

JOE AMATO DRAG RACING CHAMPION

Motor Sports Hall of Fame

WHEN?

Racing: 1960 – 2000

Born: 1944

EVENT

Chosen as the NHRA 9th
Greatest Driver in history



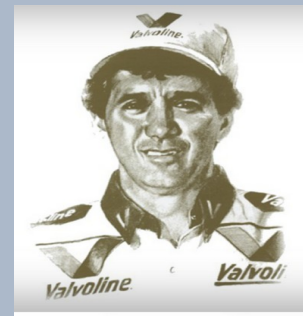
WHERE? Racing tracks

VOCABULARY

drag racing chassis
hot rod funny car
top fuel

The International Motorsports Hall of Fame in Talledega, Alabama, has an impressive display of racing champions. There you will find Joe Amato's name and exploits in the field of top fuel racing. He won five championships including three in a row in 1990-91-92. For 19 years he never finished out of the Top Ten in points (motor sports). Though he set speed records, win records, and won championships, he always credited his team for the behind-the-scenes work they did. The crew were like family to him.

In 1958 his father closed his deli store and opened an auto parts business. Several of his employees participated in racing and took young Joe with them to the track (Amato Racing). That's when he fell in love with the sport. When his father developed heart issues two years later, Joe decided to quit school at 16 to help with the family business. His own racing career began a few months later. Though his father died a few years later, Joe was able to capitalize on the business foundation built by his dad and formed Keystone Automotive which became the largest auto parts business on the east coast during the next 20 years.



Though his racing career started in a 1953 Ford, he soon chose to move to Alcohol Funny Cars. While a funny car looks similar to a showroom model the tilt-up body is made out of fiberglass or carbon fiber. The fuel is a mixture of methanol and nitromethane. In 1982, he began racing Top Fuel. With major changes made in the chassis and rear wing, he and his crew chief Tim Richards enabled Amato to pass 260 mph and later the 280 mph mark (Amato Racing). He also ran the sports first 4.5 second pass at the Western Auto Nationals in Topeka.

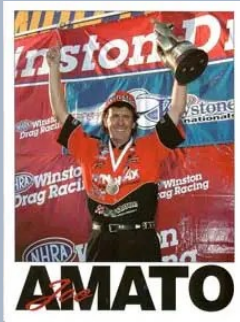
Although Amato suffered from chronic back pain after thousands runs on the drag strip, it was a detached retina that eventually put the period at the end of his racing days in 2000. In an interview, Amato talked about the eye surgery. "I was sitting in the doctor's office, and was telling me that I might not drive anymore," Amato said in Denver. "And then I come back from laser eye surgery with holes in my retina and win the race. To me, that is the comeback of my career. Someday, when I sit down and write my memoirs, this weekend is



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going to be a special chapter in my book” (Amato Racing). His last victory was in 2000 at the Keystone Nationals at his home track--the Maple Grove Raceway (Amato Racing.) After his retirement as a driver, he then moved into ownership of his own racing team.



An interviewer asked: “*Joe Amato, 35 years of drag racing and then one day, it’s over. This is unique for you, isn’t it?*”

“I guess when I woke up the next morning it was like what happened to the switch? I’m used to waking up and full speed with Amato Racing. Tomorrow is more or less unwinding everything and moving all the pieces of the puzzle to the next chapter. It’s been a great, great ride. Like all good things in life, sometimes you have to change the chapter. I have my health and now I’ll have the time and freedom to come to a few races and do what I want to do, but not be here and have the Monday to Friday obligation” (Amato racing).

ONLINE RESOURCES

[Motor Hall Sports of Fame](#)

[Amato Racing](#)

[Throwback Racing Amato Youtube](#)