

PLN: Forever Young!

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Paul Newman got the racing bug when most men are approaching middle age. He did some of the driving in his 1969 film *Winning* and went to SCCA Driver's School in a borrowed Lotus Elan. He quickly completed his SCCA Regional license requirements in the Lotus and advanced to National competition in a partnership with fellow Westport, Connecticut, resident Bob Sharp who was the czar of Nissan Racing on the East Coast.

Paul handed over to Bob a princely sum to prepare a Datsun 510 B-Production Sedan. He would arrive at the races with one or two of his children stuffed into a Porsche 911, and Bob and his team would have the 510 ready to go. Paul's wife, Joanne Woodward, didn't want to see him get hurt and would not attend his races -- as things turned out, she had nothing to worry about.

At the time, I held an SCCA National Scrutineering license and worked all of the Nationals at Lime Rock Park. My wife Carolyn had accompanied me to Paul's first National race and she worked Station One -- which was an inspection of the driver's suit and helmet.

I was working at the end of the line issuing tech stickers and stamping tech books.

When we were finished, she said, "I inspected Paul Newman's underwear . . . but he wasn't wearing them."

I laughed and said, "Let's go up to the tower and watch practice."

We were standing on the starter's bridge in the old Lime Rock tower watching the cars roar by underneath when I saw a familiar figure out of the corner of my eye. I said to my wife, "Turn slowly to your right";

There he was, standing right next to her with his suit rolled down and tied around his waist, exposing the top half of those famous Nomex long johns. She was speechless as she stared at him.

Paul must have sensed something because he turned and smiled at her, said that famous "Hello", and went on his way. All she could say was, "Those eyes";

Paul's race came and went and he won by the proverbial mile. The announcers were asked to refer to the driver of the red, white and blue Datsun 510 as "P.L. Newman";

As the winner of his class, the car was impounded for post-race inspection. I was in the impound area when he drove in, mobbed by spectators and film fans who were kept outside by Lakeville's Finest. I noticed that he had left his helmet in the car -- which is not permitted (extra weight). It was a simple open-face helmet, painted metallic blue with the initials PLN in white script.

I retrieved it and handed it to him with the rejoinder, "This would make a great souvenir for someone." He laughed and said, "Thanks, I never thought of that";

I was working tech at his next National and the same drill went down. He won his race, he drove to impound, and left his helmet in the car. Again, I retrieved it and handed it back to him with the same reminder. He said, "I remember you told me that last time. I must be getting old and forgetful. Thanks again";

Paul Newman was such an amazing driver that, instead of paying Bob Sharp to prepare his cars, Sharp was asking him to be one of his team drivers in less than one year's time. And, the rest is history.