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HEADLINE: Hot rod designer John Buttera dies

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The Associated Press

LOS ANGELES

"Lil' John" Buttera, an innovative creator of hot rods, dragsters and Indy cars, has died.

Buttera died March 2 at Los Alamitos Medical Center of complications from brain cancer, his friend, Kevin Bell, told the Los Angeles Times.

"You couldn't help but admire him," said **Don Prudhomme**, who drove winning Buttera cars. "He was the best. Not only was he an innovator, he just did things that other chassis builders didn't do."

The newspaper gave his age as 68, but an obituary on the Web page of the **National Hot Rod Association** said he was 67.

Buttera also pioneered the use of custom parts made from aluminum blocks called billets.

In the 1970s, his use of billets for suspension, wheels and other components made for lighter hot rods and sparked a craze for the technology.

Clients at his shop in Cerritos included **rac**ing stars such as Don Schumacher and Shirley Muldowney. He built Schumacher's 1970 U.S. Nationals-winning Funny Car.

Buttera also built a car that competed in the 1982 Indianapolis 500.

"The first time I saw my car come out of Turn Four at Indianapolis . . . I had goose bumps all over me. I couldn't talk; I was crying," Buttera told the Orange County Register in 1995.

The car finished in 27th place.

Buttera cars also appeared at the 1984 and 1987 Indy **rac**es but were sidelined by a crash and mechanical problems.

Buttera was a longtime friend of fellow hot rod designer Boyd Coddington, who died four days before him.

Buttera was born in Kenosha, Wis., and began building dragsters there. He moved to California in 1968.

In recent years, he built hot rods out of his garage in Los Alamitos.

He is survived by his son, Chris; a daughter, Leigh, and two grandchildren.

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Highlights: **Don Prudhomme, National Hot, Rod Association, racing, races**