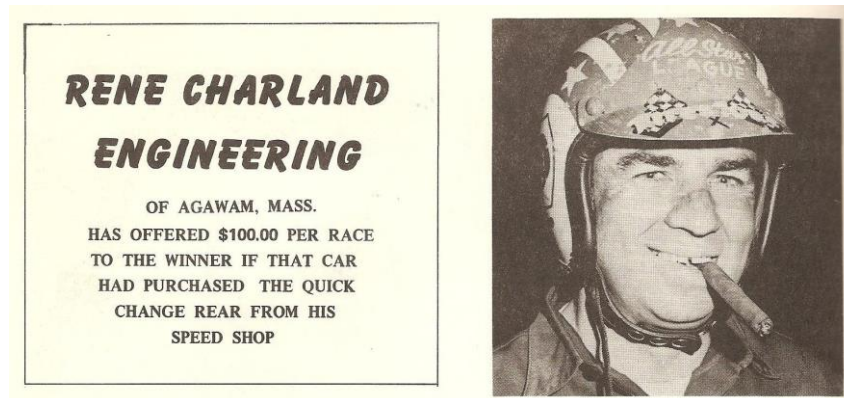




PHOTO TRIVIA ANSWER – SPRING, 2017



This native New Englander had an illustrious career racing on asphalt and dirt. He was part of the "Eastern Bandits" posse. His many championships earned himself the nickname "The Champ". Note his trademark cigar. This ad appeared in the All Star Stock Car Racing League programs in 1971. Who was he?

Yes, it's Rene Charland. Rene was born in Chicopee, MA on November 13, 1928 and lived in Agawam, MA. His extraordinary career spanned 35 years, starting with his first race at Riverside Park in 1949 and ending at Fonda Speedway in 1984. During that time it is estimated that he won over 700 races. He raced with ease on either dirt or asphalt often running alternate nights on different surfaces with the same car. He was mostly identified with the #3.

It wasn't until about 1960 that Charland began to gain national prominence as a member of the "Eastern Bandits." The Bandits, as they called themselves, were a group of New England drivers that found the pickings were a little easier in the mid-southern states than back home in the Northeast. Members of this loosely-knit bunch included Charland, Denny Zimmerman, Ed Flemke, and Red Foote. They traveled together and spent much of the week at small blacktop tracks in the Virginia-Maryland area, as well as New York. Racing as much as five times a week, the Bandits devastated the locals, often sweeping the top five and carrying the lion's share of the prize money home to New England.

As an Eastern Bandit, Charland entered about 80 to 100 shows a year from 1961 through 1966. Because most of the tracks which he and the Eastern-Bandits invaded were NASCAR-sanctioned, Charland began accumulating valuable NASCAR Sportsman Modified points.

In 1961 Charland finished fifth in the NASCAR national standings and announced that winning NASCAR's National Sportsman title in 1962 was his goal. Indeed, 1962 became his breakthrough season. He won 21 features that season and handily won the NASCAR title. He repeated as NASCAR Sportsman National Champion in 1963, 1964 and 1965. He probably would have won the 1966 title too, but for being sidelined by injuries and burns sustained in a near-fatal mid-season crash at Albany-Saratoga Speedway. Rene credits Ed Flemke for saving him that day. Flemke reached through the flames and pulled the 3-times bigger Charland from the burning car. That mishap is what Rene and racing history called the "French Barbecue." That René could joke about his own near-death experience only helped to build his legend.

Charland's rebirth as a dirt tracker continued throughout the early 1970's. His upset victory in the 1974 Lebanon Valley 200 capped his illustrious career.

He was a 1996 inductee into the DIRT Motorsports Hall of Fame and an initial inductee into the NEAR Hall of Fame.

In all, Charland won an estimated 250 career features. He drove a variety of cars numbered 3, but he is also remembered for successful stints in the Cziepel #888, Russ Betz #59 and Platt brothers #99. Over the years, Charland acquired a number of nicknames, but is best known as "The Champ", due to his string of NASCAR titles. Rene Charland passed away on September 30, 2013 at 84 years of age.

Edited from an article on the Legends of NASCAR website: http://www.legendsofnascar.com/Rene_Charland.htm.