

Gordie Bonin (1948-2013)

NHRA lost one of its most colorful characters last week when former Funny Car driver Gordie Bonin passed away in Las Vegas at age 65.

A nine-time NHRA national event winner, “240 Gordie” — a nickname he acquired in the 1970s when his Bubble Up Trans Am repeatedly ventured into the 240-mph range, a rare feat in those days — was inducted into the Canadian Motorsports Hall of Fame in 2000 along with partners Ron Hodgson and Gordon Jenner.

Bonin, born in Red Deer, Alberta, Canada, also drove Top Fuel dragsters and served as NHRA marketing director.

“Easygoing” was a common description that many shared,” National Dragster editor Phil Burgess wrote in his blog this week. “There’s no doubt that Bonin sometimes led a complex personal life — much to the amusement of his teammates at times — but he was always upbeat and smiling through it, at least publicly.”

Graham Light, a fellow Canadian, shared the a highlight with Bonin in 1977 at the World Finals at Ontario Motor Speedway. Bonin won the Funny Car class and Light, now the NHRA director of competition, was runner-up in Top Fuel under the same banner.

“Gordie was always enjoyable to be around, always very positive, and, in my opinion, one of the best Funny Car drivers of that era,” Light recalled to Burgess. “The one thing about Gordie is that he wanted to be a Funny Car driver for life; even right to the end, he was talking about a comeback. He lived an amazing life to its fullest; a guy would have to live 150 years to enjoy what he packed into 65.”