



## **LEGENDS OF THUNDER VALLEY RONNIE SOX AND BUDDY MARTIN**

Dominant and innovative individuals often leave an indelible mark on the sport in which they competed. When the names of these legends are spoken, an impressive list of their contributions always follows. Through the years, two names have become synonymous with speed, ingenuity and domination in drag racing. Those names are Sox and Martin.

While Buddy Martin began his career behind the wheel, it only was after he turned his car over to Ronnie Sox that a super-team emerged.

In a 2001 interview, Martin said, "I was driving my own 409 '61 Chevy, and every time he took first place, I'd ask him to drive my car for the second place consolation prize. At the end of 1962, I told him that I was planning on ordering a new '63 Chevy with the Z-11 427, and I asked him if he'd like to be the driver. He agreed, and we won our first time out in January."

That first event would set the tone for the duo's impressive career. Sox and Martin would rack up a list of accolades that would make any racer envious. The pair took home five World Championships and 46 National Hot Rod Association, International Hot Rod Association and American Hot Rod Association national event wins. Four of those victories have taken place here in Thunder Valley, a place with an aura as extraordinary as that of these drag racing giants.

With Martin's mechanical expertise and business savvy, the team had powerful and reliable cars and the sponsor support necessary to compete in the top levels of the sport. Combined with Sox's incredible skills behind the wheel, the team burned up drag strips across the country.

In 1970, NHRA created the Pro Stock category. Sox and Martin dominated the inaugural season collecting three of the seven event titles and the World Championship. They doubled the win total in 1971, taking home six victories and their third-straight NHRA World Championship.

Sox's amazing power shifting ability perhaps is his greatest legacy. In 1973, teams began to switch their cars to the clutchless Lenco transmission. Most competitors saw times fall by as much as a tenth of a second. Sox, however, actually slowed down while using the new style of transmission.

“Ronnie’s skills as a driver were a gift,” said Martin. “He was very coordinated with the hand and foot. In addition to his shifting, his reaction times were outstanding. Everybody drove four-speed cars at that time, and other drivers would miss gears left and right. That never happened with Ronnie. Everybody had an excuse, but Ronnie could get into anyone else’s car and have no problems whatsoever.”

Despite his amazing ability, the Lenco transmission virtually erased Sox’s advantage over his competition. Sox and Martin continued racing as a team until 1975. Sox raced in IHRA competition through the 1980s and early 1990s, but never experienced the same success as he did when he was paired with Martin.

In 1998, the pair made a brief return to NHRA competition, racing in the short-lived Pro Stock Truck category.

“I’m certainly glad that I was able to race at the time that I did,” admitted Sox during a 2001 interview. “Back in the days of the four-speeds, the driver had a lot more to do with the outcome of the race, and I couldn’t imagine anything being more fun than that.”

Sox passed away on April 22, 2006 after a long battle with cancer. He was 67. Martin currently lives in the Carolinas and operates an automobile sales and leasing company with his son.

For their contributions to the sport of drag racing and their success at Bristol Dragway, officials honored Ronnie Sox and Buddy Martin as Legends of Thunder Valley during the 2008 NHRA Thunder Valley Nationals.

Present to accept the honor on May 18, 2008 were Buddy Martin and Diane Sox, the widow of Ronnie Sox.