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## George Ray

Posted by ArcadeGuest - 2009/12/13 20:12

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Beginning from the first day of December this year, reports began to surface concerning the failing health of George Elzie Ray. When he passed away just after midnight on December 5, the news spread quickly of the loss of a legendary figure in the sport of drag racing.

In fact, George Ray's death was the end of a life but the beginning of a legacy. At age eighty-five, even George knew of his limitations and had intimated to close friends his hopes for the continuation of that legacy long after he departed the planet. The only problem to that offering was the simple fact that most of the millions of people who knew the man...or even simply knew his name...refused to believe George Ray would ever die.

So much has been written or presented about George Ray in the past 15 years that a complete review of his life's work is no longer necessary. The man who was considered by so many to be the last bastion of true drag racing will now be forever entwined with the drag strip that bears his name. The legend and the legacy are now inseparable.

George Ray was much more than a drag racing icon. He was a genuine family man whose love of those in the Ray clan far exceeded his passion for the sport. He was, however, fully aware that his contribution to straight-line racing affected thousands more families and it became a bond within his community.

When a much younger George Ray realized the Tennessee drag strip at which he competed favored some racers more than others, he took the promoter's ridiculing advice and built his own track. After securing a deal to purchase a parcel of land six miles west of the eastern Arkansas state line a half-mile south of Route 412 on State Road 135 just east of Paragould, George poured 2600 feet of concrete in a 30-foot-wide strip and opened the gates in early November 1961. The no-frills place to race opened under the name "George Ray's Hot Rod Drag Strip". A half century later, after all but a handful of the nation's thousands of tracks had closed, it is still standing.

That, in itself, is the George Ray legend. It involves no crusade, revelation or history-changing invention. It is no more than the story of a common man with resolve to do things his way with the conviction required to make his efforts last beyond his own life. George Ray achieved the dream of every person. George Ray showed 'em all.

For the first 35 years, George Ray provided for his family with a drag strip of his own creation while offering the community an entertainment venue that stood the test of time. In those same three decades, George never got greedy. He knew the purpose of the facility and recognized even better its limitations. As speeds on the track increased, George shortened the quarter-mile distance of the strip to one thousand feet and, inadvertently, forced almost all other tracks in the state to adopt the same distance. Eventually, he moved the finish line to one eighth of a mile from the starting line. Again, most other Arkansas tracks switched, too.

The facility itself, however, changed little. It still remained in the back yard of George's house. A few grandstands were added and the spectator crossover catwalk near the starting line eventually housed an announcer and a few public address system speakers. A new concession building was added and a few fences were erected, but in reality the only noticeable visual difference from opening day was the growth of the trees that lined the track and silently reflected the history of George Ray himself.

[http://www.dragracingonline.com/finishline/xi\\_11-georgeray-1.html](http://www.dragracingonline.com/finishline/xi_11-georgeray-1.html)

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## Re:George Ray

Posted by junkman306 - 2009/12/14 11:09

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Damn good article. I heard about him dying the morning it happened. I'm glad I got to go and see him when I did. He will be forever remembered. :(

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## Re:George Ray

Posted by Devin - 2009/12/26 18:07

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Fuck! That just makes 2009 an even shittier year.

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## Re:George Ray

Posted by monstercarlo - 2010/02/07 10:45

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gorge did not shorten the track because of excessive speed or for safety reasons. the story from his mouth was, short  
virson a kid built a car like his and it would outrun his just before the 1/4 mile mark. so he shortened the track so he would  
not be beaten. quote his track his rules. unquote. make no mistake gorgr was an outlaw and a man i am proud to have  
known and called friend.

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