

**THE MIDWEST**

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# **RACING CONNECTION**

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

***Makin' Memories***

***Speedweeks 2023***



March 2023

**Inside...**



Shampine Super Mod



10 Years Of Speedweeks





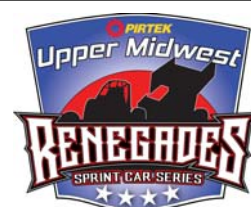
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## Publisher's Note Racing According to Plan



### Dan Plan

The 2023 season marked my 10<sup>th</sup> consecutive trip to Speedweeks. Things have definitely changed at the big track in Daytona Beach, but the short tracks

## 10 Years of Speedweeks

have remained consistent. When I took my son to Speedweeks in 2013, Daytona ran all week long. In 2013, The Clash started things off on Saturday the weekend before the 500. 2013 was also the last time the Duels were run on Thursday afternoon. This year, nothing took place at Daytona until the Wednesday night before the 500. Speedweeks at Daytona has evolved into SpeedDays. This was the first time I did not stop at the big track at all. I spent every night I was in Florida at the short tracks.

Things at New Smyrna and Volusia still take place for well over a week. Car counts and crowds have gone up and down over the past 10 years, and this year saw some of the best crowds I've seen at the Florida short tracks in years.

While the Super Late counts may have been down slightly for the 35-lappers at New Smyrna, the car count and crowd for the Tuesday night ASA Southern Super Series 100-lap event was fantastic. The number of East Coast Tour Mods has nearly tripled since our first visit in 2013. The addition of the 602 Mods to several of the events really brings the car count up. The 602 Mods also had some of the closest finishes over the course of the week. Volusia continues

*Publisher's Note  
continued on page 4*



Dan Plan photo

*The Midwest*

**RACING**

*Connection*

March 2023

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*Publishers note from page 3*

to pack them in each night with World of Outlaws Sprints, Late Models, East Coast Big-Block Mods and UMP Mods. The best part of Volusia for me from a race fan point of view is they only run 2 divisions each night. Volusia during Speedweeks is one of the most efficiently run short track events throughout the course of the year. During the WoO Sprint final night at Volusia, rain was on the way. They actually started the program about 20 minutes early in an attempt to beat the rain. They were able get all of the Sprint heats and last chance qualifier completed prior to the rain falling. I'll give them an A for effort on that one.

Other than one being asphalt, and the other being dirt there is one big thing I noticed between New Smyrna and Volusia: the age of the drivers. New Smyrna had several drivers in their teens in top notch rides. At Volusia, the only drivers that have top notch rides have several years of experience. The younger dirt drivers are well into their 20's and not in their teens. I'm not saying that drivers in the teens are a bad thing, it's just different than the dirt side of the world.

And speaking of teenage drivers, William Sawalich proved that he can run with the veterans. William picked up a couple of wins during the course of Speedweeks 2023. Sawalich showed that he can "dish it out" if roughed up and also showed he can race a veteran driver cleanly when he chased down Bubba Pollard and passed him cleanly to win the 100-lap final event of the week.

Even though my first two nights of Speedweeks 2023 were cut short by rain, my time was well spent. Short tracks racing every night and snuck out early one night to attend the Midwest Is Best party hosted by Angie and Gregg McKarns. It was time well spent. Now it's time to get ready for things to kick off closer to home.



*Dan Plan photo*



*Dan Plan photo*

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Racing Nuggets



PJ "Jacklyn" Nuttleman

When my grandmother passed away in November of 2012, she left a huge void in our family. She was quick with a laugh, always willing to help others, a devout Catholic, and quite an entertainer. I went to Las Vegas for the first time with her when I was 21. That is hardly how most 21-year-olds envision “doing Vegas,” but hear me out. My grandmother played piano in a band and they were doing a headlining stay at The Stardust. It was an amazing experience and fortunately for me, I have oodles of memories from that trip with her.

It’s only a matter of time before our aging loved ones will be gone. Life goes faster than the test runs at the Bonneville Salt Flats in Utah. I am forever grateful for the memories I made with Grandma Helen. Sometimes I ache to hug her again, other times I am laughing by myself behind the wheel at a red light, as I recall some of our adventures together. The memories are mine and they can’t be taken away.

We are nearing the passing of another that is sure to pierce our hearts: The Rockford Speedway.

Yes, we will all be reading the obituary for this beloved Midwestern race track when the checkered flag falls on the 2023 race season. Leave it to the Deery family to coin a catchy slogan to market this historic closing. This last season has been dubbed “The Final Lap.”

That being said, we all have a choice with this “Final Lap” at Rockford Speedway. We can wallow in the sadness of the track’s forthcoming demise—or we can revel in this final season and inject ourselves into the venue’s rich history one final time. I don’t know about you, but I tend to take the positive route whenever possible—so for me, it will be the latter—and I’m not alone.

Racers who haven’t run at Rockford in quite some time are putting their plans together to return to the legendary short track this final season. Some for a few select races—others planning to make a bid to capture the last championship ever at the track.



Dan Plan photo

My friend, Steve Rubeck had a STELLAR idea that he shared on Facebook. He suggested that racers bring back their first paint scheme they ran at Rockford for this final season. That is a GREAT idea and I hope more people choose to do that.

The thread of making choices continues to weave through the fabric of this “Last Lap” season at Rockford Speedway. We can choose

Racing Nuggets  
continued on page 7



Dan Plan photo



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*Racing Nuggets from page 6*

to celebrate instead of complain about it. We can choose to attend as much as possible, rather than miss out on memory-making opportunities. We can choose to support the racers AND the staff in positive ways through sponsorship dollars or time spent helping them—or we can sit at home and lament the whole situation.

I vote we all start to share our memories NOW from Rockford Speedway—photos, stories—all the things! Share them on social media, write about it in a blog, whatever you feel compelled to do. In addition to trying to attend as many races there as I can, I also intend to bring as many of the Deery family members onto the Racing Nuggets Podcast as I can throughout the season to highlight more stories and memories.

We just kicked off the love fest for Rockford Speedway on February 28<sup>th</sup> with our first Deery family member interview on the podcast. If you haven't watched or listened to it yet, I encourage you to do so. Dan Plan and I sat down with Jack Deery and he shared a lot of great Rockford Speedway (and growing up working there) stories. You can download the episode wherever you get your podcasts or watch the video version on the Racing Nuggets YouTube channel.

In another interesting development, there is a Facebook group that is rallying to get iRacing to scan Rockford Speedway before it's gone. You can search for "Rockford Speedway for iRacing" on Facebook and join their group. Basically, they were told they need to get more support and interest in order for the company to do the scan. We need to get a megaphone on this idea. Let's go, people! That would be a real legacy thing to have done and help Rockford Speedway close things out in style and allow future generations be able to continue to race virtually on the famous short track.

Let's all enjoy this "Final Lap." Don't be sad it's over. Be happy to know that you have this final season to enjoy it!  
#TheFinalLap #RockfordSpeedway



Dan Plan photo

'65	WHITEY GERKEN	15:34	FORD
'66	WHITEY GERKEN	14:98	FORD
'67	WHITEY GERKEN	14:98	FORD
'68	RAMO STOTT	14:90	PLYM.
'69	BOB JUSOLA	14:63	CHEV.
'70	BOB JUSOLA	14:63	CHEV.
'71	DICK TRICKLE	14:35	FORD
'72	JOE SHEAR	14:21	CHEV.
'73	JOE SHEAR	14:17	CHEV.
'74	JOE SHEAR	14:17	CHEV.
'75	TOM DEENER	14:00	AMC

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# THE MIDWEST RACING CONNECTION

## Speedweek's Vintage Photo Gallery





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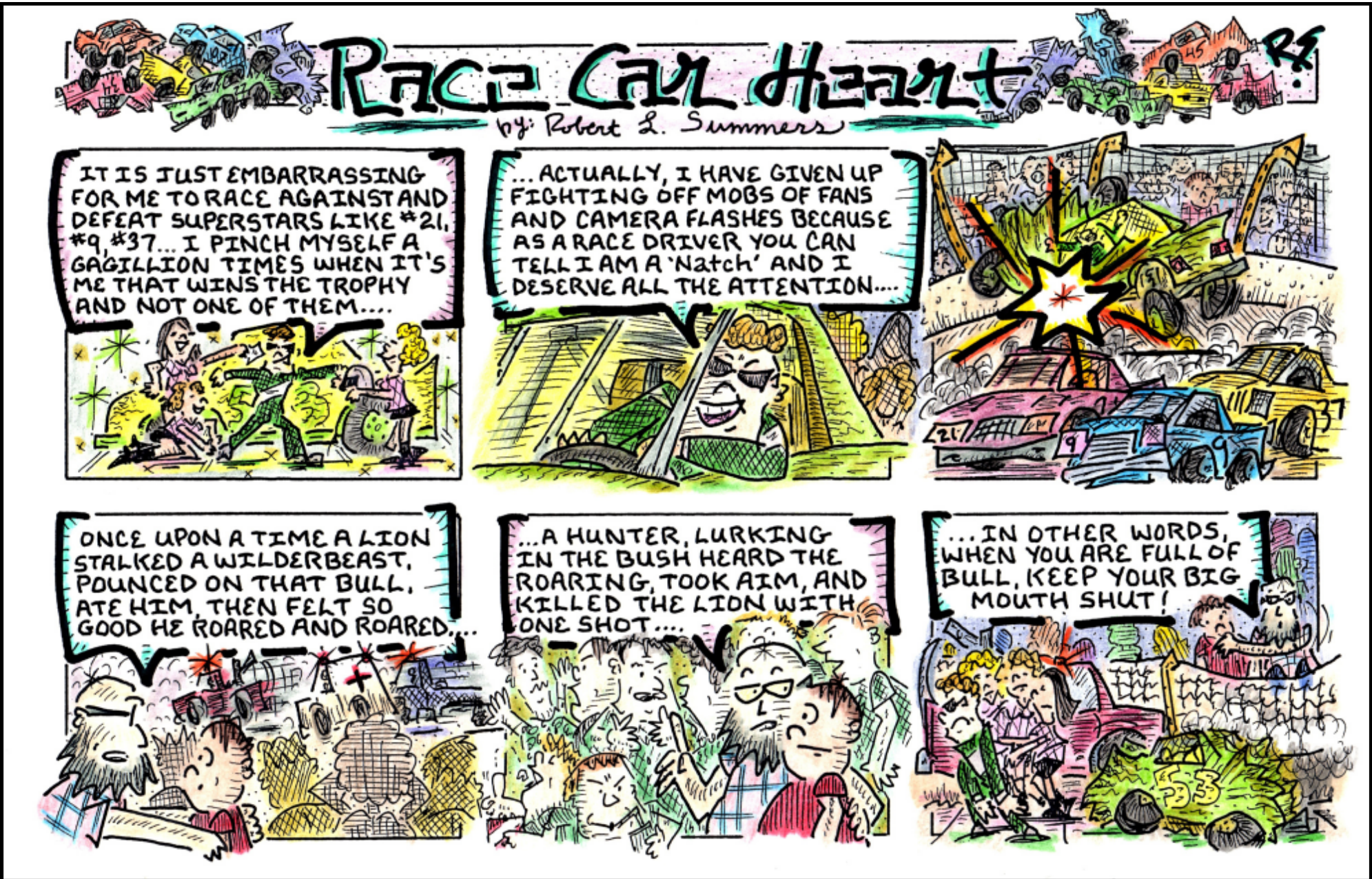
## New Smyrna & Volusia Photo Gallery



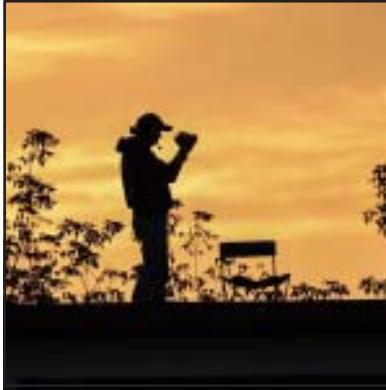




**Opening Night - April 8**  
**Legendary Opener - April 21 & 22**





**Dangerous Dan****Dan Margetta**

As I recombobulated in the Recombobulation Area at Milwaukee's Mitchel International Airport after passing through security and heading to my flight, I quickly realized the off season was over and it was time to start chasing races again. My 2023 racing season began once again with a trip to Daytona for Speed Weeks with fellow race chaser and radio partner Brian Schmitt and we definitely hit the ground running. We flew to Tampa mostly due to flight options and prices but also because the original plan was to catch the All Star Circuit of Champions Sprint Cars at East Bay Raceway Park that night. However, in the days leading up to our departure, the New Smyrna Speedway announced the Clyde Hart Memorial 100 scheduled for the same date would now be the season opener for the ASA Southern Super Series and as the entry list grew with more drivers we knew, the decision was made to trek across the state and go asphalt racing instead. In Amazing Race style, as soon as we landed we quickly grabbed our bags and

*Brian Schmitt photo***Speedweeks 2023***Brian Schmitt photo*

bounded to our rental car which ended up being a Volkswagen Jetta (nothing fancy but it got the job done and was great on fuel mileage) and headed toward New Smyrna. I had seen Twitter reports in the past stating something like 800,000 people had migrated to Florida over the last couple years and while I can't say for certain that's the case, I can tell you it sure felt like all 800,000 of them were on the road between Tampa and New Smyrna as immediately upon leaving the rental car garage we were met with standstill traffic on the Interstate. With the use of Google Maps we were able to find a zig zag route that took us through a lot of residential streets but got us around the interstate logjam and kept us on time to make the New Smyrna race. Traffic was a common theme throughout the ride as the ride took longer than expected although the new express lanes in Orlando helped tremendously. One thing that did go our way, I was able to use Holiday Inn points to secure a place to stay for the night right across from the big speedway and we were able to grab two top row New Smyrna seats ahead of time online. With the lodging situation taken care of, we were able to roll into New Smyrna just before qualifying. As soon as we pulled in, we ran into good friend and Egan Racing crew member Tim "Miler" Becker and his wife Kelly and we quickly grabbed our pit passes and headed to the infield to see everyone else we knew. It felt great to be back at the track again and while 34 super late models signed in,

31 started the main event. For awhile it seemed like the leaders were cursed as Stephen Nasse, William Sawalich, and Bubba Pollard all experienced problems with running out front. William Byron was kind of the last guy standing out front and he drove to his second straight Clyde Hart Memorial win. Gabe Sommers fared the best of the Midwest drivers as he finished a solid 8<sup>th</sup> while James Lynch made the qualifying invert and started on the pole before eventually finishing tenth. Johnny Sauter brought the same car that finished second at New Smyrna in January but struggled with handling issues and finished 19<sup>th</sup>. We spent a long time visiting with Sauter after the event mostly discussing his decision to decline a NASCAR Craftsman Truck Series ride for Daytona due to a sponsor conflicting with his values. It's always cool talking with Johnny Sauter because he's not afraid to tell you the real story and you really get a perspective of how much behind the scenes red tape drivers at the upper levels of big time racing have to go through that most people never see. A common theme continues to be financial ability outpaces driving ability and while I understand it's a harsh reality of the times, it's still kind of sad. Seeing as we really hadn't eaten since leaving Milwaukee, we ended the long day/night picking up hoagies at a late-

*Dangerous Dan continued on page 14*

*Brian Schmitt photo*



*Dangerous Dan continued from page 13*

night Wawa where we ran into Wisconsin broadcaster Jim Tretow who clued us in on a Reunion and Race Car show to be held the next day at the Streamline Hotel.

We couldn't check in to the beachside condo we rented for the rest of the week until late afternoon so we had a lot of time to kill on Wednesday. After signing in for our big track credentials we picked up Miler to head to lunch at Racing's North Turn Grill and Beach Club. It's always an adventure hanging out with Miler and it's never hard to meet people when he's around. He's got quite an outstanding personality and he's the kind of guy where "we're having one" always turns into "one too many." Racing's North Turn is located at the site of the North Turn of the old Daytona Beach Course and it's filled with really cool pictures and memorabilia. It was packed and we made friends with both patrons and bartenders as we enjoyed lunch beach side on a gorgeous day which is something we would never be able to do in Wisconsin in February. After lunch we still had time to kill so we headed to the race car show at the Streamline Hotel to see what that was all about. The parking lot was filled with vintage race cars while the rooftop held an autograph session with 44 legendary drivers and other motorsports personalities. The car show featured a lot of show cars including a vintage midget racer that was the same car I had my picture taken next to when I was eight years old during a 1978 Daytona stop my family made as part of a trip to Disney World. The autograph session was winding down but we decided to check out the roof top anyways. We ran into Bobby

Allison who was leaving just as we were heading in and we rode the elevator to the roof with Billy Venturini. Once up top the view was pretty spectacular and we were able to catch up with Rich Bickle who we really hadn't seen much since he retired. It was fun reminiscing about old racing stories and debating dirt and asphalt racing and which was better. Rich ain't exactly a dirt guy but man it sure was a fun discussion and of course we had one and maybe another one. It was also a pleasure to finally meet Dave and Jayne Wick, longtime listeners to our radio program who I've heard their names but until then had never got the opportunity to meet in person. The time flew by and after checking into our condo we were off to Volusia Speedway Park for some dirt racing as the DIRTcar late models were running three features that night plus a full program of Super DIRTcar Series big block modifieds. Volusia has a gator pond in the pit area and while I've always seen the many signs warning not to feed the gators, I had never seen the actual gators until this night. Both gators were clearly visible peeking out of the water seemingly unbothered by the noisy race cars around. I took pictures but didn't get too close and used the zoom feature on the camera as I didn't feel like being viewed as dinner plus there were races to watch. The track was bad fast with near track record speeds and the late models put in three quick features with Brandon Overton, Tim McCreddie, and Chris Madden scoring the wins while Max McGlaughlin ran away to the big block modified main event victory. We stopped at Buc-ee's afterwards for food and for the record this year Wawa beat Buc-ee's in the late night after the races food contest.

When you have a beach side condo, you can't



Brian Schmitt photo

miss the picturesque sunrise over the ocean and I was up to see it on Thursday. Once the day was in full swing, we finally headed to the Daytona International Speedway where driving into the infield tunnel will give you goosebumps every single time. We took a swing through the NASCAR Craftsman Truck Series garage first to check out the new number and wrap on Ty Majeski's #98 Road Ranger Ford and visit with Derek Kraus who had a one race deal to drive the #20 Young's Motorsports Chevrolet. We talked with Kraus for a long time and his plans for 2023 where he may have a few more Craftsman Truck Series races lined up along with plans for super late model racing this summer. While we were conversing we met a group from Crowe Equipment, an Indiana construction equipment company, and they were sponsoring the team for the weekend. They came to razz Kraus for last year's Knoxville race where he apparently dumped Kyle Strickler who was driving their sponsored truck. It was some good natured ribbing and Kraus was quick with the "Hey, I got you some TV time didn't I?" comeback which made it a lot of fun. Those guys were racers who really enjoyed being a part of the NASCAR deal and seemed like a good sponsor to have around. They even invited us over to their compound in the campground for festivities later. After our truck garage visit, we headed back to



Brian Schmitt photo

*Dangerous Dan continued on page 15*



*Dangerous Dan continued from page 14*

Volusia for another night of dirt racing with the World of Outlaws Case Construction Late Model Series and a second night of the big block modifieds. While we were in the grandstands during the races, a guy was making the rounds asking everyone, including us, what they thought of the show. That guy was none other than World Racing Group President Ryan Carter which was really cool to see because fans appreciate that kind of dedication and appreciation when the main guy spends time with them in the grandstands. Both feature races on this night were outstanding as Matt Williamson came from a straight-away back to complete a last lap pass to win the big block modified main while Bobby Pierce snookered Brandon Overton on the final lap to win the WOO late model feature.

We were at the big track for the rest of the weekend and Friday started out with a run down pit road for ARCA qualifying where we ran into former Mid-American Stock Car Series driver Darrell Phillips who was just hired by Venturini Motorsports and was working on the #15 entry driven by Amber Balcaen for Daytona. Our time to talk was brief because as soon as we said hello, the oil cooler exploded on the #15 car during qualifying and Darrell's day suddenly became extremely busy. It was really interesting watching the crews from all the Venturini entries change the engine and put the #15 car back together and the many students and inexperienced crew members got quite an education from the veteran crew guys. We strolled through the NASCAR Xfinity Series garage and were able to talk with Josh Bilicki who has a limited NASCAR Cup Series schedule lined up in the #78 car along with some Xfinity Series starts. Josh was in the #91 car for Daytona and the team didn't have enough points for a guaranteed spot in the race and didn't lease an engine from a powerhouse team which was going to be concerning in qualifying as six cars were going to miss the race. There was a lot of on track activity scheduled and it was soon time for Truck Series qualifying where the top ten qualifiers would move onto the second round and go for the pole position. Ty Majeski advanced to the second round and qualified on the outside of the front row while Derek Kraus had to settle for the eleventh starting spot after posting the exact same time as Carson Hocevar for the tenth and final spot to move to the second round. Kraus set the mark first but the tie-breaker went to Hocevar based on 2022 owners points. NASCAR Cup Series practice followed and right about the time the Truck Series race was about to start light mist began popping up around the speedway. The NASCAR Craftsman Truck Series race battled the mist all night and never really got into a rhythm as the mist continued to stop the event. Eventually the mist won out and the event was called after 79 of the 100 laps with Zane Smith taking the win while Wisconsin drivers Ty Majeski and Derek Kraus finished sixth and eighteenth respectively.



*Brian Schmitt photo*

Saturday's on-track action began with the ARCA race which concluded with a storybook style ending as short tracker Greg Van Alst held off a pack of hungry drivers for his first Daytona win. About a month earlier, Van Alst put up a Facebook post asking for sponsors to get to Daytona and he definitely rewarded those who signed on. His heartfelt "Guys like me aren't supposed to do this" victory interview really hit home and exemplified just what this racing deal is all about. The NASCAR Xfinity Series race was pretty action packed as well and the Wisconsin drivers entered had some pretty good runs. Franklin's Sam

Mayer was going for the win on the final lap when he got involved in a wreck and his car turned over on it's roof in a shower of sparks while Rhinelander's Parker Retzlaff finished fourth in his first ever Daytona start. Retzlaff's fourth place finish with no prior superspeedway or drafting experience was noteworthy enough that we had to find him to congratulate him

*Dangerous Dan continued on page 15*

# R & R

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Dangerous Dan continued from page 15

which we did in the garage afterwards.

The big Daytona 500 day was finally here and we were up early to get to the track to set up for our LTN radio show which we broadcast live from the Radio Row in the UNOH FanZone. The show went off fine and we even got to chat with a couple of the US Air Force Thunderbirds who put on a spectacular pre-race flyover and air show. The “500” was setting up to be a classic battle between Kyle Busch and Brad Keselowski, two veterans yet to taste victory in the Daytona 500 with each of their respective team mates tucked behind them to provide the drafting help. That was until, Daniel Suarez’s car spun off turn four before the leaders took the white flag and NASCAR Overtime went into effect. NASCAR Overtime pretty much always ends in a wreck on the superspeedways and this time was no exception as a multi-car wreck on the first attempt set a up a second and another wreck on the white flag lap ended the race with Ricky Stenhouse Jr. out front. I would have preferred to see the race finish under green without the overtime but also felt good for Stenhouse to get his first win in over five years. I also thought Kyle Busch’s “There you have it” post race interview was spot on. When the analytical data began to be tracked, Stenhouse was spotlighted as the driver who got into the most wrecks and he gained his share of detractors because of it. Throughout his Cup career however, Stenhouse has always been in a bit lesser equipment and he over drove the car to compensate for that which resulted in the incidents. He’s a true racer and hopefully this Daytona 500 triumph can earn him the respect he deserves.

We were back at the condo in about an hour which I thought was pretty good traffic wise for a race that drew 100,000 plus people. From there it was off



Brian Schmitt photo

to Orlando to fly home on Monday. The flight home was uneventful and I even fell asleep for most of it which I guess shouldn’t be surprising after a long and busy week of racing. The 2023 season is off and running and the calendar is already filling up with places to go and races to attend. I look forward to telling you all about it next month so until then, I’ll see you at the track.



Brian Schmitt photo

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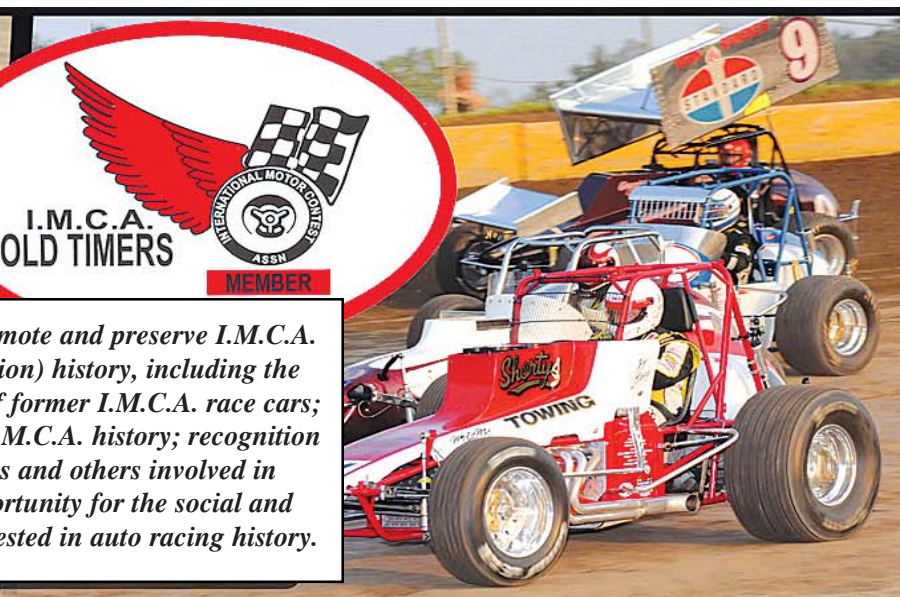


# The Shampine Super Mod

Dan Plan story & photos

*As someone who grew up reading about Jim Shampine's radical Super Modifieds in the pages of Stock Car Racing Magazine, this was my first opportunity to see one in person. Jim developed several cars that revolutionized the world of Super Modified racing. I'd seen pictures of this particular car in the book titled "The Pine" by Andy Fusco. The two things that stuck out most to me were; This particular ride was Ford powered and the location of the torque tube.*

*I had figured in this era of short track racing, everything was as small block Chevy, but Jim made the Ford work well. The torque tube caught me off-guard. I'm familiar with them from the Sprint Car world as they pass under the seat. This was the first time I'd seen one pass under your armpit.*



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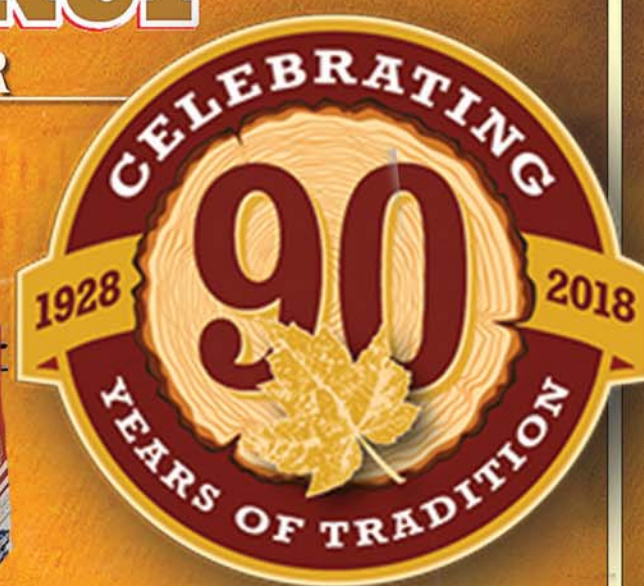
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