

THE MIDWEST RACING CONNECTION

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THE MIDWEST'S SHORT TRACK AUTO RACING AUTHORITY



March, 2011

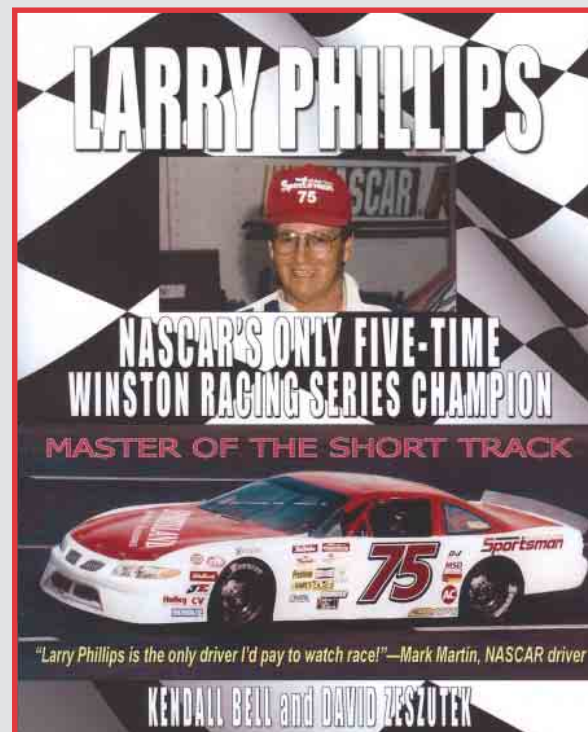
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The Inside Dirt



Larry Phillips Book Review



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Publisher's Note

Racing According to Plan



Dan Plan

For this issue, I figured I would steal an idea from the founder of the publication (Rob Hahn) and just use the space for my column for some random thoughts. Here we go.

NASCAR recently lowered the eligibility age for their touring series. Part of me wonders if this was perhaps done in part due to the success of high-profile drivers such as Chase Elliot and Ross Kenseth having banner years in 2010. Could it be NASCAR feels somewhat slighted that they weren't able to showcase these drivers?

Was there anyone else that thought 2-Time Daytona 500 winner Mickey Waltrip's win in the Truck race at Daytona was scripted? Good Ol' DW shouting you got it Mickey just didn't feel right to me.

How cool was it to see the Wood Brothers with Trevor Bayne win the Daytona 500? Granted, the Woods are getting help from Roush/Yates, but they are clearly not one of the top-tier teams these days, and still plan on running a limited schedule. This just

Random Thoughts

goes to show there's still hope for the underdog in this sport.

The ASA Midwest Tour recently updated their 2011 schedule to include the annual stop at Hawkeye Downs in Cedar Rapids, IA and the addition of being the headline division for the National Short Track Championships at Rockford, IL. A great move in my opinion for both parties (ASA Midwest Tour and Rockford Speedway). The tour now has another asphalt crown jewel event on their schedule, and Rockford continues to bring the NSTC back to a premiere short track event.

I recently received the 2011 schedule for the MSA Sprints. They are the 360 Sprint group that runs on the eastern side of Wisconsin. This lead me to daydream about how cool it would be to have the UMSS and MSA have a combined show at the annual Richert Memorial. The show had over 60 sprint cars on hand last year. Maybe someday we could see over 100 sprinters at the show.

Miscellaneous news and notes;

Make sure to check out our sharing shop space story in this issue. It's great to see drivers thinking out of the box on how to cut costs, yet improve their race program at the same time.

We recently spoke with Twin Cities racer Harm Alken, who lost a lot of equipment in a shop fire during the month January. Nobody was injured in the fire, and Harm was able to salvage enough equipment to continue racing this year. The spare parts inventory isn't quite what it used to be, but the good news is, nobody was hurt. We are also glad to report; no tazers were involved when Harm was asked by the local law enforcement to refrain from trying to put out the fire.

Continued on page 4

The Midwest

RACING

Connection

March, 2011

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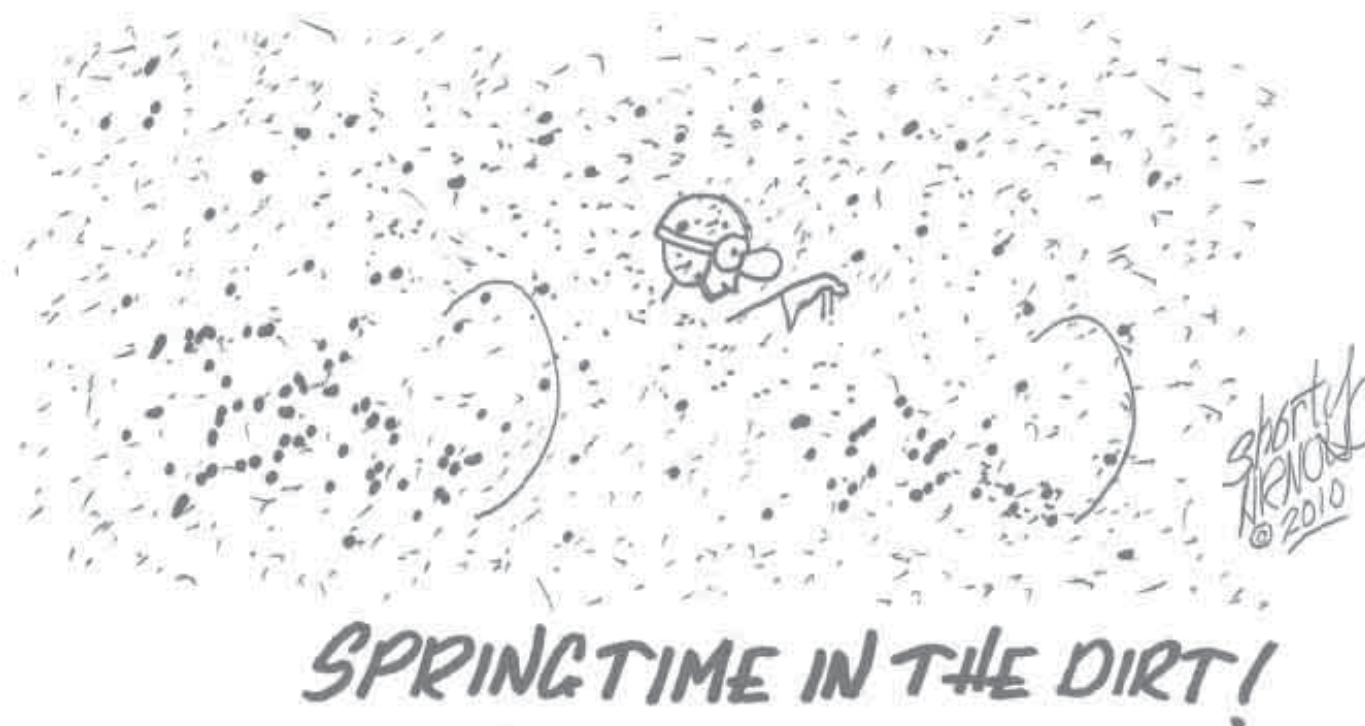
continued from page 3

A few Midwestern racers made the trek down to Florida for Speedweeks this year. Congratulations goes out to Becca Kasten for picking up two wins at New Smyrna Speedway and Cedar Lake Speedway track champion Pat Doar on setting a track record at Volusia County Speedway.

And finally, our condolences go out to the families of Craig Scott and Jerry Thomsen. Craig recently passed away while on a racing trip to Texas. I'll always remember thinking it sounded like announcers in the area were saying "Great Scott" (like Batman would say on the TV series) when introducing Craig at the various tracks through the years. And Jerry was a guy that would always make you smile when you walked up to him. I'm sure going to miss Jerry's voice shout out "What's the Plan.....Dan?" as I would walk up to his pit stall. Godspeed Craig and Jerry.



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Martin DeFries photo



Dan Plan photo

Rest in peace; Jerry Thomsen and Craig Scott

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Going in Circles



By Charlie Spry

Where did the limited late model come from? How long has it been around? While efforts to curb the cost of racing have been around practically since day one, most point to the late Hugh Deery from Rockford Speedway as one of the first in the Midwest to make the efforts pay off.

Hugh saw the writing on the wall in the mid-1970's as it was getting harder and harder to run a full field of "super late models" as was the custom for so long. It was getting much more expensive, crowds weren't what they once were, and payoffs were not keeping up. Hugh came up with his "Rockford Rules" late models, running the division for the first time on a weekly basis as the 1974 season rolled around. While Americans were waiting in long lines to purchase gasoline, this idea seemed to have merit. The opener brought forth a small car count, bringing on many naysayers, but within a few weeks the car counts improved drastically. Jerry Lewis (no, not THAT Jerry Lewis) won the opening night feature, and dominated the early season races, but soon others took their turns winning, including Dennis Borgan and Don Marmor. Lewis held on to win the title that year over Borgan and Marmor, and the division had already proven itself, as the tire savings alone were huge. Gone were the huge slicks, and in their place came 60 series street tires.

Wisconsin's Columbus 151 Speedway stayed with the regular late models, and had the best drivers competing weekly, as Joe Shear, Dick Trickle, Johnny

Ziegler, Dave Watson, Mike Miller and others came weekly to race at Bob Schmelzer's facility. Can you imagine nowadays seeing that kind of field at your local weekly races? People didn't know what they were missing, as fan counts remained low, even with switching nights throughout the year. Racing was finally suspended on July 28, with Shear winning the finale in Jim Pierson's car. The Tri-R promotions group put on a show later that season, with Ohio's Tony Diano and his first generation Camaro setting a new track record of 13.733, with Watson and Tom Jones winning features, with the finale going to Shear. This would bring down the curtain for the year at this facility.

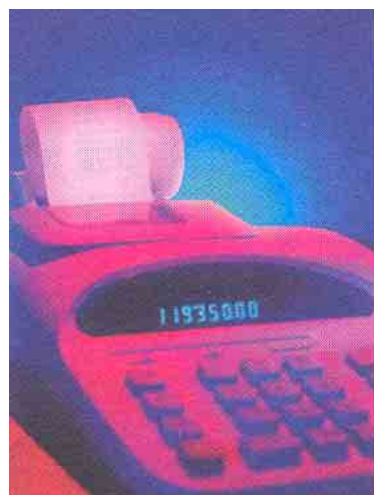
While Rockford kept on keepin' on in 1975, a new fad was taking the nation by storm. Those of you who remember "streaking" will know what I am talking about. If you don't know, ask someone older! Jefferson Speedway tried running the "regular" late models again in '75, with dwindling car and fan counts. Columbus opened once again under new management, running the late models, but fared no better. Jerry Eckhardt, Bill Retallick, Conrad Morgan, John Ziegler, Howie Weissman, Ron Schuyler, and a new young driver, Mike Langsdorf, were among the frontrunners. The track was suffering once again from low car counts and fan attendance.

1976 brought about a change at Jefferson Speedway. Promoter Dick Tucker saw what was happening at Rockford and did the same at Jefferson. Amidst the disco craze and eight-track players the new class of Jefferson late models began. While C.W. McCall was singing about a truckin' convoy, a young Pat Schauer would first make his presence known. Driving a four-door Ford Fairlane, he would be a force to reckon with there, along with Ron Bishofberger. As this track was having a disagreement with the racing papers at this time, it has been hard for me to find results from this year, as I've relied on information from a few who were there at the time and raced there. If you can believe it, 1976 was the year I went to ONE race. Yes, ONE race. I was ready to enter my senior year of high school and had other things on my

mind, street cars, girls, etc. I did get to the Milwaukee Mile for the fair USAC stock cars, but that was it. In 1976, Columbus was shuttered for most of the year, opening up for a few weeks late in the year with an open class late model and sportsman cars from Jefferson running. Wausau's Rick Haase would make the long trip down for the last show, sweeping the open class. Several years later, his son, Jesse would run here with a limited late.

By 1977, Rockford was doing quite well with their late models, and the Rockford Rules class had been deemed the star of the 1970's. Drivers such as John Luther, Jim Kersten and Wayne Lensing ran strong. Racing at Jefferson saw huge increases in car counts, sometimes running as many as eight or nine heat races of cars with their new low dollar racers, as Schauer modernized to a '69 Camaro and again dominated. Columbus hung in there the best they could, with a sometimes open class, sometimes sportsman class, sometimes "2 Barrel" late models class, which were also run at Capital (Madison) in conjunction with their regular super lates. Capital even began seeing a drop off of car counts, as the writing seemed to be on the wall. While ARTGO ran quite successfully with a super late model car and several other tracks in the central part of the state also fared well, southern Wisconsin tracks weren't doing so well with this class.

In the years to follow, Columbus would also adopt the limited late model as per Jefferson rules, still doing so today. Rockford's cars would become NASCAR sanctioned, and Jefferson stood pat. Madison would go on for many more years with the super lates, until recently dropping them as a weekly class, running more of a limited late. However, few fans can tell the difference anymore. The limited lates are seeing an escalating cost to run, so you have to wonder, when will this division get re-invented once again?



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**THE MIDWEST
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THE MIDWEST'S SHORT TRACK AUTO RACING AUTHORITY

Master of the Short Track

Our most recent book received this winter was about a driver that made the most of racing at his local short track. In fact, he made a living racing at his home tracks at the end of his career. The driver we are referring to is the Legendary Larry Phillips.

Larry was someone I often read about in the racing papers as I was growing up. A large number of fans may recall that Larry won multiple NASCAR Weekly Racing Series national championships (five to be exact) racing on the asphalt tracks in his home state of Missouri. A large number may not know that Larry was also very proficient on the dirt tracks for a large part of his career.

This book contains a chronological description of Larry's career, quotes from current and former drivers, the terrible fire at a race in Arkansas (that nearly ended his career), tons of photos and enough statistics about the former Winston Racing Series to keep me occupied on a cold winter night.

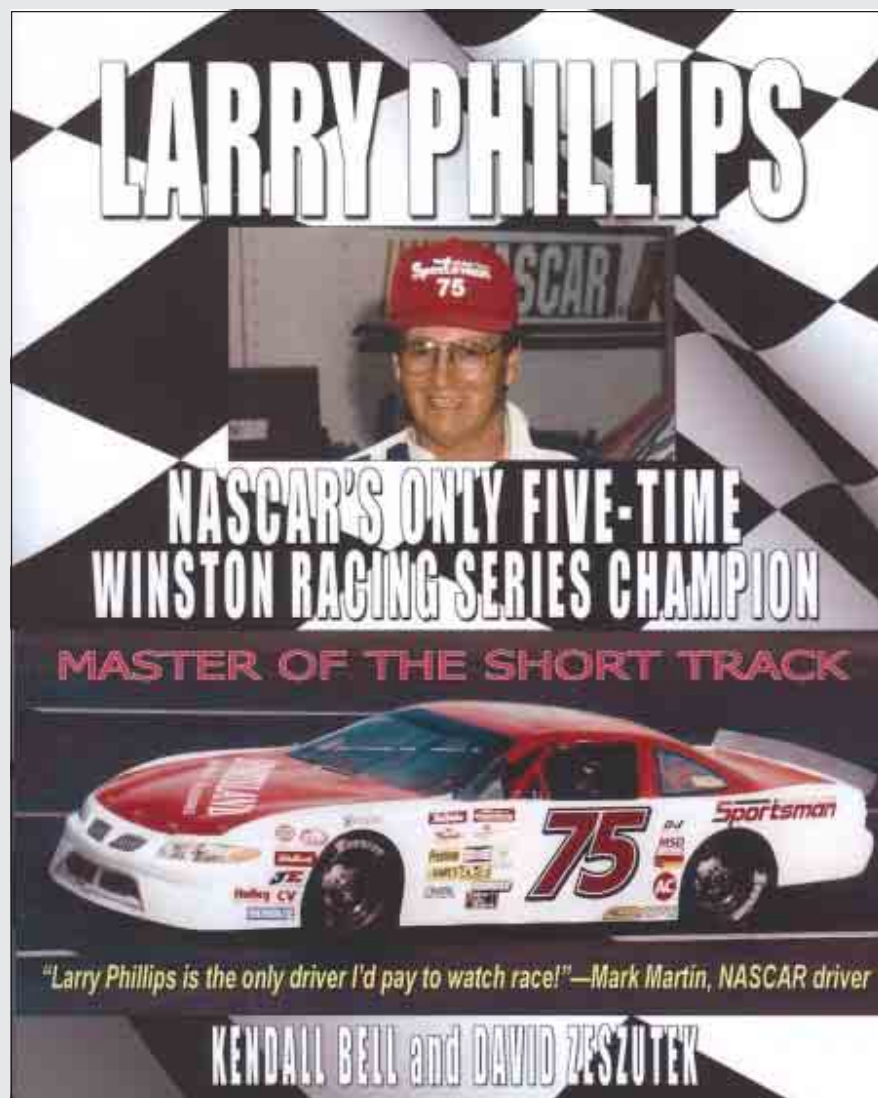
One of the quotes from this book I found most entertaining was from a driver that had a fair amount of success himself; Mark Martin. Mark was quoted as saying, "Larry Phillips is the only driver I would pay to watch." The book covers some of the details of the early days of Mark's racing career and how Larry taught him how to be a car builder and fabricator. In addition to helping out Mark Martin along the way, Phillips also helped out home town drivers along the way such as Rusty Wallace, Kenny Schrader and Jamie McMurray. Based on what these four have done, I think the instructor must have known what he was doing.

There is also a fair share of quotes from Larry in the book. My favorite quote was after a race in which several local fans paid Dick Trickle to travel to

Missouri to beat Larry who was on a hot streak of sorts. After Trickle won the race, Larry was quoted as saying on the PA system, "I could have saved all of you a lot of money. I could have told you I couldn't beat Dick Trickle."

While Larry did make a few big league starts in NASCAR during his day, he was more at home on the short tracks. Race fans truly lost a great one when Larry left us in 2004.

I truly enjoyed this book from several of the aspects mentioned previously. Looking at Larry's career as he started out in racing, and winning some of the high-dollar NDRA dirt-track races in the 1970's and 1980's was something that some of us may have forgotten, or never known. The fiery wreck in Arkansas brought back memories of the story published in Stock Car Racing Magazine following the crash, and the need for more drivers to wear gloves; the photos from years gone by and some fairly recent photos; and lastly, looking through the statistics and seeing familiar names for this part of the country such as Behrens, Bilderback, Hinkemeyer, Murgic, Martin, Nuttleman, Walen, Wilberg and the list goes on. There's even a section about Larry's battle for the 1995 title with Greg Biffle. All good stuff.



The book is titled Larry Phillips; NASCAR's Only Five-Time Winston Racing Series Champion and was written by Kendall Bell and David Zeszutek. The book is available from Bella Rosa Books at www.bellarosabooks.com



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Sharing Shop Space

Over the winter month's we heard of a neat story while visiting the new restaurant (Tin Cup – www.tincupmn.com) of Twin Cities racer Darren Wolke. Three adult drivers (Darren, Jon Lemke and Bret Nordine) along with three younger drivers (Derek Lemke, Nick Beaver and Ryan Wolke) are sharing resources to have all of their cars housed in one shop. The idea makes a lot of sense if you sit down and think about it. The drivers end up with a lot bigger shop and share the rent and monthly utilities. Especially in these challenging economic times, it's great to see drivers looking at ways to make sure they can make it out to the track as much as possible. Cutting costs on shop rent and sharing resources is a step in the right direction.



We recently visited the shop and had a chance to talk to Darren about the concept of three separate teams sharing shop space. The idea reminded me of NASCAR years ago when there were teams that had factory backing and then there were the independent teams. This setup reminds me of the independent teams of years gone by.

When asked how the idea of sharing space came about, Darren stated, "That came out of necessity. My father and Izzy were partners for years and years. My dad retired and Izzy wasn't ready to retire. Jon (Lemke) found this place and Izzy suggested we keep all of our stuff in one place. We don't have the resources and technology that some of the other drivers have, but we're trying to creep up on that and give ourselves a fighting chance."

Veteran driver John Lemke also shared his thoughts on the concept of several teams being housed under the same roof. "There's a lot of camaraderie and

help. We all race because we love to race. If you need help, there's always someone here."

Both Lemke and Wolke refer to the youngsters in the shop (Derek, Nick and Ryan) as the "Franchise" of their operation. Lemke even went so far as stating "Derek has far more talent than I've ever had." That's a glowing endorsement from somebody with a lot of seat time, and obviously a proud father.

Both Jon and Darren have been very thankful of the people that have helped them during their racing careers. A situation such as this is a model for

helping a relative new comer to pavement racing such as Bret Nordine improve his on-track performance, along with speeding up the learning curve for the kids.



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Auto Racing Facts, Observances and Opinions



By Dale P. Danielski

With Florida Speedweeks in the books it can't be long before Spring arrives and we get into Upper Midwestern racing can it? In looking out my window; it can as more snow piling up means the Ground Hog is back to sleep and it will be awhile before we hear the roar of racing engines in these parts. So, to keep everyone nice and cozy we'll produce some more warm racing memories, or new experiences if you weren't there, with events and goings on from the year 1974.

A big announcement by track promoter Phil Stewart heading into the racing season was Elko Speedway (known for this season as Minnesota National Speedway) continuing with the NASCAR sanction but going with a dressed down "Sportsmen" type race car as its main attraction. Cutting costs was the reasoning behind the decision and many longtime Twin Cities drivers were not happy feeling their Late Model race cars were literally obsoleted over night. A minimum car weight rule of 3,300 Lbs at 9.4 pounds/cubic inch of the engine displacement were the most drastic changes in the rules. In addition a street type tire was to be utilized instead of the more expensive racing skins of the past along with the mandatory use of mufflers. It proved to be too much for many of the area star drivers to take and they began traveling to Wisconsin to race where less restriction applied. And being selfish in Wisconsin, we welcomed the

Minnesota contingent as field's swelled to huge numbers everywhere we followed paved racing. Some that crossed the border to do battle included Larry Behrens, Don James, Mike Miller, Bob Jusola, Jim Derhaag, Bob Arbuckle, Bruce Sparrman, Bill Oas and Jon Chrest.

Interesting to note that while embroiled in argument with Stewart the Minnesota Stock Car Racing Association which had for members most of the top pavement drivers racing in the area, was looking to purchase the track in Shakopee, MN which they had also been regular competitors at for many years. If that, with advice from consultants wasn't feasible, the group was looking at having a track near Centuria, WI., paved and possibly racing there. None of it however came to fruition and most was forgotten when, in a shocking to the racing community development, Stewart at just 37 years of age, suddenly died of a cerebral hemorrhage just a week later. Only one event in 8 tries had been contested under the new rules and now many were wondering if there would be a racing season at all. Mercifully it was arranged to continue racing in Elko and the season once again commenced with a late May event. The driver line up there was looking quite different now that most of the veterans were running elsewhere and names like Dewey Gustafson, Mike Demars, Ted Kitzman, Mark Lamoreaux and rookie to the top billed division, Jim Weber were showing up in victory lane. It was however, one of the regular star drivers that stayed home, John Boegeman having one of the best seasons winning numerous main events.

In 1974 it wasn't just Minnesota paved racing shaping up differently as the Rockford Illinois Speedway was also implementing new cost savings "Rockford Rules" for their Late Model division which meant many of the drivers that had been racing there wouldn't be, and consequently heading over to Wisconsin on a regular basis. What a treat to have Joe Shear, Dave Watson, Don Leach, Boyce Sparkman, John Knaus, (Yes, that's the father of NASCAR crew chief Chad Knaus) Danny Bellard and numerous others crossing that border to race in the Badger State. According to flamboyant promoter Hugh Deery, "It makes sense for drivers to be racing a \$3,000 car for a \$3,000 purse rather than in a \$15,000 car. We are putting racing back in the driver's hands as they will be able to compete here in a car for 25% of what they used to need to be competitive."

Actually Wisconsin didn't totally stay put in their rules package from previous years as cars were required to race at the 8 Lbs/cubic inch standard which ended up eliminating the huge bore Big Block engines that had been regular winners in the past. Now racing with those engines would require a car to be too heavy to compete with the 350 CI or so small blocks. Wisconsin also went with a muffler rule which drew a fair amount of opposition but as it turns out was a blessing since we could now hear each other talk when cars were on the racetrack. That especially applied when Larry Detjens went by in his Hemi-Mopar which was by far the loudest of them all.

Sadly the season barely got started when it was reported that long time racing supporter Alan "Moose" Peterson had perished in a motorcycle



#99 Larry Behrens in 1974

accident. Peterson from Black River Falls, WI., had kept many a racer going both on asphalt and dirt including Ev Fox, Lyle Nabbefeldt, Dick Trickle, Wayne Kittelson, Jere O'Day, Harold Mueller, Gary Kneisley, Tom Nesbitt and Marv Marzofka. Peterson, who also did some dirt racing himself was just 38 at the time of his passing.

Looking at the circuit for many of the Wisconsin group in 1974, you had Wednesday racing at Columbus 151 Speedway of Columbus, WI., Thursday at State Park Speedway, Wausau, WI., Friday at Capital Super Speedway, Oregon, WI., and La Crosse Interstate Speedway, West Salem, WI., Saturday at Dells Motor Speedway, Wis. Dells, WI., and Sunday night racing at Golden Sands Speedway of Plover, WI. Of course Tuesday and Sunday afternoon also found much in the way of Special event racing.

In the meantime, the latest promotional group, Tri-R promotions of Oak Forest, IL., had come up with a very ambitious schedule of open competition racing for top Late Model drivers announcing a 10 race series of events featuring \$125,000 in purse pay-out money. The group had scheduled four events in 1973 but upped the ante for competitors considerably with its 1974 version.

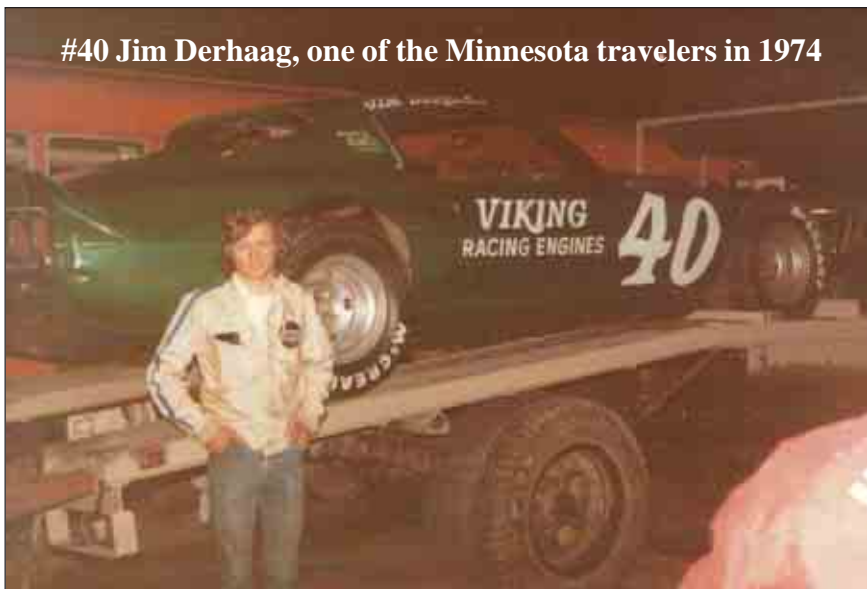
With all the money on the line Tri-R events regularly attracted the Wisconsin and Illinois gang of racers but also such Michigan stars as Bob Senneker and Butch Miller which was special for us following the sport as we rarely had an opportunity to see those guys in action. They ended up taking their share of the loot home with them too when all was said and done.

Early season action found Larry Detjens in his still really loud, but cool nonetheless, 1974 Dodge Challenger taking the win at Wisconsin International Raceway, Kaukauna, WI., in the Spring Opener 50, besting a record field of 63 entries. Dick Trickle meanwhile captured the overall win in the Tri-R Prairie State 150 event at Capital Super Speedway in his 1970 Mustang, taking one of the three 50 lap feature events.

With all the uproar going on about drastic rule changes folks should have been looking back in time where they would have seen that this type of action is not all that unusual. If you take a look through the years racing has always gone through phases to make the sport less costly. Taking a step or two backward periodically to move

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#40 Jim Derhaag, one of the Minnesota travelers in 1974



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forward has been commonplace. The controversial Rockford Rules move by the Deery's may have cost a bit in the short term as virtual no names Jerry Lewis, Marv Palmer, John Luther, Gene Sisk and Rich Blakely made the headlines, but by sticking to their guns the track persevered and eventually ended up with very good car counts and successful weekly race programs. Minnesota National Speedway finished out their year with set rules intact and also saw car counts increase and a number of the previous stars come back to race there.

Along those lines, we've seen some tracks refuse to let technology and racing revolution dictate what classes of cars and rules they'll mandate. Many stayed with the same rules for many, many years. One such track in 1974 was the Door County Speedway of Sturgeon Bay, WI. The coupe division was still competing with Ray LeMieux, 1932 Plymouth, Dale Peterson, Straight 8 Buick Coupe along with Irv Ettien and Terry Cochart in 1930 something coupes. Now that's maintaining the status quo.

Also of note during this time period, for certain in Wisconsin anyway, was the simplicity of identifying race cars and divisions of racing. You had the top billed Late Models, our favorite, and the start up, entry level Hobby stocks which we had a number of friends competing in and were also fond of. Unknown to most, Vic Getzloff who went on to become Dick Trickle's race car hauler driver, sometimes pit man and full time body guard, drove in this division in the 1970s. In one particular program at Golden Sands Speedway as described by Jack of all trades and publicist Kenley Snyder, Getzloff was in a hurry to get to the front in the feature race. In Snyder's words, "A bizarre incident occurred in the hobby stock feature as Vic Getzloff knocked out six cars in the 3rd turn of the first lap. Getzloff assumed that the cars in front of him would take the high groove and attempted to pass on the inside. Unfortunately, all the cars stayed glued to the inside and Getzloff plowed into the pack." As you may have guessed, Getzloff was one heck of a body guard through the years for Trickle.

The multiple feature event race program format was becoming more popular at this time and Tri-R Promotions utilized it when they held their second event of 1974 at the Baer Field Speedway in Ft. Wayne, IN. The event was called the Memorial Day 200 and the event featured two 100 lap mains. Ohio hot shoe Tony Diano won one with area star Joe Wallace capturing the 2nd. Talent for this show was at a premium as the aforementioned along with Larry Moore, Dave Watson, Moose Myers, Bob Senneker, Larry

Detjens, Butch Miller, Bobby Wawak, Jim Bickerstaff, and Dick Trickle were a partial list of those competing. The following week La Crosse Interstate Speedway held a Tri-R event with three 50 lap features. Senneker, Trickle and Shear were the 50 lap victors with Shear getting the overall win. The next Tri-R event held at Capital Super Speedway included four 50 lap mains. Trickle, Shear, Terry Bivins and Conrad Morgan took home wins in those. Trickle banked over \$1,000 for his days work which was tops for the event.

The next Tri-R event on the schedule was to take place at a track undergoing a huge change. The Slinger Speedway which had hosted the highly popular Modifieds on its dirt surface for over 20 years was going to be paved and as a special attraction run Late Models. Now a ¼ mile high banked asphalt track the Tri-R promoted event was the first Mega-Special to be held there. What a special it was, with drivers representing 5 States appearing in hopes of capturing the 198 lap feature. The race was actually run in two 99 lap segments with Joe Shear winning the first and placing 4th in the 2nd for the overall win. Dick Trickle won the 2nd 99 and Bob Senneker set the tone early for the event by setting fast time at 12:564 seconds, a record. Even more impressive was the fact Senneker hadn't even taken a hot lap before qualifying. The Late Model event proved very popular and although Modifieds were the top billed class there through July, the writing was on the wall and the LM's became the star attraction the rest of the season.

One of the more significant events during the year was the Lyle Nabbefeldt Memorial race held at Dells Motor Speedway. Dick Trickle won the 100 lap feature race in honor of fallen star in a 1973 racing incident, Nabbefeldt. As deemed by the family, the first driver that could win the event three years in a row would be able to keep the traveling trophy. Although extremely coveted, no one was ever able to accomplish that feat, two in a row being the closest several drivers ever got.

Three is better than one was the theme as Tri-R promotions appeared at Capital Super Speedway for the Badger 150.

Three separate drivers appeared in victory lane in the 50 lap events Butch Miller, Joe Shear and Johnny Reimer, with Miller getting the overall win. Tri-R ventured into Ovid, Michigan for the Great Lakes 100 and of course Michigan drivers being on their home turf did best with Bob Senneker taking the rain shortened 100 lap main.

Tri-R had put on some pretty impressive shows with great fields of cars up to this point but the announced North American Short Track Championship, September 4-8 really got the attention of drivers and fans alike. It consisted of 5 days of racing at 4 race tracks in Wisconsin. The near week long



#84 Bob Senneker a Tri-R promotions race regular in 1974



#36 Tony Diano another regular Tri-R Promotions competitor

tour was set to start at Columbus 151 Speedway, move to State Park Speedway, then Capital Super Speedway before wrapping up at Wisconsin International Raceway the last two days. The purse for the event was advertised at \$40,000. Although the event didn't draw all the heavy hitters that were entered, it did attract an excellent field. Joe Shear who was finishing off a fantastic season of racing captured the 50 lap finale of the first night at Columbus. Following Shear were Tom Maier, new track record holder Tony Diano, Bob Senneker, John Ziegler, Terry Bivins, Tom Jones, Dave Watson, Tom Musgrave and Mike Miller. Stop two found Dick Trickle getting back on track taking the overall win at State Park Speedway. Individual 50 lap wins went to Trickle, Tom Reffner and Trickle again in the finale. Three different drivers graced victory lane for the Capital Super Speedway stop with Tony Diano, Tom Reffner and Joe Shear taking 50 lap wins. Shear was the most consistent and claimed overall win honors. The Tour finale was set to take place on the weekend of September 7-8 but rain threw a wrench into the plan and it was pushed ahead to September 15th. The wait proved worthwhile for Tom Reffner as he placed 2nd in the first 104 lap feature and won the 2nd to take overall honors in the finale at Wisconsin International Raceway and the North American Short Track Championship. John Reimer won the first 104 lap feature.

The multiple feature format wasn't just a flash in the pan either, as it would be utilized for years to come by many groups. Little did we know at the time but John Mc Kars and Art Frigo would form the ARTGO Series the next year and use that format in more of their events than not.

In other 1974 happenings...

The year produced the famous Ralph Starr promoted race at the Rolla, MO., Speedway that no one got paid for. An



#53 Terry Bivins frequent Wisconsin visitor in 1974 from Shawnee Mission, KS.

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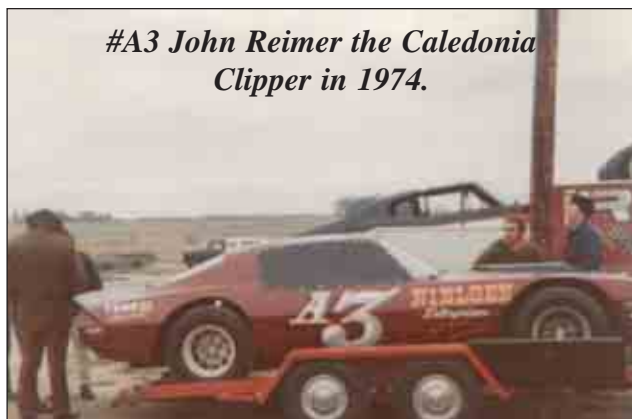
advertised \$29,000 purse produced an unbelievable field at the ultra-fast ½ mile oval, including Tom Maier, (Who won the 300 lap race) Mike Miller, Dick Trickle, Cale Yarborough, Joe Wallace, Terry Bivens, Ed Howe, Pete Hamilton and over 60 others. The event was held with over 4,000 fans at \$10 a head attending, but when all the drivers went to get paid, Ralph Starr was nowhere to be found having run off with the purse money. Years previous, cutting purses or not paying drivers at all did happen more than it should have at speedways everywhere, but now in what was considered modern era racing it was unheard of. Rumor had some of the pay eventually finding its way to drivers but never the amount that was advertised...

Port Edwards, WI., driver Dave Field went on a tear racing in Wisconsin in June of 1974. Field who hadn't raced in sometime had his 1968 Mustang convertible running flawlessly taking 7 feature wins in a 4 week period. Field brought the same car out in 1975 with a new body on it but it just wasn't the same. He never did win another feature and disappeared from the racing scene shortly thereafter... Neil Callahan who had raced mainly at the Tomahawk Speedway emerged as a major threat during the season racing to double digit feature wins. Callahan continued to race and win at Tomahawk but he also found himself in victory lane at State Park Speedway and Golden Sands Speedway... Joe Shear won the prestigious National Short Track Championship at Rockford, which saw a newcomer introduced to Late Model Racing. None other than Rusty Wallace competed on the day hitting just about everything in sight. Fans felt so sorry for Wallace and the bad luck he was having they voted his mangled car best appearing.... When Joe Shear wasn't racing his own equipment he'd hop into other cars at Jefferson, WI., Speedway. He wound up winning features there in Al Dahlmeyer and John Knaus's cars... We didn't get to a whole lot of dirt track events during the year, but it was hard not to notice the year Leon Plank had winning 26 main events mostly in Northwestern Wisconsin. Plank did however on occasion venture across the state and ended up grabbing a bunch of money from tracks and racers on that side of the state...

All in all 1974 was a pretty fair year in racing. Although an energy crunch with fuel not being available, or priced extremely high, was forecast (It never really did materialize though the Daytona 500 was shortened to 450 miles just to make it look good.) promoters kept pricing in line again allowing fans to get to almost as many races as they wanted. Rules changes made the news, but all in all it was pretty much great, exciting racing as usual in our World.

Here and there... Excalibur Speedway near Tomah, WI., is set to reopen this year after 10 years of inactivity. Many of the old pros of racing competed here back in the '60s when it was known as Tomah Sparta Speedway. It was also called Bill's Track and Trail Speedway at one time before becoming Excalibur. Friday night racing throughout the summer will occur with a couple ASA Midwest Tour sanctioned events Trucks and and Sportsmen the special events for the season... Speaking of the ASA Tour a very ambitious 2011 season of racing is on tap with some very tradition rich event dates scheduled... This editions Quote of the Column, "Racing into the future by appreciating the past". By Dale P. Danielski and the theme for Yesteryears Racing Reunions held for 5 years at La Crosse Fairgrounds Speedway. Popular here as well with all the positive feedback we receive form these history columns.

#26 Dave Field 7 Feature wins in 1974 in 1968 Mustang Convertible.



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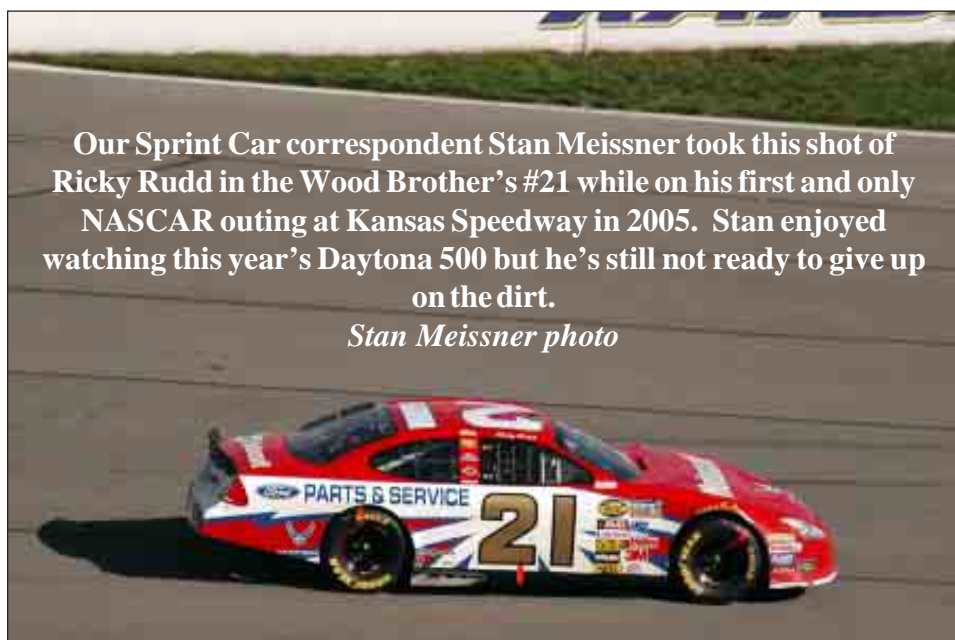
Stan Meissner

People are calling this year's Daytona 500 a great race and I agree. I would have liked to have seen some longer green flag runs and the two car drafting was kind of strange but the action was enough to hold my attention. The Daytona 500 serves as an annual reminder that spring is on the way so I always get excited when this time of the year arrives. Other than having heard the name a few times I wasn't familiar with Trevor Bayne but I loved the story line this win produced for the rookie driver and his car owner. It was nice seeing one of my old dirt track favorites Dave Blaney in a competitive car at Daytona. Dave's car sustained too much damage to finish after he cut through the grass to avoid a late race wreck or he might have come out of Daytona with a top ten. I switched satellite providers and picked the Speed Channel back up so I'll be able to keep a closer eye on Sprint Cup racing this season when time allows.

Keeping up with NASCAR racing on television might be the only racing I'll see some weekends this season if gas prices keep going up. If you have driven past a gas station lately you know what I'm talking about with almost daily price hikes due to geopolitical tensions. I'm not going to discuss politics, pseudo experts pontificate on those subjects and nausea on the racing message boards, but the

escalating gas prices threaten to limit my travel. There isn't much I can do about things that are out of my control except to write my schedule in pencil and make adjustments as the season progresses. Fortunately the effects of higher travel expenses will be offset by the great racing opportunities that are available to the fans in our area. My schedule will again be centered around the Upper Midwest Sprint Car Series (UMSS) and I am looking forward to attending as many of their races as possible.

Local racing opportunities will vary depending on your exact location but there should be plenty of options for MRC readers this year. By way of illustration, from my location in Forest Lake, Minnesota, Cedar Lake and Kopellah are both 32 miles, Princeton 48 miles, Ogilvie and Elko both 58 miles and Rice Lake 73 miles. 18 of 24 scheduled races for the UMSS winged series will be contested at these six facilities. In addition to the UMSS Winged Sprints the all new UMSS Traditional Sprint Car Series (non-winged) has a full slate of 23 events on their schedule. The Micro Sprint League of the UMSS will step up their program as well with a total of 13 events scheduled for 2011. The Micros put on a great show last year at Elko and I'm looking forward to seeing them more often. Two of the aforementioned tracks, Cedar Lake and Princeton, will also be hosting World of Outlaws races and we will see the Interstate Racing Association multiple times at both



Our Sprint Car correspondent Stan Meissner took this shot of Ricky Rudd in the Wood Brother's #21 while on his first and only NASCAR outing at Kansas Speedway in 2005. Stan enjoyed watching this year's Daytona 500 but he's still not ready to give up on the dirt.

Stan Meissner photo

(an awesome new design), the World of Outlaws website at worldofoutlaws.com, and the Interstate Racing Association website at irasprints.com.

Craig Dollansky hit the ground running this year down in Florida and was fast but was plagued by a

Craig Dollansky prepares for a test session at the Princeton in April of 2004. Dollansky was fast right out of the gate this season but ran into some early bad luck. After a brief hiatus, Princeton will again host the World of Outlaws

Stan Meissner photo



Vince Peterson took this 2007 photo of the "Buckeye Bullet" Dave Blaney for fellow MRC photographer Stan Meissner.

Vince Peterson photo

Cedar Lake and Elko. For those of you who are able to travel there are even more Sprint Car opportunities available. The UMSS will also be appearing at the Chateau Raceway in Lansing, the North Central Speedway in Brainerd and the Hibbing Raceway in Hibbing, Minnesota. I am only able to scratch the surface of the 2011 Sprint Car schedules in these pages so I encourage you to check the UMSS website at umsprints.com

string of bad luck. Dollansky finished second in the first night of All Star competition then blew two engines on the second night, one in his Heat and another in the B Main. The World of Outlaws opener marked Craig's third night of racing in Florida where he experienced another DNF when something broke sending him hard into the wall and destroying the car. In spite of the tough start Craig was again fast on night four and leading the Feature when yet another motor let go resulting in his third straight DNF. Dollansky managed an eleventh place finish on his fifth and final night of racing in the Sunshine State. The net result of Craig's Florida vacation were second and eleventh place finishes, three blown engines, one totaled car and a trip to the hospital to have his back checked out after the night three crash. Anybody who races for a living has got to love this sport to keep coming back night after night and nothing illustrates this more than Craig Dollansky's 2011 Florida experience.

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After a two week break Craig returned to action with the Outlaws in Magnolia, Mississippi, where he spun out in the Main event after working his way up to seventh. Craig managed to salvage a tenth place finish after having to restart from the tail of the field. The following night the Outlaws appeared at the Royal Purple Raceway in Baytown, Texas where Dollansky had a strong third place showing. Craig has an excellent website design at dollanskyracing.net to keep fans up-to-date on the team's progress throughout the season.

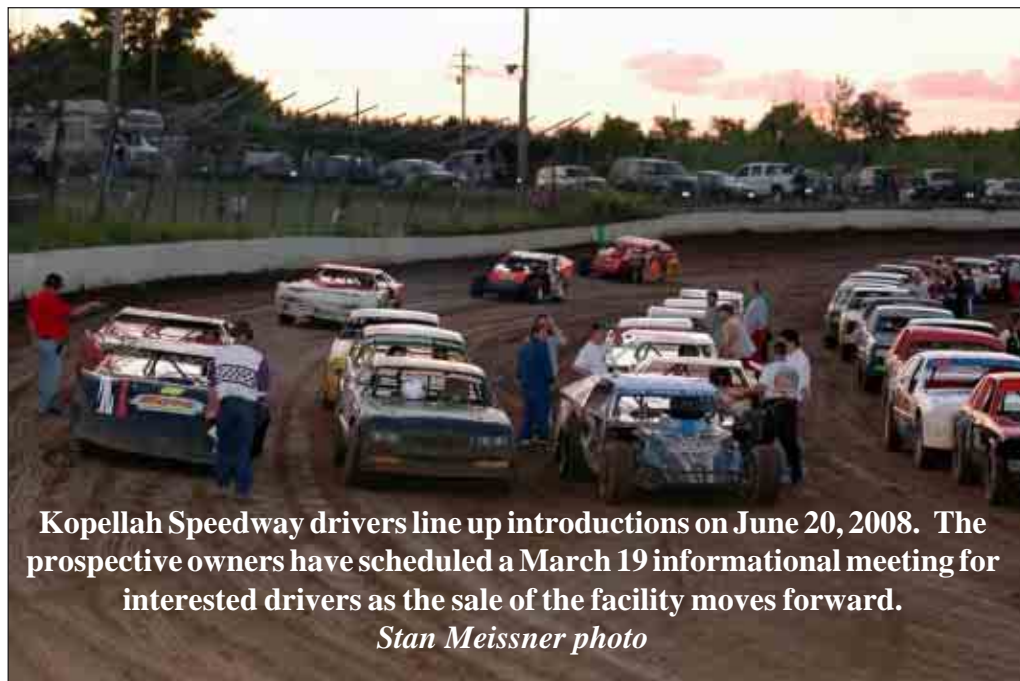
Steve Kinser had already captured three of the first five WoO Feature wins of the young season by February 26 with Saturday night Baytown winner Sammy Swindell and night three Florida winner Jason Sides acting as the two spoilers. Swindell won with the All Stars in Florida as well proving to all that the old guys can still get it done. In 2003 I had the privilege of interviewing the King for Rob Hahn's "Race Show". At that time I questioned Steve about how long he would continue to race with the Outlaws. Steve told us that he had a couple more years to go with Quaker State and that he would have to make a decision after the contract expired. At that time (based partially on my own aches and pains) I thought that he'd be retired within five years but obviously I was wrong. In the not too distant past it was unheard of for a Sprint Car driver to keep racing into their forties. Today with power steering and improved safety we're seeing drivers such as Steve Kinser and Sammy Swindell racing well into their fifties and beyond.

The UMSS has scheduled an informational meeting to be held at Joe Senser's Sports Bar and Grill on Saturday March 19 at 11am. Items that will be discussed include schedule, purse updates, memberships, insurance, and teching. Marketing and promotional opportunities and the new redesigned website will also be presented to attendees. The UMSS has enlisted the services of a new videoographer who will be introduced to the attendees as well. After these agenda items are covered, the meeting will then be open to comments and questions. Visit umsprints.com for more information.

The sale of the Kopellah Speedway is moving forward and the potential new owners have scheduled an informal meeting of interested drivers for 3:30pm Saturday March 19 at Loggers Bar & Grill, St. Croix Falls, Wisconsin. Loggers is located just south of Highway 8 on Glacier Avenue behind the BP Station that is located at the stop light by the Wal-Mart store. Prospective weekly divisions include Hornets, Pure Stocks, Midwest Modifieds, Super Stocks UMSS Traditional Sprint Cars (non-wing) and UMSS Micro Sprints. Items to be discussed include the proposed 2011 schedule, weekly classes, rules, purses, and sanctioning for two of the proposed classes. For more information you can contact Ron Bernhagen at 612-363-5302 or email Greg Parent at grp_motorsports@msn.com. Prospective Super Stock drivers are encouraged to attend in order to let

their voice be heard or to contact Ron or Greg and let them know their intent if they are unable to attend.

Minnesota congresswoman Betty McCollum recently riled up the racing community with a proposed amendment to end NASCAR's military sponsorships. McCollum said that NASCAR sponsorship is a waste of taxpayer's money. My understanding is that the first version of her proposed amendment only targeted NASCAR and did not include other forms of motorsports. Evidently this first version was voted down and it is my understanding that the next revision will include all motorsports. My proposal to Betty is that the Army should sponsor a World of Outlaws Sprint Car team because it's a much better value than NASCAR and plays out to audiences from coast to coast. Maybe they ought to reinstate the draft while they're at it and then recruiting would no longer be an issue. I work in downtown St. Paul and can tell you first hand that six months in boot camp would work wonders on some of today's youth. It's a good thing that I'm not in



Kopellah Speedway drivers line up introductions on June 20, 2008. The prospective owners have scheduled a March 19 informational meeting for interested drivers as the sale of the facility moves forward.

Stan Meissner photo

charge.

Kathy Kouba has been released from the hospital and is at home recovering. You can visit Kathy's Caring Bridge site at caringbridge.org/visit/kathykouba. It is encouraging to see that Kathy has progressed to the point where she is now posting messages regarding her own recovery.

That does it for this issue of MRC online. We'll see you at the meetings, banquets and car shows!



Stan Meissner of MRC took a 2004 vacation to Galena, Illinois, and got this shot of Mike Reinke in IRA Victory Lane at the Farley Speedway. Will high gas prices limit Stan's ability to take racing trips this season and more importantly will the fuel prices limit travel for racers like Mike Reinke?

Stan Meissner photo

THE MIDWEST RACING CONNECTION

Photo Gallery



A Richie Evans replica mod paced the field for the memorial race



Becca Kasten picked up two main event wins at New Smyrna



Ronnie Rihn ran the whole week at New Smyrna



Toby Nuttleman and Steve Carlson helping out the Kasten team



Ted Christopher on top again during Speedweeks



All photos by Bruce Nuttleman. For more speedweeks photos, check out the Ultimate Lap Photo gallery at www.ultimatelapphoto.com

The Racing Geek



by Jordan Bianchi

Check out The Racing Geek's weekly blog at:
www.theracinggeek.com

My Journey To Becoming a Fan of Dale Earnhardt

For a long time I wasn't a fan of Dale Earnhardt. I had no real reason then or now as to why I wasn't a fan. He never wronged one of my favorite drivers, and believe it or not, he never did anything on the track that I didn't approve of. However, for the longest time I just rooted against the driver of the infamous black No. 3 car. Yet, over time, my affinity for the man who dominated on the track through a combination of finesse and ruthless aggressiveness evolved. In the end, I no longer viewed Earnhardt as a villain from an old western, who instead of wearing a black cowboy hat and pistol, sported a black racecar with a front bumper he was ready and willing to use at the slightest provocation.

Looking back, my first memory of Dale Earnhardt was the 1993 Daytona 500. You see, about six months prior to "The Great American Race," I not only became a fan of NASCAR, I became an addict. At the time, the old ASA Series was making its annual Labor Day stop at the Minnesota State Fairgrounds. For a reason none other than I was in sixth-grade and going to a race sounded like fun, I begged my parents to take me. After a prolonged period of time, which may or may not have included me lying on the ground kicking and screaming, they finally

relented and I was all set to attend my first stockcar race. It was then that I fell madly in love with a sport unlike any I had ever seen. And this was coming from a kid whose obsession with the stick-and-ball sports was unmatched.

Flash-forward a few months, and after watching some NASCAR races on TV, I became an ardent believer that racing was the greatest sport of them all. So you can imagine my excitement as the biggest stockcar race in the world, the Daytona 500, approached. That Sunday, February afternoon couldn't get here soon enough. When it finally did, that day, like so many 500s before and after, Dale Earnhardt had the car to beat. Yet, for some reason, watching The Man in Black trying so hard to win the one race that had always eluded him, and the one race he wanted to win more than any other, didn't resonate with me. Looking back, it likely had something to do with the fact I didn't recognize the importance of the race and I certainly didn't know about Earnhardt's cursed luck in the 500. So as the race came down to its waning laps, I was vehemently rooting for Dale Jarrett, who at that point in his career was really nothing more than a journeyman driver, but again I had no idea. All I knew was that Jarrett's car owner Joe Gibbs was a two-time Super Bowl winning coach with the Washington Redskins, which was a sport I followed and loved. Reason number two was Dale Jarrett's dad, Ned, a two-time NASCAR champion, was in the television booth calling the race for CBS. It appealed to me then, much as it would now, that here was this son trying to reach the pinnacle of something, while his dad was up above in the TV tower watching approvingly. Maybe it had something to do with the fact I was watching the race with my own dad and it was he who had agreed to take me to my first race just a few months back. So as the laps ticked by and Jarrett was able to work by the villainous Dale Earnhardt coming to the white flag, there was no one more excited than me other than possibly the guy sitting in the broadcast booth.

My disdain for Earnhardt continued for the next couple of years. Even when Earnhardt's best friend Neil Bonnett was killed in a practice crash prior to the 1994 running of the Daytona 500, it didn't make a dent in my opinion. He was still a driver I didn't care for. It's as simple as that. Later that year, I distinctly remember calling my best friend, who was an Earnhardt supporter, during the '94 500 when it became apparent The Intimidator wasn't going to win the race for himself and in honor of his fallen friend. I was so gleefully I also phoned him post-race just to recap Sterling Marlin's spirited drive to victory. He promptly hung-up on me.

Simply put, my animosity towards the then six-time champion transformed me into a jerk. Or at least, more so than usual. But a funny thing happened. Gradually, I became a supporter of Earnhardt and over time, there was no one who wanted him to win his eighth series crown more than I. I wanted him so badly to have the championship record all to himself. I think like most diehard NASCAR fans, it had something to do with Jeff Gordon. Like a majority of fans, I didn't like this young driver coming in and showing up all my favorite drivers. I didn't enjoy seeing "Wonder Boy" as Earnhardt affectionately and sometimes not so affectionately called him, going to victory lane seemingly every week.

The tide completely turned for me during the 1996 season, when Earnhardt seemed destined to win that elusive eighth championship. During the summer race at Talladega, Earnhardt had one of the best cars in the field. A win or a solid finish would have likely given him the points lead and after that I assumed the championship would be his to win. But it was at that moment I learned that destiny can be a very cruel mistress. While leading on lap 117, Ernie Irvan, who was running third at the time, tapped the rear-bumper of second-place Sterling Marlin, who then drifted down and tagged Earnhardt. In as violent a crash as you'll ever see, the No.3 car veered head-on into the front stretch wall. Earnhardt suffered a broken collarbone and injury to his neck which lingered for several seasons. Ever the tough guy though, he walked on his accord to the awaiting ambulance. Unfortunately, like his car, his championship hopes were crushed, essentially forever.

For the next year it was a tough time to be a Dale Earnhardt fan. Following his savage 'Dega wreck, The Intimidator would go another 45 races before he returned to the winner's circle. However, the stretch between victories was well worth the wait. Earnhardt finally won the race he always wanted to win, but never had. On an overcast day, the black GM Goodwrench did the impossible and had crossed the finish line first in the sports biggest race. Dale Earnhardt; Daytona 500 Champion.

It was a feeling unlike any other I had ever experienced. And a feeling I've rarely experienced since. I vividly remember going out the next day and buying every newspaper – remember this was a time when people used to buy newspapers instead of just reading them online –

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RACE CAR HEART by: Robert L. Summers



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so that I could recap everything that had transpired. I didn't want the moment to end. Yet at the same time, I kinda, sorta realized that this might be the peak of my NASCAR fandom, only because Earnhardt wasn't likely ever going to win another title. If he did manage to win the 500 again, it would never come close to having the same emotional impact as this one. No, he wasn't going to have the record for most championships all to himself, but you know what; I was okay with that because seeing him win Daytona made it easier to accept. I was also pretty certain him that winning another title wouldn't feel anywhere close to how I was feeling then and now, so why compromise the feeling?

Surprisingly though, there were plenty of moments that came along that were worthy substitutes for what I experienced on February 15, 1998. Some involved Dale Earnhardt, others didn't. The one that most comes to mind happened about a year-and-a-half after his 500 victory, and it came at another famous stomping ground for The Intimidator – Bristol Motor Speedway, A.K.A. Thunder Valley. Of course this was the infamous race where Earnhardt, intentionally dumped Terry Labonte in the last few laps and went on to record the win. And it was in victory lane where Earnhardt uttered the famous line, "I didn't try to turn him around; I just wanted to rattle his cage." A quote that over the years has become as

synonymous with Earnhardt as much as his mustache, or the No. 3 that adorned the side of his car for most of his career.

Although just about everyone who followed the sport, diehard, casual or otherwise, all ripped Earnhardt for blatantly wrecking another driver just to win a race. I defended him like I've never defended another driver before or since. Right or wrong, I loved his competitive zeal and his willingness to do whatever it took to win. I respected that, I admired that and I wished more drivers pushed the envelope like he did every time he sat behind the wheel of a racecar. If that meant wrecking another driver on purpose; oh well, that driver should have known better than to run in front of the great Dale Earnhardt.

As I reflect back on that fateful day when Earnhardt was killed before our collective eyes, I didn't mourn nor did I cry. While that may come across as slightly strange or worse, uncompassionate, it's not meant to be. I always believed and still do, that if Earnhardt was destined to be taken from us, it was appropriate that it occurred in the manner that it did. Earnhardt loved Daytona more than any other track. It was a track that he had tasted victory at more than any other and it was a race that meant more to him than all the others combined. When you factor in that Michael Waltrip and Dale Earnhardt Jr. were heading for a one-two finish driving cars Earnhardt owned, it seemed only fitting that in the last seconds of his life he would see two of his cars speeding towards the checkered flag in the race that mattered the most to him.

Dale Earnhardt is a legendary driver. But he is a legend for more than just his driving. His death ushered in the safest period in NASCAR history. That is to me what Dale Earnhardt's greatest legacy is. Not his seven championships or his 76 victories, but how his death changed the sport for the better. Though it wasn't completely neglected beforehand, certainly not with three deaths the year prior, it didn't seem to be a priority of NASCAR to make the sweeping changes that were desperately needed. Not since that fateful Sunday afternoon have we had to write an obituary about a driver who perished while competing in one of NASCAR's three national touring series.

As the saying goes, it's not only the legacy you create while you're on this earth, but the legacy you leave behind when you go. For Ralph Dale Earnhardt, his legacy is secure for what he did during his 49 years and more importantly, what he did in the 10 years thereafter.

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