

★ AL UNSER, JR. ★

Al Unser Jr.'s continuing success as a superstar in auto racing gives him a unique niche in the Albuquerque Sports Hall of Fame.

He's being enshrined in the Hall tonight as the 53rd inductee, yet he continues an active career rewriting the book in IndyCar auto driving.

The identical situation happened when his father, Al Unser Sr., and his uncle, Bobby Unser, were inducted into the Sports Hall of Fame in the 1970s. Bobby was the first inductee in 1974. Al Sr. followed as No. 8 two years later.

Little Al, as he is affectionately called, qualified long ago for induction into the Hall. But, at age 32, he embellished his record as auto racing's 1994 driver of the year. He also became IndyCar's all-time leading money winner.

"It was a magic 1994 season . . . a season that comes to a driver once in a lifetime," said Unser of his eight IndyCar wins and \$3,535,813 in earnings that surpassed Emerson Fittipaldi's record \$2,575,554 in 1993.

"But, I didn't win it alone," Unser added. "My Marlboro Team Penske was the key. Our team set the standard for modern-day IndyCars by running 1-2-3 in so many races. We had the best people in racing.

"My father (4-time Indy 500 champ Al Sr.) had the same type magic season when he won 10 races (for Vel's Parnelli Jones Ford) in 1970."

Unser's 1994 campaign, a season for the ages, increased his 13-year career earnings to \$15,379,906, which surpasses Fittipaldi's record \$13,272,876.

Unser shows 27 wins and 138 top ten finishes in 188 races. He's raced for only three owners, Rick Galles for nine years, Doug Shierson for three and Roger Penske for one.

The Duke City native capped the 1994 PPG 16-race IndyCar World Series with eight wins, the most laps led (677 of 2,083), the most times led (31), while compiling 225 points. The point total is second only to Michael Andretti's 234 in 1991 when there were 17 races.

"It's super nice that Little Al is joining the Hall of Fame," said his uncle Bobby. "The important thing is that he's earned the honor. He's a

tremendous talent. He's just got to be an awfully proud man."

Unser Jr., the head of AUJ Motorsports Inc. in the North Valley, won his first Indy 500 for Albuquerque's Galles Racing in 1992 in the closest finish in history (.043 seconds over Scott Goodyear). The Galles-built Galmer machine is to be presented by Valvoline to the Indy 500 Museum in 1995.

The Unser family now shows nine Indy 500 titles; two by Al Jr., four by his father Al Sr. ('70, '71, '78, and '87) and three by his uncle Bobby ('68, '75 and '78). All three of the Unsers won one Indy 500 for Penske, who now has won more driver championships (9), Indy 500s (10), IndyCar races (91) and poles (114) than any other car owner.

In 1994 Little Al, driving his No. 31 Marlboro Penske-Mercedes Benz, captured the Indy 500 pole at 228.011 mph. Two weeks later he won the race the very day (May 29) his father celebrated his 55th birthday. He led 48 of the 250 laps and averaged 160.872 mph. He won his first Indy pole for Galles racing in 1989 and his first season driver championship in 1990.

This year Little Al won five out of six IndyCar races including three straight at Long Beach, Indianapolis and Milwaukee. He missed at Detroit, then won two at Portland and Cleveland. After two more races, he won three in a row again at Mid-Ohio, New Hampshire and Vancouver.

He won two national championships for Galles Racing before starting his IndyCar career. He was the 1982 national Can-Am (Sports Car Club of America) champion and the 1981 Super Vee (SCCA) champ.

Unser Jr., who won the final round of the 1994 IROC series at Michigan International, is the most successful driver in nine years of IROC racing with eight wins and two season championships (at 24, he was the youngest champion ever in 1987).

Unser also won two straight 24 Hours of Daytona endurance races in 1986 and 1987 when he teamed with Al Holbert, Derek Bell and Chuck Robinson.