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THE MIDWEST'S SHORT TRACK AUTO RACING AUTHORITY

December, 2010

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Publisher's Note

Racing According to Plan



Dan Plan

At this time of the year, it becomes difficult to come up with topics for my column, as we haven't been able to see any racing in person for over a month now. This year, I've decided to use this column as my personal favorite top-ten moments for 2010. While, I don't want to leave anybody out of this column, I have just limited the items mentioned to events that were covered in our publication, or events I was able to see in person. There are many other tracks and series out there that had great seasons, and I hope to see more of them in 2011.

The Official Word

While the publication has had driver profiles for some time now, we decided to do something a little different this year. We featured several track/series officials in our publication in a section titled "The Official Word." While the drivers may get the most notoriety, we figured we would share the love and give some of the officials some positive ink.



Doug Hornickel photo

Wisconsin NASCAR State Championship

I was lucky enough to be on-hand Labor Day weekend when J. Herbst took over the point lead from Shawn Pfaff,



Ken Johnson photo

The Best of 2010

with just one race remaining for the LaCrosse Late Model drivers. It was also thought at that time that Herbst would win the NASCAR State Championship, but hold the phone. While the NASCAR points were over for the asphalt guys, Pat Doar had three-strong runs at Cedar Lake Speedway to close out the year and take over the state title. Both drivers competed in a total of 19 shows, had good car counts and were separated by just 4 points at the end of the year.

Reuvers Wins another Elko Championship

While I didn't see Donny Reuvers race as much as I have in previous years, Reuvers continued his dominance of Elko Speedway. Reuvers won this year's championship under a more traditional point championship format, versus previous years. While there was little doubt before, Reuvers is now solidly in an elite group of drivers with multiple Elko track championships. Joining a group such as Brian Johnson, Jeff Martin, Norm Setran and Danny Priziborowski as drivers that have won three or more Late Model championships at Elko is a pretty impressive in my book.



Scott Swenson photo

Debut of the ASA Midwest Sportsman Tour

I've always been a fan of steel-bodied race cars. This year the ASA Midwest Tour added a separate tour for Sportsman type cars. I had a chance to see the cars race at several different venues this year, and put on some great shows. The Sportsman class offered the opportunity to see several different (easily identifiable) body styles, and drivers from four states competing, with Minnesota's Chris



Bruce Nuttleman photo

Marek being the only driver to attend all ten shows. Hopefully the 2011 season will see a few more cars attempt the tour.

USA Nationals at Cedar Lake Speedway

The USA Nationals is the must see dirt track Late Model event in the area. Each year, there's something a little different. Three-days of camping in the summer with dirt track racing at night is a great way to burn a couple of vacation days

The Midwest

RACING

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December, 2010

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from my daytime job. Rich Olson's work with the F.A.N.S. Fund each year helps bring in a few extra drivers, and having Bloomquist, Moyer and the rest national dirt starts in town for a few days is about as good as it gets. This is one of these shows that has so much going on, it gets hard to see everything, and it's not always the action on the track that makes the show. The unmanned tow truck and the glow balls only added to the experience for the weekend.

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continued from page 3

knowing they will have all winter to fix things.



Jerry Zimmer photo

Four-Day Racing Trip in Wisconsin

The highlight of my season was the trip to Wisconsin during the Fourth of July Holiday week. Karaoke Dave, Conrad Jorgenson and Bryan Turtle let me tag along on a whirl-wind tour of Wisconsin starting with the traditional Tuesday night, Swiss Colony All-Star Challenge at Madison International Speedway. We completed our tour at the same track later in the week. It was great to see some of the tracks that I haven't been to in a while, such as Wisconsin International Raceway.

Kaukauna has such a unique track, and having a weekly race program on a Thursday night still makes me envious of the people that live in this part of Wisconsin. I could only dream of having so many options of weekly racing from Wednesday to Sunday each week. The trip also allowed me to make my first ever visit to 141 Speedway in Francis Creek. The Creek definitely has an unusual top few rows of bleachers, with the padded bus seats being the hot ticket. We also stopped in at a few tracks just to check them out during the afternoon, as I had only seen pictures of Columbus 151 Speedway and the two tracks in Beaver Dam. This is the kind of trip I used to take in my early twenties, and I'm probably not going to be able to make the trip every year at this time, but give me about five years or so from now, I'm hoping to make this an annual event once again.

That concludes this column for 2010. We'll be back with our first monthly issue on-line issue of 2011 in

60+ Sprint Cars for Richert Memorial

I mentioned this just a few columns ago, but seeing over 60 Sprint Cars was truly something special. We've all heard for the past year or two now about the doom and gloom with the economy, yet the UMSS and IRA groups had an awesome car count. A true testament to the work these



Stan Meissner photo

groups put into their respective series and a special thanks to Steve Sinclair and Ron Bernhagen for making Open Wheel fans have something they can smile about again.

Figure-8 Drivers at Raceway Park in Shakopee

The Figure-8 drivers at Raceway Park are a close-knit bunch. They'll go out of their way to help each other, but towards the end of the year, they were a little too close. Several times towards the end of the year, there were some exciting (and at times downright scary) wrecks. I'm all for the occasional close call and occasional fender bender, but man some of those wrecks looked bad. On the other hand, I have a sneaking suspicion that type of thing is something that keeps some fans coming back.

Oktoberfest

What can I say about Oktoberfest? Each year, I just don't seem to have enough time to do everything I want to do while I'm in town. I'm thinking I may have to join the large contingent of campers that make the trek to West Salem early in the week. This year had unseasonably warm weather, along with the traditional crowning of the various champions. Then again, there's typically a good chance of the spectacular Oktoberfest wreck, as anything can happen when drivers hit the big track for the first time, or somebody figured they would push it just a little too far,



Martin DeFries photo



Tom Johnson photo

February, followed by the return of the print version later in the spring. Make sure to check our website each week for a new photo of the week and we'll have our annual thrills and spins video up soon on YouTube.



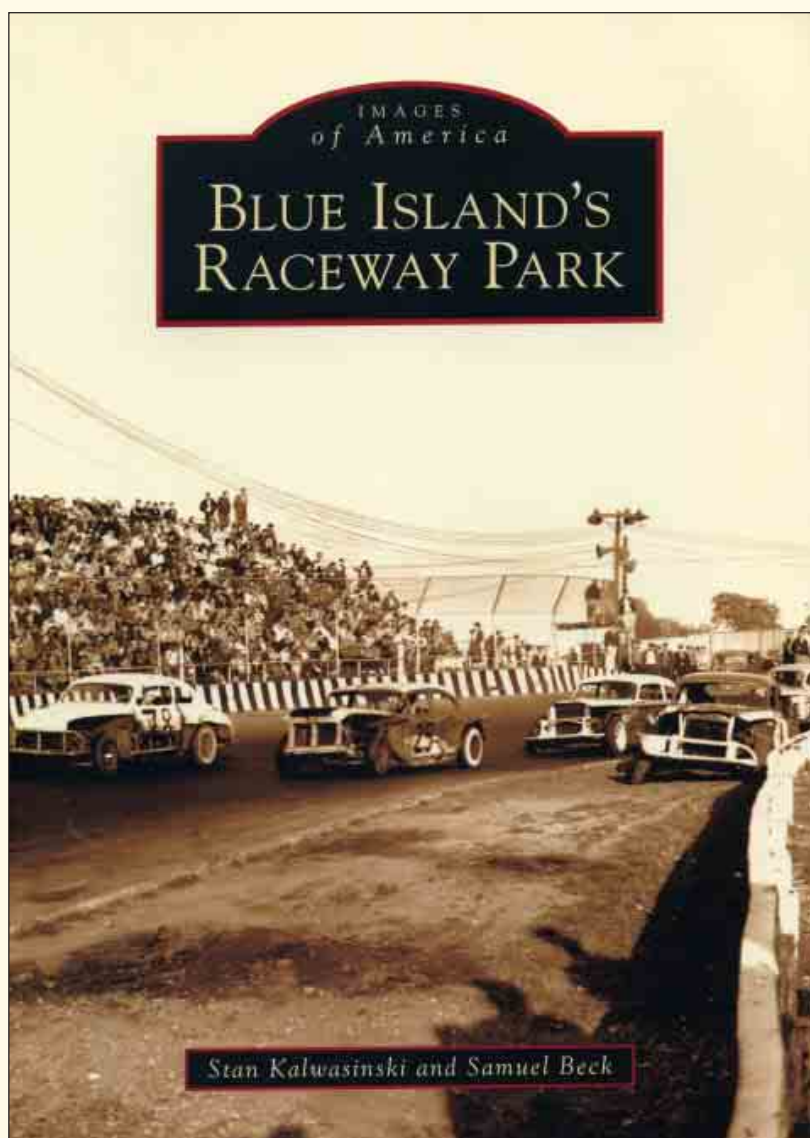
A mid-week, afternoon practice session at WIR



Fourth of July Fireworks, racing every day and the Pink Flamigo hoisted in high the sky four nights in a row. It doesn't get much better than that.

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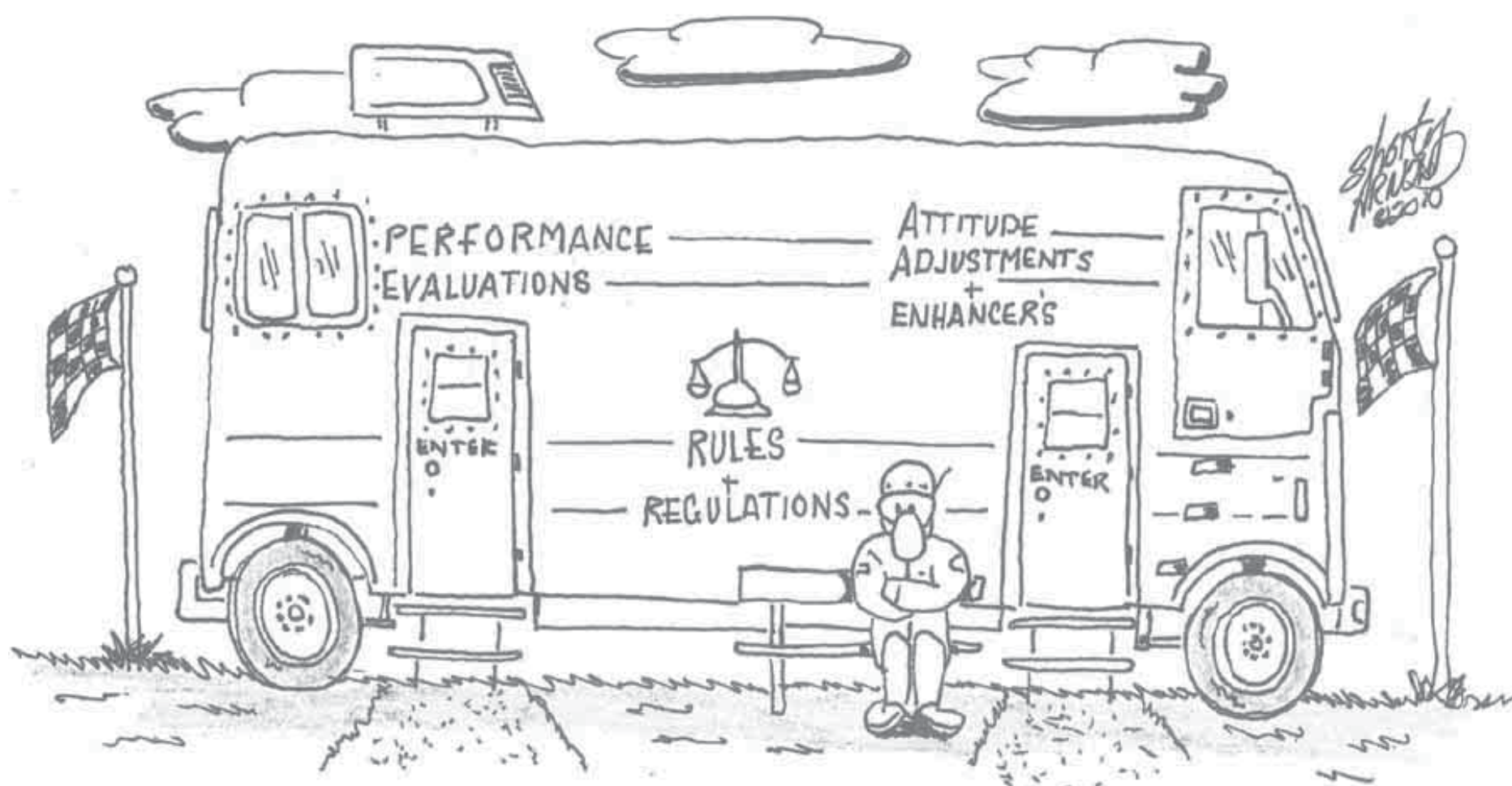
Coming in the next issue.....

Our friends at Coastal 181 Publishing (www.coastal181.com) sent us a review copy of the book titled Blue Island's Raceway Park. We'll use the next few months to look over the book and give a full report in our next issue.



Special Offer for Wisconsin Midwest Modified Drivers

Wehrs Machine has the solution to the Wisconsin Midwest Modified rule change to a three-link rear suspension for the 2011 season. We are going to offer the Midwest Modified drivers that use our cages a FREE swap out if they send us their housings. In return, we will send them brackets that clamp solid to the rear end and still use our plates.



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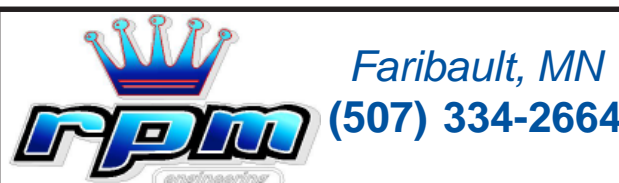
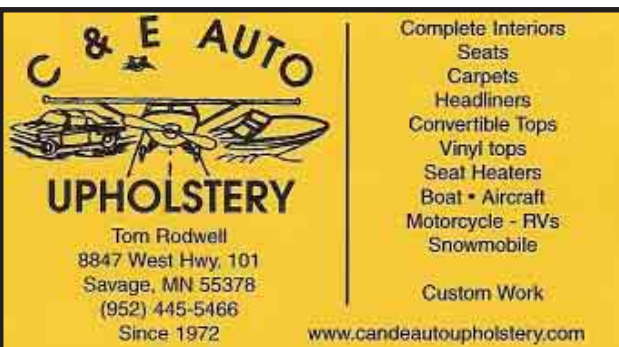


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In The Drivers Seat



Earlier this year, Jonathan Eilen was injured in a crash that occurred during the ASA Midwest Tour's annual visit to Hawkeye Downs Speedway in Cedar Rapids, IA. The Midwest Racing Connection recently caught up with Eilen to discuss the recovery process this summer and the plans for returning to the race track in 2011.

How did the accident at Hawkeye Downs actually occur?

I was actually about 14-laps from the finish and the brackets for the panhard bar broke. I was just trying to make it to the finish at this point. I came about four laps shy of the finish. The rear-end was moving back and forth and cut my right-rear tire down. When the tire went down, it spun me around and I hit the wall just about perfectly square, drivers-side first coming out of turn two.

What was the extent of your injuries?

I broke my L-3, which is one of the bones in your back, four broken ribs, a bulged disc and torn cartilage.

What type of therapy did you have to go through following the wreck?

Actually, I'm still doing therapy, and probably should be doing more. For two months after the wreck, I had to do different stretches and exercise two or three times each day. Just different things to build the strength back in the bones and muscles.

How did you occupy your time while you weren't able to race?

Well, I think I they told me I couldn't do anything for about a month and a half after the wreck. They told me towards the end of the six weeks, I could probably starting doing some light-duty stuff. I got bored after about a week and was back driving truck after about three weeks. I was able to spend some time at my dad's shop learning some of the business side of the operation; learning the stuff that I usually don't have time for, but need to learn it sooner or later. It was enough to keep me occupied, without going nuts sitting around.

During Oktoberfest, I believe I may have heard your voice on the scanner a few times. Were you working on somebody's crew during this weekend?

Yeah, I was helping out Jason Schuler in the John McKarns race. I figured he's helped me enough the last couple of years that I could return the favor. I had never done it (spotting) before, but figured it would be nice to see how everything is done from a different perspective.

Earlier this year, you had the misfortune of losing one of your haulers in a fire. Do you have any plans on using the skills you gained during this experience to become a volunteer firefighter?

Ah, probably not. We're probably not on the best of terms with the fire department after that whole incident happened. That happened a week before I broke my back and a week before that, my brother received third-degree burns in another fire. The month of June was not good for us. I don't ever want to see a month like that happen again.

Are you looking forward to getting behind the wheel of a race car again?

Oh yeah, absolutely. I wanted to get out before the end of the year, but my doctor wouldn't let me. Three weeks after LaCrosse, my doctor gave me the OK to go back and practice. Donny let us rent the track I was actually out at Raceway Park testing. Everything felt really good. It took about two or three laps to feel comfortable and get back up to speed.

What are your plans for the 2011 season?

I want to do the full ASA Midwest Tour schedule. We will also try to run a few of the bigger specials in the area. Pretty much the same thing we planned on doing this year. It gets to be a lot with racing and trying to work at the same time. Hopefully everything goes as planned.

***Our next on-line issue
will be in February.
All of us here at MRC
wish you a happy
Holiday Season***

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Auto Racing Facts, Observances and Opinions



By Dale P. Danielski

With the off season of racing here and things quieted down a bit we'll take the time now to do a little Retro-Racing.

One of the most significant changes in short track racing occurred in 1972 when the Pony cars or smaller sporty type cars officially arrived on the scene. Due to national trends in short track racing the most influential group in this part of the country, the Central Wisconsin Racing Association decided via it's mostly driver membership voting power to allow 108 inch wheel base race cars and eliminate the big 18 inch or wider steam roller tires. An 11 inch maximum tire width was decided on mounted on a 10 inch rim and Ford Mustangs, Dodge Challengers and Chevy Camaros would now be the norm rather than exception at Wisconsin tracks. With the rule changes Central Wisconsin's favorite drivers immediately began constructing new race cars for the upcoming season. Dick Trickle would be in a 1970 Mustang, Marv Marzofka planned to campaign a 1972 Moose Peterson backed Chevrolet Camaro, while Tom Reffner was putting together a 1967 Mustang. Others going the small car route were Lyle Nabbefeldt, 1968 Camaro, Jim Sauter 1972 Camaro and Jim Back, 1968 Mustang. Although the smaller wheelbase appeared to be the way to go many opted to take a wait and see attitude by sticking with the longer wheelbase cars they'd been racing successfully for years. Some of the hold outs included Rich Somers, 1969 Ford Torino, Tom Jensen, 1971 Torino, Bill Wirtz, 1972

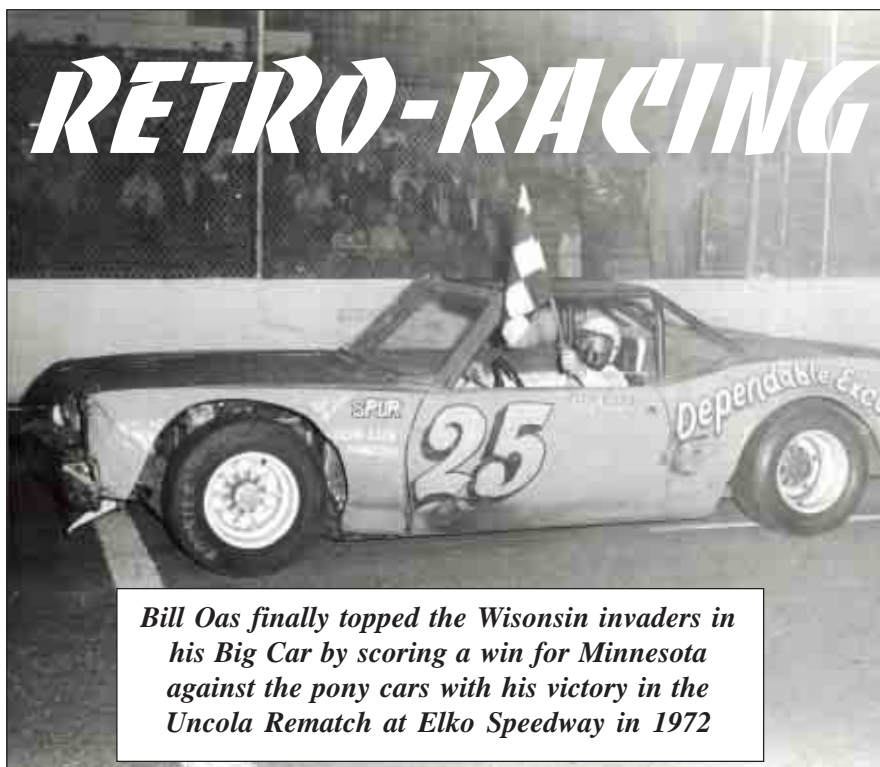
Sticking with the full size machines in 1972 was #0 Bill Wirtz.



Chevelle and National Short Track Champion from the previous year at Rockford Speedway Bill Retallick in a specially built Bobby Allison Chassis, Chevelle. John Rank a Milwaukee area Modified racer in previous years was set to hit the stock car scene in an immaculately prepared 1972 Camaro. Of course Rank and Son was a very successful

auto dealership in the South Eastern part of the State and most believed financing for his racing effort would make John a huge threat on the paved stock car circuit.

Of course who better to take advantage of the new car specifications then Trickle who was trying to better his 56 Feature wins of 1971. He already had 12 wins by Mid-May. Statewide tracks with the same rules again enabled drivers to race as much as they wanted during the season. A typical week found racers at North La Crosse Speedway on Wednesday, State Park Speedway of Wausau on Thursday, Capital Speedway of Oregon on Friday, Wis. Dells Motor Speedway Saturday and Golden Sands Speedway Plover, WI on Sunday. Sunday afternoons also found special events held at various tracks including Wisconsin International Raceway of Kaukauna, WI., while Tuesday night found an occasional big event held as well. Tracks in Columbus, Jefferson and West Salem, WI., also held weekly shows for the stock car group as did Rockford Speedway where Joe Shear began the season in a full sized Chevelle but soon switched over to a 1972 Camaro where he was in short order dominating. During one stretch in late May and early June Shear won 7 features in 8 tries. Wisconsin favorite, Dave Marcis, who was establishing himself racing in NASCAR came back home to Wisconsin and made a huge impact with a shorter wheelbase car in 1972 as the Wausau native teamed up with Dave Deppe to race in the USAC sanctioned race in Kaukauna in May. The 200 lap event found Marcis in his blue Chevy Nova number 37 racing to the win against the established veterans of the series in their full sized cars which did not go over very well at all. USAC did everything it could to find something wrong with the car including tearing down the engine in a dirty dusty area of the pits. Everything was legal and the win stood however further establishing a stranglehold for the little cars racing in 1972. Popularity was never higher for the drivers racing in the state as fans were flocking to tracks everywhere to watch them compete. With IMCA, USAC and NASCAR considered the big league attractions the short track stars and their pony cars were stealing their thunder as exciting racing was happening at paved track venues everywhere. That fact was made even clearer with the cancellation of a 250 lap USAC stock car race scheduled for August in Kaukauna. With few of the Wisconsin drivers having cars to compete in the race as rules were much different than what they raced under at the short tracks the main attraction of the event was lost. USAC still had star power with Ramo Stott, Butch Hartman,



Verlin Eaker, Jack Bowsher and the open wheel guys like Foyt, Unser and McCluskey dropping in on occasion to race the stock cars, but the area now had its own top status with the short track guys. And with all the racing in this part of the country and a chance at making some decent money, most racers weren't even considering heading South

to NASCAR, which at the time was no where near as financially desirable as it is today. Not that the best from the Midwest couldn't compete in the South, they chose not to as it meant more sacrifice than they were willing to take to fit in.

Action continued to heat up heading into summer, with Trickle at 18 wins and Marv Marzofka up to 10 main event victories. The two were taking much of the spotlight, but others such as Larry Detjens in his 1971 Dodge Challenger and Throttle Stomping Lyle Nabbefeldt were also winning. Detjens scored a 100 lap win at Golden Sands Speedway while Nabbefeldt did the same in a special holiday event in late May. Long time racer and many feature event winner at Jefferson Speedway, Dick Duerst, decided if you can't beat 'em join 'em as he debuted a Dodge Challenger in Mid-June at that track winning the main event. Not to be outdone, John Ziegler was racing a Mustang in competition mostly in the Southern part of the state taking checkered flag after checkered flag at the Columbus 151 Speedway and a big win in the red, white and blue painted car at Capital Speedway, which was drawing all the top drivers from every corner of the state. Interesting to note at this time that some drivers weren't going the way of the new pony cars as Bryce Spoehr, '37 Pontiac, Pappy Diemel and Ron Van Roy '32 Fords, were racing and winning at tracks in



Lyle Nabbefeldt #55s

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Wisconsin's Fox Valley with their older versions of pony cars, Coupes!

Across the border Illinois hot shoe Ed Hoffman hopped on the Pony Car bandwagon, campaigning a radical Camaro convertible to numerous wins at Illiana and Grundy County Speedways. Meanwhile across that other border in Minnesota, the Wisconsin guys were still having their way with the Gopher State contingent as Tom Reffner in his 'Stang took the Uncola 100 at Elko Speedway. Shear in his Camaro placed 2nd with Minnesota drivers putting up a good fight in their full size cars placing 3rd and 4th in the form of Dick Giles, '67 Fairlane and Dan Prziborski, '67 Chevelle. The writing was definitely on the wall by this time for the big cars though and as of July 30th Trickle and Marzofka had roared to 44 and 17 Feature wins respectively. Almost everyone else was left literally just hoping for a top five finish as the dynamic duo continued to dominate action. Rich Bickle gave hope to the big car set winning a number of features at Jefferson in his full size Ford, but the day was near for all to be racing 108 inch wheel based cars. Even Bickle recognized that fact debuting a 1970 Mustang at Jefferson late in the season with a feature win.

Of course the Pony Car set knew they were on to a good thing as Trickle proved racing to the 300 lap win at I-70 Speedway of Odessa, MO. Trickle pocketed \$4,645 in the process further hammering home the point of not needing the form of racing USAC offered.

Another really unique promotion going on at the time was the Late Model versus Milwaukee Stock Car Racing Association Modifieds challenge races. Capital and Golden Sands promoter Sam Bartus came up with the idea and

others for bragging rights.

With the season winding down the small car group with all its success was practically salivating in anticipation of the season ending high dollar event promotions. One such race was the 1st Annual Midwest Championship to be held at Dells Motor Speedway September 9-10. The event boasted of a \$16,000 total purse pay-out with \$2,500 going to the main event winner. Winning the race wasn't going to be easy either as it featured 200 laps of tough racing on the small 1/3 mile Dells oval. Added incentive to attract drivers to the event was a \$500 offering by promoter Howard Johnson to anyone outside the area that could win the 200 lap race. Attract drivers it did, as Michigan

hot shoes Ed Howe and Tom Maier entered along with Missouri star Larry Phillips. All told over 100 race cars were on hand for the event representing seven states. Big event; Big money. That meant Dick Trickle would be at the top of his game which he was, winning the 200 lap race for his 64th main event victory of the season. With the year Trickle and Marv Marzofka had it was only fitting they would finish 1-2 in the 200. Trickle also captured the 2nd Annual Old Style 200 later at Elko Speedway putting Wisconsin up 3-1 over the Minnesota contingent in the challenge races held there

in 1971 and '72. Bill Oas did finally break the ice in his Big Car by scoring a win for Minnesota against the pony cars with his victory in the Uncola Rematch in 1972. As is quite well documented Trickle and Marzofka scored 67 and 32 main event wins respectively during the 1972 racing season. The Pony Car ushered in the latest revolution in short track stock car racing as lightweight cars with big horsepower engines became a necessity if you wanted to win or even compete. The domination displayed by a handful of drivers in their areas that took a chance on constructing their version of the cars will probably never

be duplicated. The 67 feature win mark set in a single season of racing certainly seems out of reach.

We offer this quote of the column for

our latest writing effort. "You CAN get the black flag for driving like an a*****". Everyone listened as the black flag was not given during the race. That quote from a person remaining anonymous!

Questions, comments, opinions and other information welcome at Starmaker Multimedia 967 10th Ave N Ste A, Onalaska, WI 54650 608-783-5827 or at dale@starmakermultimedia.com

Whitey Harris raced this modified #A3 in the 1970s for Fred Nielsen, while he also raced a Pony Car late Model Camaro also #A3



events were held at those tracks along with Wis. Dells and others. The events pitted the Milwaukee Modified stock car guys in their smaller cubic inch engine but much lighter cars against the heavier full bodied mostly big block engined Late Model stock car group. The superior handling stock cars usually won out over the feather weight and faster on the straight a ways Mod set but what a cool concept nonetheless. How cool it was to see John Reimer, Ron Marish, Whitey Harris, Don Schuppel, Dick Duston, Fuzzy Fassbender, Aaron Solsrud, Jim Sullivan, Willie Goedon, Roger Otto, Bob Robel and up to 15 others go head to head on a regular basis against Dick Trickle, Joe Shear, John Ziegler, Dave Watson, Tom Reffner, Fred Bender, Jim Back, Marv Marzofka, John Rank and so many



Dave Marcis #37

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***Congratulates the Elko Speedway
Rookie of the Year class for 2010***



Martin DeFries photo

The Inside Dirt



Stan Meissner

Tony Veneziano, The Public Relations/Media Director for the World of Outlaws Sprint Car Series was unceremoniously released by World Racing Group after holding the position for five seasons. Tony was in charge of the World of Outlaws media trailer, the eighteen wheeler you see at their shows with the fancy dirt graphics scheme. If there was anything that media members needed to do their job Tony, would make sure they were accommodated.

Veneziano elaborated on his termination several days later in an email exchange. Tony said that WoO officials broke the news to him after the Outlaw's banquet, as he was organizing his office before heading home to Indiana for the winter. Tony said that his termination was described as a "restructuring." I don't have any insight into the inner workings of the World of Outlaws beyond what I see at their races but I do know a dedicated and motivated individual when I meet one. Tony Veneziano was one of those tireless workers who came to the track every day with a smile and nothing but praise for the organization he represented. In just five years Tony brought World of Outlaws media relations up to a standard of professionalism the organization had not previously known. Tony did an outstanding job working with the writers and photographers around the country, and was a master at getting press releases and results posted to the WoO website within minutes after the

conclusion of each event. I am confident that Tony will land on his feet, preferably in the racing industry.

Speaking of the World out Outlaws they held their final event of the season at the Charlotte dirt track in a combined show with the Late Models. This annual event referred to as the "World Finals" is televised on Speed and is gaining momentum among racers and fans. I spoke with 2010 Interstate Racing Association champion Bill Balog about his trip to Charlotte to compete with the Outlaws. Bill experienced motor problems during the first round of qualifying that couldn't be resolved before the second round. The motor problem produced a less than desirable qualifying effort (42nd out of 56 cars) that put Bill behind the eight ball for the entire weekend. Balog said that the weather that weekend was cold and wet and there was a lot of down time with all the racing that took place. After doing two rounds of qualifying on Thursday Friday rained out and the entire event was run on Saturday. Bill ended up fourth in the C Main and said that it was difficult to pass due to track conditions and the number of top quality cars on hand. Other drivers with local ties that made the A Main include Donny Schatz finishing seventh, Jac Haudenschild finishing in fourteenth in the Carnahan R19, Brooke Tatnell in seventeenth driving Erin Crocker-



2010 World of Outlaws Champion Jason Meyers. Photo taken at the July 2010 Cedar Lake World of Outlaws show

Stan Meissner photo

Three time
Interstate Racing
Association
champion Bill
Balog at Rice
Lake Speedway on
May 22, 2010



Stan Meissner photo

was a locally owned team that has competed at Knoxville and most recently with the Outlaws.

Jason Meyers won the World Finals Feature and the World of Outlaws championship. If you're a Jason Meyers fan be sure to sign up for the Elite Racing E newsletter. Go to the Elite website at eliteracing.net, then go to the "News" section where you can sign up. Many of the top teams update their progress on their websites and if you visit their sites you can keep tabs on your favorite racing teams.

The Elko Speedway recently posted on their website that the track will be covered in dirt not once but twice in 2011. The 2011 Elko Dirt Nationals will be a Saturday only affair that will span three consecutive weekends. July 9 the

Everham's car, Craig Dollansky eighteenth and Justin Henderson twenty third.

Carnahan Motorsports notified Haudenschild that he was free to pursue other options after this final event of the season. Their longtime sponsor informed them that they would not be renewing for 2011 and without their support the team would be forced to cease operations. The R19

featured classes include the UMSS Sprint Cars and USMTS Modifieds. On July 16 the featured classes will again include the UMSS Sprints along with the Cornbelt Clash Late Models. Finally on July 23 the Interstate Racing Association Outlaw Sprints will take to the track along with the Micro Sprints and Modifieds. In October the track will be covered with dirt a second time for three days of racing from Thursday October 13 through Saturday October 15. Event details for the October dates had not been announced at the time of this writing.

The Upper Midwest Sprint Car Series recently completed a successful second season with 20 events taking place at seven tracks and sixty two drivers listed in their season point standings. The UMSS has scheduled their banquet for Saturday January 22 at the Running Aces Harness

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Tony Veneziano interviews Donny Schatz after his 2009 Cedar Lake Speedway World of Outlaws victory. Veneziano's position as Public Relations/Media Director for the World of Outlaws Sprint Car Series was abolished leaving Tony to pursue other options.

The Inside Dirt from page 11

Park in Columbus, Minnesota. Details taken from the UMSS press release are as follows:

"The cost of the banquet is \$30 per adult, children 6-15 are \$15, and under 6 are free. Tickets should be purchased ahead of time by contacting series head Ron Bernhagen at 612-363-5302 or series promotion and sponsorship coordinator Mark Daniels at 612-839-8311. Driving directions and other information about Running Aces can be located on their website at www.runningacesharness.com or by calling them at 651-925-4600 or 1-877-RUN-ACES."

"The Country Inn & Suites in Forest Lake, MN will be the official host hotel. Rooms have been set aside under the name UMSS-Ron Bernhagen. The rate for Saturday night for a room with two (2) queen beds is \$84.15 while a suite goes for \$97.75. Reservations can be made by calling 651-982-9799 and mentioning the above reservation name. The cut-off date for reserving a room under the UMSS banquet rate is January 7, 2011 at midnight. The UMSS is working on arranging a shuttle taxi between the hotel and Running Aces."

In addition to the banquet there will be a free chassis setup seminar that afternoon at Mastell Brothers Trailer Service from noon until 3pm. Mastell is located in Columbus on Lake Drive Northeast just minutes from the banquet location and the seminar will take place in their heated service shop. For more information contact Ron Bernhagen at 612-363-5302 or Mark Daniels at 612-839-8311. Visit mastellbrothers.com for driving directions.

Speaking of chassis setup and the UMSS there will be an increased demand for setup help this coming season. The UMSS will debut the long anticipated non-wing class that has been in the works for the past two seasons. The non-wing cars will be an exhibition class to start with but I expect that it won't be long before fields have grown to the point that they're able to support a complete racing program. The rules have been posted on the UMSS website at umsprints.com and offer a very affordable alternative for racers on a budget that want to give open wheel racing a try. Non-wing Sprint Cars are one of the most exiting forms of racing you'll ever see anywhere.

Watch for the GRP Dirt Track Racing Trivia Contest coming up right after the Holidays on the gotomn.com website.

Season number two of the midwestracingtalk.com website will debut starting in January as well.

Have a safe and Happy Holiday season and I'll see you on the banquet circuit!

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Jac Haudenschild gets underneath Craig Dollansky at the July 2010 Cedar Lake World of Outlaws show. Carnahan Motorsports suggested to Haud that he should pursue other options for 2011. Dollansky will be back on the World of Outlaws toure in the Big Game Treestands #7

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The Racing Geek



by Jordan Bianchi

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The Championship That Means The Most

This one was different. It was unlike any of the previous four. This was about pure grit and determination. It was an utter and complete refusal to give in, despite the numerous obstacles that kept arising along the 10-race meat grinder known as the Chase for the Sprint Cup.

Be it a car that didn't seem to run well in traffic, not one but two pit crews who had their share of difficulties throughout the playoffs and an adversary in Denny Hamlin, who wasn't intimidated by the juggernaut known as Team 48.

No, this year was about a driver, a crew chief, an owner, and most importantly a team that met every challenge head-on and never wavered. While the end result is the same as it was in 2006, '07, '08, and '09, this year was by far the most special of them all.

In the previous four years, Jimmie Johnson rolled into Homestead with his name all but engraved on the championship trophy; only needing a somewhat reasonable finish to secure the title.

That was not the case yesterday, where Johnson had to scrap and fight for every position on the track, because every point meant the difference between being a five-time titlist and a former series champion.

To the surprise of no one, and to the angst of many who were ready to see someone else win, when the checkered flag waved it was the same team being handed the trophy that we've seen for the last four years.

"I've always told you guys that the first championship, first win, has meant the most to me," said an exuberated Johnson.

"This one, I think this takes the lead. Just the circumstances, it's not that the other Chases weren't competitive. We were stronger I think in the previous two Chases, at least. Maybe all four. But this one, I'm just so proud, because there were times on Saturday nights when we would get together and discuss our race car after practice, and we would have some tough conversations, and just struggled to get what we needed."

The obvious thing to do now is to try and determine Jimmie

Johnson's place in the sport and where he sits among the all-time greats. Except, now isn't the time for that, as there will be plenty of time to assess where he ranks in the pantheon of NASCAR immortals later.

Let's for the time being simply acknowledge that he and his team continue to make what was considered impossible, very much possible. They're doing so in the most competitive era in NASCAR history. At a time when parity rules the day and no one team is supposed to have a prolonged advantage, the 48 team continues to defy logic.

Is Johnson beatable? Of course he is. His pit crew is sloppy, mistake prone and inconsistent, not just in the Chase, but throughout the entire season. On intermediate tracks, the Lowe's Chevrolet frequently struggled, particularly when immersed in traffic.

One could make a very good case that the 11 team of Denny Hamlin outperformed the 48 over past 10 weeks. If it weren't for a couple of self-induced mistakes at Phoenix and Homestead, they easily could have dethroned the 48. But woulda, shoulda, coulda, the results are what they are and speak for themselves.

The scary thing is Chad Knaus, just hours after the conclusion of the Ford 400, had already turned the page to 2011 and what the Hendrick organization can do to be better.

"The 2010 season ended two hours ago," said the crew chief that at times seemingly willed his team to the title. "And 2011 started two hours ago."

"We have started preparing at Hendrick Motorsports for next year and we are full force to make sure that we take a better product to the racetrack next year, and it's going to be so."

This dynasty is far from being over and the appetite that this team has for winning is far from being satisfied.

I'm of the belief that to first win a championship, you first have to lose one. Until you experience the pain of seeing something you want so badly slip through your fingers, you can't fully realize the immensity of the task at hand.

This past weekend, Denny Hamlin lost the championship.

It all started with the poor qualifying effort on Friday, which he downplayed afterwards, but eventually led to his demise.

In trying to move up from his 37th starting position, he was simply too aggressive. There's no need to go three-wide 24 laps into a 267-lap race unless absolutely forced. When he moved underneath Greg Biffle, who was beside Paul Menard coming off Turn-2, it was a recipe for disaster.

The No. 16 car of Biffle moved down, clipped the front of Hamlin's Toyota, who then proceeded to slide across the grass on the backstretch.

The subsequent damage proved too much to overcome, and with it a fine season that saw the Joe Gibbs driver on the brink of his first title, went out the window.

Jason Smith/Getty Images



"You can kind of maybe contribute it to bad qualifying," said Hamlin. "But our car was really fast at the beginning. I mean, just unbelievably fast at the beginning, and I knew we had a car that could contend for a win. And obviously when we got in that incident on the back straightaway, it tore up the front and knocked the toe out and obviously the car did not drive as well for the rest of the day."

How Hamlin handles the disappointment of losing will be one of the more captivating subplots heading into the offseason.

Does he use it as motivation to propel him to greatness, much like Jimmie Johnson used losing the championship in 2004 and '05 to drive him?

Or, does he go the route that the other drivers who have finished second to Johnson have gone, and struggle the following season.

Jeff Gordon still hasn't recovered from losing out on his fifth title in 2007, and has won just one race since. Carl Edwards went from having nine victories in 2008 to being shut out the next season. And there's Mark Martin, who won five races last season, but not only went winless this year, he didn't even make the Chase.

The direction Hamlin goes from here is up to him. For the time being, he can take solace in what was a breakout season.

"I feel like we had a solid year. We had a really good car all year, and you can take away the fact that we are coming off of our best year ever. I still know that there's — I've got to get better in a lot of areas."

Last year, the future appeared bleak for Kevin Harvick and Richard Childress Racing. Driver and team were floundering, and it was all but a certainty that Harvick would be taking his services elsewhere for 2011.

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Now, following a season in which he won three times, won the regular season points crown and finished third in the Chase, the future is as bright as it was dark a year ago.

"It's a 180 for us," said a smiling Harvick. "Last year at this time we all wanted to put a gun in our mouth. Didn't know what we needed to do to fix it, and we were running better but we didn't know if that was going to continue into next year."

The guys, we came out of the gate strong. We ran strong all year. And in the end, we came up a little bit short but from where we were last year to this steppingstone, for us to build on is a whole lot better than where we were a year to go to be consistently racing for championships."

For a driver who can be highly critical of his team, sometimes too much, the above comments speak volumes. There's a lot to be proud of, and for Harvick to recognize all that he and his team have done this season says a lot about where he has come as a leader.

"I remember where we sat when I left this race last year. You always want to win but I'm not going to sit here and be disappointed. We raced as hard as we could race this year, with everybody putting up every piece of effort that they had, week-in and week-out, and I know what it feels like to run like we did last year."

"I'm not going to look back. This is going to make us stronger. We have got a good race team that's going to

stick around for a while, and I'm just happy to be a part of it right now."

While there may be doubt as to whether Denny Hamlin can put this bitter defeat behind him, those questions don't surround Harvick. In fact, it's the complete opposite, as one expects him to be the thick of the championship picture when the series returns to Homestead 12 months from now.

By the way, in case you didn't notice, Carl Edwards was your race-winner at Homestead. It marked the second straight week he went to victory lane and no one noticed. That's life when we're in the midst of a compelling title fight that goes all the way down to the closing laps.

Not that Edwards is complaining. After going 70 races before returning to victory lane last weekend in Phoenix, he's grateful just to be winning again.

"A 70-race winless streak is very difficult. And it's difficult because — Jack owns this team. He goes to bed and wakes up every morning; I'm sure, thinking how can we make this better. I go to bed and wake up every morning, thinking how can I be better and Bob (crew chief Bob Osborne) does the same thing."

"When you don't get the results you want, you first look at yourself and you say, hey, how can I do better. It's very easy to start looking around and start pointing fingers at everyone else."

Despite a grueling season, featuring the longest schedule in sports with 36 point races, plus two exhibition events,

Edwards isn't ready for the season to end. If he had a say, the Daytona 500 would be next weekend, he's that excited about what the future holds.

"I feel a lot better right now going into 2011 than I did going into 2009. That's because I feel we have a lot of momentum and things are getting better. We have a new engine that we are working on that just keeps getting better."

"For our team, to finish like this and to be on the upswing that we are, this is as good as it gets."

At one point, it would have been unfathomable to think Jeff Gordon would go through a whole season without winning a single race. Well, for the second time in three years, that is the reality we're dealing with as the four-time champion again went winless. With just one victory in his last 108 races, it's going to be a long offseason for a team that not too long ago was the benchmark of NASCAR.

Joining Gordon as drivers who won in 2009 but went winless this year are Brian Vickers, Kasey Kahne, Mark Martin, Joey Logano, Brad Keselowski, and Matt Kenseth.

On the opposite end of the spectrum, Ryan Newman, Carl Edwards, Kevin Harvick, Clint Bowyer, Juan Pablo Montoya and Greg Biffle all returned to victory lane after lengthy absences.

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