for Modoc (SC) Speedway located just north of Augusta.
- In 1998, Joe saw his first NVRA race at Lavonia, Georgia. After that, he would try to get to any NVRA race that did not conflict with the local race schedules. Around 2000, Joe was burned out on the local racing and promoters. He decided to cut back and mostly attend vintage and sprint car races that were in a couple hour radius of Augusta. In 2004, he started going to more NVRA events. In 2005, he went to several more. In 2006, the only race he missed was at Talladega, AL while his car was in the shop.
- Joe is very proud of the plaque he received at the NVRA banquet honoring him for his publicity and photography for the NVRA in 2006. Joe works as the club's publicist and tries to send the race results (and a picture or two) to the hometown papers of the drivers finishing in the top five.



- Joe also sends the articles and photos to several racing newspapers and magazines. And he can still be found selling extra copies of his photos at the tracks.
- In 2007, Joe plans to continue working as he did last year. He enjoys traveling with the NVRA because they are racing the same kind of cars he saw when he started going to races many years ago. Joe has taken his own car around some racetracks, but has never competed in the races. His enjoyment comes from photographing the cars, the drivers, the crews, and the fans.