



LEGENDS OF THUNDER VALLEY

DALE PULDE

When drag racing fans hear the iconic “War Eagle” name, another name just as popular is sure to be uttered in the same sentence. Dale Pulde’s War Eagle was one of the most well-known Funny Cars to ever grace a drag strip, and the personality behind the wheel made the car a sure winner.

Pulde’s racing career began in the 50s, not on the strip, but on quarter midget tracks when he was only five. When he reached his eighth birthday he was a national champion. The hobby became too expensive for his parents and they sold his race car.

At the age of 15, Pulde, from Van Nuys, Calif., began racing a Jr. Fuel Dragster owned by one of his neighbors. During his time in the dragster, Pulde met Charlie Wilson, owner of the “Vicious ‘Vette.” Pulde raced the Corvette while still in high school, but after graduation completed a 1968 Camaro Funny Car and went on tour.

Pulde began match racing across the country in the early 70s for the legendary Mickey Thompson.

During the 1974 World Finals, Pulde defeated Don Prudhomme and played his part in handing the first NHRA World Championship to Shirl Greer. Without a ride for the following season, Pulde returned home to work for his brother’s machine shop. He also raced Joe Mundet’s Eastern Raider on a part-time basis.

Later in the 1975 season, he became partners with Mike Hamby and the two men began to build a race team. In 1977, Pulde and Hamby debuted the very first car from their stable. In a previous interview, Pulde recalled the development process for the name of the car, something he said was probably the hardest thing about building the car.

“Mike went to the library and came home with a bunch of names, but we were still undecided,” said Pulde. “One night, Mike came in late while I was watching a cowboy movie. Ironically, the Indian character’s name was ‘War Eagle.’”

Dale Pulde’s War Eagle would become one of the most famous Funny Cars on the tour. It claimed several NHRA and IHRA National event victories and was booked for match races across the country.

Pulde rode the car to victory during the 1977 IHRA Spring Nationals in Thunder Valley. He became a regular visitor to Bristol Dragway’s Winner’s Circle, claiming wins in the 1979 Spring Nationals, the 1982 Summer Nationals, and the 1985 Spring and Fall Nationals.

During his career, Pulde earned three IHRA World Championships and 20 National event victories, making him the winningest IHRA Funny Car competitor. He also collected six NHRA National event victories. While "War Eagle" and "The Miller Warrior" were the two cars most associated with Pulde, he earned victories driving in replacement roles, notably in 1996 driving for the injured Whit Bazemore.

Currently, Pulde races a replica of his 1977 War Eagle at match races and nostalgia events across the country.

For his accomplishments in the sport of drag racing, Bristol Dragway officials inducted Dale Pulde as a Legend of Thunder Valley during the May 15-17, 2012 running of the NHRA Thunder Valley Nationals.

Past Legends of Thunder Valley inductees are Ronnie Sox and Buddy Martin, Don Garlits, Rickie Smith, Larry Carrier and Bruton Smith.