

## Lew Florence

Versatile in just about any kind of car, Lew Florence drove mostly big cars in the 1960s, all the way to up to Formula 5000. TransAms, Group 7, Lew could drive everything with skill and success.

Born in 1925 in Tacoma, Washington, Lew developed a keen interest in cars from working after school in his father's body shop. After starting his racing career with midget oval cars, Florence moved to Yakima and worked in car dealerships, as he got involved in the Northwest road-racing scene.

In the late 50s, Florence won Seafair Trophy races in 1959 and 60 when that race was the most prestigious event around. In 1960 and 1961 he also won 17 straight times at Westwood and set lap records at Maryhill and Westwood. While he was successful in just about anything he chose to drive, Lew's string of victories in a Lotus 15 is particularly amazing—he won 27 times out of the 29 races he entered with the car. As Lew Florence's business interests grew and he acquired dealerships in Yakima and Olympia, he occasionally drew back from racing, even announcing his retirement on more than one occasion and selling his cars.

He drove a Lister-Chev in the early 60s, finishing an impressive third in the 1962 NWGP. Carroll Shelby prepared a Cobra especially for Lew Florence and Lew raced that car in the mid-60s. He then acquired first a Lotus 19-Chev and a Genie, both of which were fast and successful although Florence did not race them often. He proved his ability time and time again by winning many pole positions in qualifying, even if the car did not win. Florence teamed up with other drivers at Trans-Am races and stepped in to protect co-driver Russ Harness in the infamous "Local Yuk" incident in 1967.

Florence next had a Porsche 906, and his duels with Monte Shelton and Gerry Bruihl followed. He livened up many Northwest races with the psychedelically painted car that people probably thought belonged to some young hippy driver, but Florence was in fact in his mid-40s at the time.

Selling the Porsche in 1969, Florence bought the Gurney-Eagle Chevrolet which had been driven by the Dickie Smothers. He got down to 1:18.4 at Kent while practicing with the car, but sold it to Sam Posey at the beginning of the 1969 season. He bought another Formula 5000 car but only raced it once or twice, finally retiring in 1971. The loss of his friend and long-time fellow race Stan Burnett is thought to have had a major effect on Lew Florence's retirement from a life of racing. He passed away from the effects of cancer in 2001.