

THE MIDWEST RACING CONNECTION

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THE MIDWEST'S SHORT TRACK AUTO RACING AUTHORITY

Rookie Report



Influencers of Wisconsin Racing

November 2023

Inside...

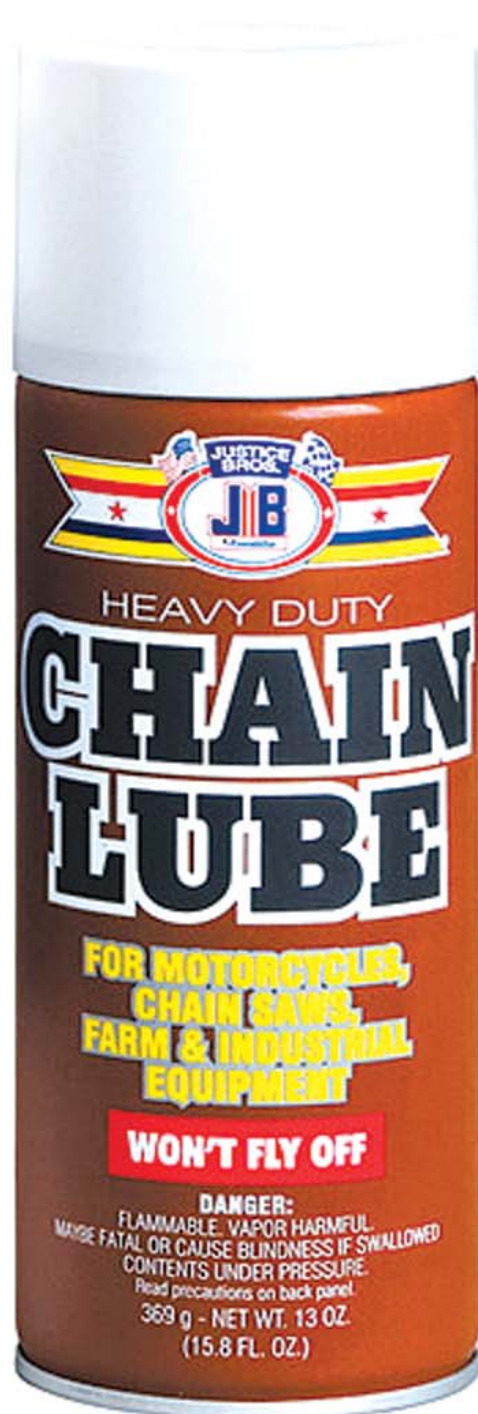


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Publisher's Note
Racing According to Plan



Dan Plan

I've come to realize in recent years that I'm in the minority when it comes to my opinion on what makes a good race. It seems the popular opinion is that drivers need to wreck each other to make a race "exciting." I find it exciting when two drivers choose to just race each other rather than wreck each other. I witnessed three events recently that I consider good races. Two in person and one on TV. The two I witnessed in person were the Big 8 main event at Oktoberfest and the Falloween 150 at Dells Raceway Park. The one on TV was the Dirt Track World Championships from Eldora on FloRacing.

The Big 8 series event at Oktoberfest is a true example of weekly warriors battling amongst each other. The final laps of the race had Elko Speedway track champion Jacob Goede battling Madison International Speedway Zack Riddle for the win. They raced door-to-door for many laps with Riddle finally securing the top spot near the end.

***It's Better Here
and The End of
an Era***

The Falloween 150 at Dells Raceway Park had Gabe Somers in the lead with Casey Johnson right on his bumper. For whatever reason, the top groove just wasn't there at the Dells on this day. Casey was faster and waited to finally get a nose under Gabe going into turn 3. Gabe didn't try to block the move, and Casey didn't move him to get in there. It was just good old fashioned short track racing.

The dirt world seems to have less of the "move the leader" mentality these days. The Dirt Track World Championship at Eldora showed this first hand. After numerous rain delays, the event was postponed until Sunday evening. There was a lot of buzz about the Lucas Oil Late Model Series point championship, but that's a story for another day. As the race was nearing the end, the championship was going to be settled between Hudson O'Neil and Donovan Moran. The championship was worth \$200,000.00. They were racing for second and third behind race winner Brandon Sheppard. Huddy and O'Neal passed each other twice on the last lap with Huddy getting second place and the Lucas Oil Late Model Series Championship. I can pretty much guarantee, if this were a pavement Late Model race (especially in the South) these two would have dialed each other out and wrecked both cars for \$200 grand. Instead, they both raced each other and shook hands. It was fantastic stuff.

The same weekend of the Lucas Oil championship at Eldora ended up being the final event at the

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The Midwest
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November 2023

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THE MIDWEST
RACING CONNECTION



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Historic Devil’s Bowl Speedway in Mesquite, TX. Many around this part of the country (including myself) were dealing with the closing of Rockford Speedway this year. While Devil’s Bowl isn’t anywhere near the Midwest, it has a special meaning for me. I had read about Devils Bowl being the birthplace of the World of Outlaws Sprints, and always had an interest in visiting the track. About 30 years ago, my full-time job consisted of traveling across the United States. I had to work in the Dallas-Fort Worth area a few times back in the early 1990’s and used this as an opportunity to visit the track. I didn’t go alone on my first trip though. I had met this pretty girl on my work trip and one of our first dates was to Devil’s Bowl Speedway. I ended up marrying that same girl in 1997 and brought her to Rockford one time and made a few more trips to visit Devil’s Bowl when we returned to Texas to visit the in-laws. I used to say I could go to Texas to visit the in-laws and the Outlaws. That too has come to an end. Devil’s Bowl and Rockford closing is definitely the end of an era for many race fans.



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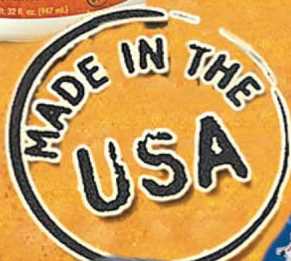
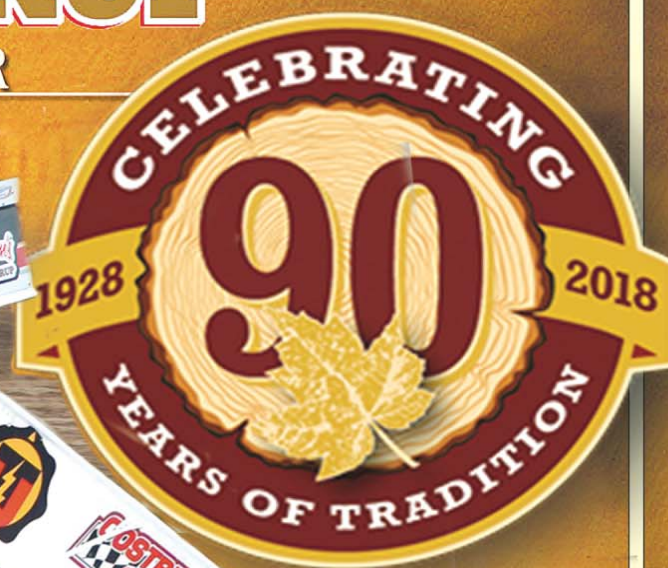
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Racing History



Dale P. Danielski

Heroes aren’t supposed to die. Heroes live on forever. But that’s exactly what happened here on October 20th, 2023, as short track racing legend Tom Reffner, my biggest hero, passed away.

My dad was a race fan, going to events in the Milwaukee, WI., area as well as the Griffith Park Speedway outside Wis. Rapids, WI. My dad was also one of the best welders in Central Wisconsin working at the mill in town. Of course, that is where the pipe fitters operated out of as well, of which Tom Reffner was one of them. When it came time to finish up their projects and welding was needed, my dad was the chosen one, as his quality workmanship was superior to the others. Tom told me, “When we needed a welder, old Emil is who we wanted as he was the best.”

And that is how my dad got to know Tom Reffner and the racing interest was next. Once dad mentioned that to me, Tom became the one I followed.

I could go on and on statistically here, but Tom Reffner highlights I have, are probably more

mundane and may end up boring people. There is no doubt my interest began with my dad’s relationship with Tom, it just happened it was in racing. And what a place to be. Local racing was just getting rolling in the area. Tracks cropping up everywhere, race cars having a character to them that made it fun to identify with and follow. What a time to become a fan. Unfortunately, my dad died shortly thereafter, and I was pretty lost for quite awhile. There is no doubt Tom Reffner filled a lot of that void just by being who he was and a heck of a racer besides. You know how confidence can be built just by knowing someone is out there, that even without them knowing, are providing guidance as the trials and tribulations of life occur? That was Tom Reffner to me.

Time marches on and everyone has goals to pursue. This was my position with short track racing, following it for many years and ultimately, owning and operating my own series, albeit way from my Central Wisconsin home. I was actually making a living doing that, which was pretty much a dream come true all starting with that early introduction with my Dad and Tom

INFLUENCERS OF WISCONSIN RACING

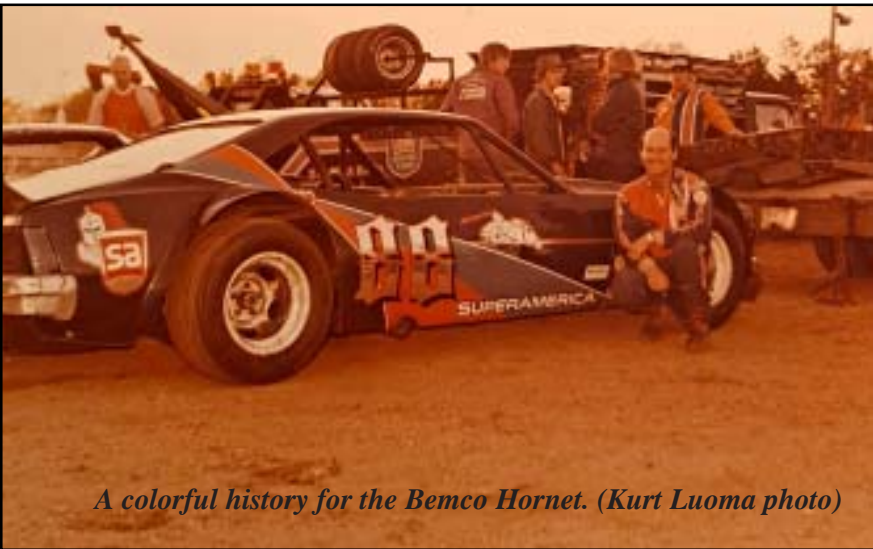
A LEGEND OF SHORT TRACK RACING RUNS HIS FINAL LAP



AMC Concord 1979



#88 Tombo



A colorful history for the Bemco Hornet. (Kurt Luoma photo)

Reffner. The pursuit eventually brought me back to Wisconsin to try to help make racing better via tracks and sanctioning groups. By that time, in the late 1990s, the Tom Reffner racing career was winding down and with that Tom was also hopeful of getting the sport back on track, this time from a rules, sanctioning body and track perspective. With that, we were able to collaborate on a number of projects and with each of our endeavors apart, we were able to see things differently and put our ideas together in a way that could work. There was a lot of reward in that, and it proved to be a very enjoyable time. Right to the very end.

The racing reunions I organized became very popular over the years, as bringing back racers that

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entertained us for years, for a day in the sun, was very rewarding. Certainly one of the biggest moments was getting Tom back behind the wheel of a race car.

Bringing back celebrities of the day to my Champions Reunions at La Crosse Fairgrounds Speedway was not unusual, as we had many attend. But bringing back 78-year-old Tom Reffner to compete once again for his last race, was very special. The whole idea originally was to have Mike Miller come back for the 2018 Oktoberfest event and wheel a Camaro he had built for racing in 1981. It had been rescued from land that had flooded, nearly washing the car away, and restored by racer, fabricator, Dan Navrestad. Mike wanted to come back, but in doing so had hoped to compete with fellow competitors Marv Marzofka and Tom Reffner. Marv just wasn't equipped to do so and it seemed that the least likely would be Tom Reffner. Miller tried gearing up for the

and down in the pit area after the race, as those on hand were able to one last time, catch a glimpse of undeniably one of the best short track stock car racers in history, competing again.

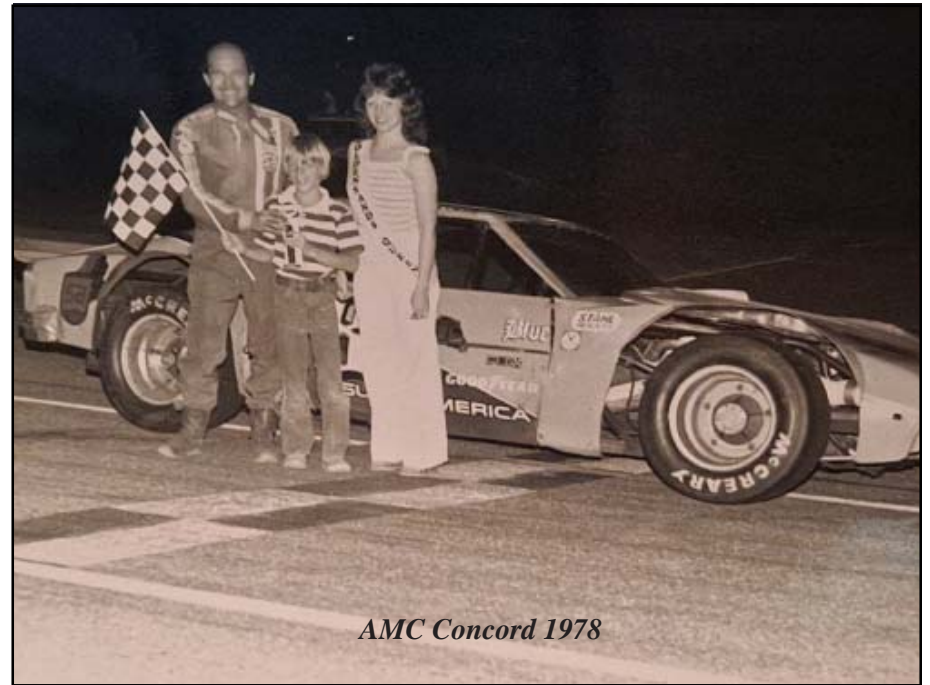
The Blue Knight, Tom Reffner has now completed his last lap. As in all his years of racing, he didn't disappoint.

A great career in racing, notes, quotes, and anecdotes for the Blue Knight. "If his doctor knew he was in that race car he'd be in big trouble." Tom's wife Dee Dee admonishing me for setting up and allowing the whole scenario to unfold with Tom back

racing. Ultimately, she understood how important to Tom it was, but also told me, "Don't do that again!"

Some of the biggest wins for Reffner throughout his storied career included winning 67 Feature races in 1975 as well as winning 37 more in 1976, including the \$10,000 victory in the World Cup 400 at I-70 Speedway of Odessa, MO. With the \$10,000 win, Tom immediately traveled to the Bobby Allison shop and spent the money on all his AMC parts... Reffner won the 150 lap Feature two years in a row, 1977, '78 at Colorado Springs International Speedway, Colorado Springs, CO. The victories combined brought him over \$6,000... Tom Reffner

was the victor in 412 Feature races in a career that spanned 40 years...I was able to catch the racing in 1976 at New Smyrna Beach Florida Speedway in 1976 of which Tom was a participant. A friend and myself down there for the first time, with barely enough money to get there, we were helped out by Tom who let us stay in a room they had for just \$20. We had to do laundry for the Reffner crew as payment as well and that included washing everyone's socks. Of course upon taking them out of the dryer nobody had a clue which ones were theirs. Pete Haferman, who was Tom's crew chief at the time, was particularly displeased with us. He was even more displeased when yours truly headed the 1969 Buick Skylark we



AMC Concord 1978



*The fastest car in the land, the Blue Knight
Tom Reffner Javelin*

event by running Go-Karts in Florida, where he resides, but found too much had changed and competing once again was not in the cards. With the entire arrangement falling apart, I decided to call Tom, and his response, to my surprise, was "I'll do it, if I can practice in the car." What started out as an attempt to get Mike Miller back behind the wheel of his former car, now turned to getting Tom Reffner back behind the wheel. What better way to do it, then to get a hold of friend and huge racing supporter John Gilbertson, who just happened to have an AMC Javelin that was a look alike to the one that Tom drove to 67 Feature wins in 1975. Tom got his practice in and after numerous difficulties fitting in the car, finally got squared away and was ready to go. The stage was set and Tom got lined up. The Oktoberfest event featured nearly 20 cars and Tom chose to start near the back of the field and get better acclimated to the car and racing again. He did so with urgency, as in the 15 lap main event, he passed car after car, eventually ending up in 4th position with his only foe, a lack of laps to advance further.

There were a lot of smiling faces in the stands

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Racing History from page 7

were driving the wrong way on the highway back to our base in Port Orange, FL. We all obviously survived.

Really enjoyed all the visits to the Reffner race car shop on the East side of Wisconsin Rapids. Visits included experiences with Crew man John Bovee's dog Meathead. Let's just say John taught the dog some things other than normal manners that you picked up on as soon as you walked through the door!

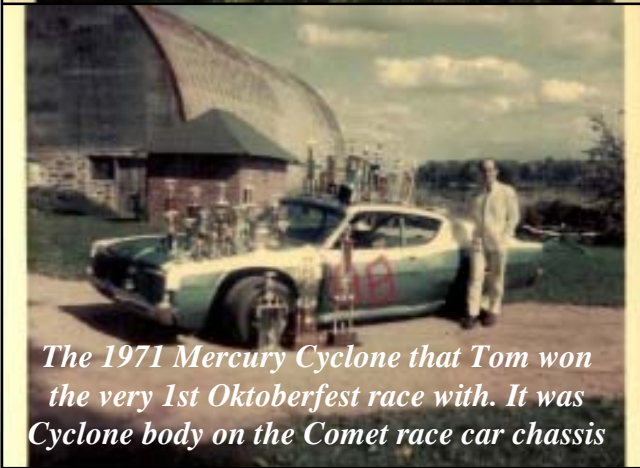
When Tom got totally frustrated with the handling of his Bemco Hornet, Meathead almost became the recipient of a new doghouse that looked like a race car. Tom eventually found some places to race the car where rules were more favorable like the 1977 Colorado race win. The car did win 16 Features on the year...Tom Reffner who could be quite fiery, at least earlier in his career upon alighting his car in the pits after an incident on the race track, "You pull that on me again and I'll mash you!" I don't think that racer dared try that again...I remember having the opportunity to carry the American flag for the National Anthem for Tom and thinking no big deal. Of course, it was at West Salem where they carry a fair amount of speed even for a slow lap. I nearly had the flag pulled out of my grasp, flying out of the car on the backstretch.! Now that would have been embarrassing. Tom was sitting there laughing...Most folks know of Tom as the Blue Knight, but he had other nicknames. Tombo, when teaming up with Jimbo, Jim Back. Mercury Mind Stomper was another of them that he carried on his 1969 Mercury Comet. There was also Tachyon and Tachyon II which came later on. Originally I asked Tom why the nicknames? "For awhile there it was just the thing to do, everyone was coming up with one, those were mine." Took me quite awhile to figure out what Tachyon was...I got to know the Reffner family quite well through the years even chumming around now and then. When son Bryan was in the shop one day, helping Dad, I remember a current rock song coming on the radio and Tom commenting, "At least I can listen to that compared to that other station you had on." Ah, yes, generation to generation... According to Tom, "1980 was a bad year for me. I had wrecked really bad in 1979 at Elko



The pony car era Ford Mustangs



Tom Reffner 1949 Oldsmobile #88



The 1971 Mercury Cyclone that Tom won the very 1st Oktoberfest race with. It was Cyclone body on the Comet race car chassis

Speedway and my head just wasn't right. I was doing things with the car and didn't realize why. We figured out later, it was a closed head wound, which nobody even knew what that was until later on...In one particular season, 1978, Tom won with three different race cars. He had wrecked the Dennis Frings Concord and brought out his Bemco Hornet to race at



The Bac-Kar era

Capital Speedway. With the Concord under repair, he won with his homebuilt Javelin at Kaukauna. He won a number of races with the Concord as that was a good car for him in 1978, '79. Bryan Reffner ended up with the Frings car as Tom moved into the Bac-Kar Chassis years of racing. Tom Reffner was a three time winner of the

Oktoberfest race at La Crosse Speedway, West Salem, WI. He won the very first Oktoberfest 100 in 1970...'If I thought I could have passed for the lead sooner I would have. I knew if I could still see the leader in front of me I had a chance." 1971 Uncola 100 winner at Elko Minnesota Speedway, Tom Reffner. "Super America was really good to us. It started out with fuel for the race car and our own vehicles and then to them paying for race car chassis. They really treated us good..." I can remember many a day in my parts selling days having "accidentally mixed" mismatched paint for the racers. Save a buck, make a buck to help the effort...

The "Blue Knight" Charles "Tom" Reffner has won the final race, just like we knew he would. November 21st 1940-October 20th, 2023

Questions, comments, opinions and other information welcome at Starmaker Multimedia 967 10th Ave N Ste A, Onalaska, WI. 54650. 608-783-5125 608-518-2478 or at dale@starmakermultimedia.com



The Mercury Mind Stomper Comet Calais



Tachyon (Kurt Luoma photo)

The Midwest Racing Connection Directory Page

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Going in Circles



Charlie Spry

The 58th and final National Short Track Championships at the Rockford Speedway went off as planned with a little bit of everything. Lots of emotion, some great racing, huge crowds of people, and also, a sad tragedy for one of the teams who were simply attempting to return home from the races on Saturday morning.

Friday's race program saw nearly 150 cars take to the track in some of the weekly divisions here. The four cylinder American Short Tracker field saw many varied entries, including a trio who made the long haul down from Marshfield, Wisconsin to race. Tim Anderson, Travis Hill, and Pat Dickman were racing on a track that is much different from their home track. Struggling a bit at first, all figured things out as the weekend went on, with these drivers also racing the following night in the Midwest Dash series event. Anderson especially looked strong on Saturday, running a strong second place in a battle with Devon Dixon for most of the race. Dixon's car erupted in flames late in the race, with Anderson forced out with CV axle issues while in second. Hill would score a heat race victory on Saturday night as well.

Nick Schneider was the track champion here, and ran off to the feature win on Friday, later noting that he had never had much luck during the NSTC prior, saying, "I have been running this race for thirteen years and had never won so much as a heat race in it."

Steven Mueller has only been here three times in his life and raced twice but took the feature win in the Sixer class. He is a smooth driver and I have raced with him in the past and will say that he is someone that you can trust

on the track. He is going to race you hard but will race you very clean.

Shawn Bowar was the track champion in the Bandit class here, with Ryan Finley finishing second in the points, and that is how they finished in the Bandit feature on Friday night. Before the races began I talked a bit with Ryan, and also met and chatted with his Dad, Pat Finley.

Pat has been a well known sign painter and has lettered many cars throughout his career with painted graphics, No vinyl here. "I have lettered some pretty famous cars, including those driven by Mark Martin, Jim Sauter, and Dave Watson," Said Pat. I quickly found out that Pat and I are on the same page when it comes to how race cars should look, and I hit it off with Pat right away. I was walking around with a notebook getting autographs from this event, and later ran into Pat at the concession stand, where he asked me how my adventure was coming along. I am sad to say that that was the last time I got to talk with Pat. On the way home from the races early Saturday morning their truck with trailer and race car were broadsided at an intersection just miles from home and Pat perished in the accident. Ryan and his friend were also injured but will recover fine. I want to extend my condolences to the Finley family as they try to move on from this. They are a good family. Ryan always has been a very soft spoken racer who managed a smile even on the worst of racing nights. This is a huge loss to the racing community and I will miss Pat very much, even though I only met him for the first time on this night. He left a lasting impression. They are first class people all the way.

In other racing on Friday night, Tyler Leutenegger took the win in the Super Stox class, and did the best victory burnout of anyone in any division after. The large group of racers from the Sycamore Speedway put on a good show as usual, racing the track like it was dirt, which is fine with me, as I like dirt racing.

Roadrunner track champion Kevin Memoli

Rockford Last Lap

bested a huge field of cars to win the Roadrunner feature,

On Saturday over 100 cars were once again in the pits, with Big 8, Super Lates, and Sportsman cars doing the racing.

Tyler Deschaine drove the borrowed car of Mark English to the victory in the Midwest Dash series, with the excitement being from contenders dropping out one after another. Track regular David Russell Jr. drove a smart race and took home second, while Aaron Rude brought his Pinto home in third. I think this was the largest field of cars that I had ever seen in this series and they put on quite a show.

The super lates ran their feature on this night, with young Jacob Nottestad looking very strong. Jacob continues to be one of the young guns to keep an eye on, as he races well wherever he goes. He was running in second behind Austin Nason when he suddenly dropped out with issues with just a few laps to go. Most people were watching the return from retirement by Rich Bickle, and he took home second. After the race was over Rich stopped his car at the wall in turn 1-2, got out, and sat and reflected.

Earlier, I had a chance to talk quite a bit with Rich, and he had a lot of interesting things to say. "It is too bad about this place closing," Said Rich. "I grew up here, my Dad raced here. When I was a kid at other tracks we ran around the shithouses for fun, but this place had a nice playground for us. After I started out racing at Jefferson in 1976, we decided to build a car and come race here in 1980. We were reasonably fast right away." They would later convert the car over to run as a super late and things just went on from there, as he would go on to reach the highest level of the sport.

Obviously, this track has meant a great deal to Rich over the years, and especially this race. "For the longest time I could never get over the hump and win this thing," Said Rich. He would finally win it in 1990, then repeat in 2012. A very emotional night for Rich as he raced for the last time here. He alluded to the fact that he has raced on 226 different tracks during his career. That is a pretty amazing statistic.

Sportsman racer Jeremy Wolff made the long trip down from Minnesota to race. "I love this place," Said Jeremy. "Of course, I don't like it when I wreck," He laughed. Jeremy usually came down for this weekend, but this year being the last year, he made a few trips down during the season to race weekly events as well. He is a good, strong competitor who shows up with a beautiful appearing car and races hard.

The Sportsman feature was another interesting race. Joey Pontbriand came down from Norway, Michigan, and found himself starting on the front row next to Robert Hansberry Jr, who really knows his way around the track. The pair raced side by side for something like 42 of the 50 laps, with Pontbriand's



Doug Hornickel photo

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Going In Circles continued from page 10

bumper coming off and Hansberry getting shuffled by the pack behind. Austin Nason won the event but in all honesty, the excitement was the forty two laps of mostly side by side racing between these two with little touching.

For Nason, it would be a good night as he not only got the win in the Sportsman feature, but also scored the win in the Super lates. Track regulars Dennis Smith Jr. finished third after converting his car over, and Jon Reynolds Jr. drove to fourth ahead of another track regular, Jacob Vanoskey.

Onto the Sunday racing, The Big 8 late models were featured, as Nason looked to three-peat. It would not happen, however, as he got onto the track but did not even get to start the race with problems.

Dale Nottestad looked to be the strongest car of the field as he took the lead and led many laps, until a late caution on about lap 139 changed things dramatically, as his car started popping. Returning to the pits, he came back later but had no chance at that point. Jeremy Miller then inherited the lead and took the win. It was reported that Jeremy had not won a Big 8 contest here in 16 years, so he was due. Randy Sargent drove a steady race and was there at the end to finish second. Alex Papini returned from his home in Florida to run here for the last time, and also drove a steady race to finish third. The thing all top three drivers had in common today? They all drove nice smart races and stayed out of trouble, and their cars worked well for them.

Austin Fowler took the win in the Roadrunner Rumble, with nice payouts for all, way more than they usually get. Austin did not get a win all year long, but was fast just the same, just could not get to the front. Today, it worked out and he got ahead of Kevin Memoli and Waylon Robinson and was not going to be denied.

The Mid-Am cars were on hand, with Josh Nelms getting the feature win. Not a surprise, as he has raced here for a long, long time and knows the lay



Doug Hornickel photo

of the land.

I earlier had a chance to meet and talk with Mid-Am racer Vince Cooper. I did not know that his Dad is Larry Cooper, who was a top sportsman competitor at Grundy County Speedway back in the late 1970's and 1980's. I got a chance to talk with Larry, and told him that I remembered him racing at Rockford a few times back in the day. He was surprised that I remembered that and told of one of the times, saying, "I went there with no expectations, but won the semi-feature. Posing in victory lane, I saw the trophies sitting there and said, "how about getting one of those?" To my surprise, they reached over and gave me one."

Another time, he said, "I led a race from the start, lap after lap after lap. Finally, on the last lap John Luther got by me for the win after I led the whole thing."

Now, Larry helps out his Son, Vince. Vince has a pretty strong resume, and said that he has raced a lot on the dirt tracks in Illinois, such as Kankakee, Fairbury, and LaSalle, and has five track championships to his credit in UMP modifieds.

He now is trying his hand on the asphalt in the full-bodied Mid-Am cars, but still likes racing on the dirt as well. "We raced the Mid-Am cars on dirt at Kankakee and Sycamore earlier in the year, and I tried to help these guys out with setups. I want them to have fun and do well, as I don't want them to take the dirt shows off the schedule," Said Vince.

Vince's car kind of stands out, as it has the unusual number of 700. Vince reiterated

on this saying, "Dad was number 00 when he raced. I was number 00 when I started but had to switch to another number when we went to a track that did not allow duplicated numbers, so I went with number 70. Then, when we stated racing this I had to switch again, so I just took the 00 and added a 7 to it to make 700, a combination of both of our numbers."

The car is also a bright green, kind of fluorescent, which really stands out. "We don't like all white cars or all black cars, we like something to stand out that you can see," Said Vince. "Also, we don't have any sponsors, so the longer number takes up some of that blank space and the checkers on it does as well."

Vince did not have a good day, as his car erupted in flames and he hit the wall in turn 3-4 while leading his heat. Here is hoping that someone jumps on board to sponsor this very capable team, who are also very personable.

Going In Circles continued on page 12



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Going In Circles continued from page 11

A couple of weeks later it was back at Rockford for the 32nd and final Bahama Brackets to be held at the track. It was good to hear that the tradition will continue with this event being held at the Grundy County Speedway starting in 2024. This is too good of an event to let it go by the wayside, and Grundy is a good fit, as a good percentage of the entrants come from the Chicago area and points south.

Day long rains fell on Thursday, all day Friday, and Saturday until about mid-afternoon, but as I have said before, nobody knows how to run a big event in poor weather better than the Deery family. They did very well in getting all of the scheduled events done on Saturday, which was actually Sunday by the time they were completed.

For the feature races on Sunday we actually had sunshine. It was one of those days where you start out with wearing a winter coat, change to a sweatshirt, then a flannel shirt, then finally a t-shirt, and then reverse the process backward.

As for the racing, the AAAA feature was probably the best race of the weekend in my opinion. Sycamore Speedway racer Zack Orts led a good portion of the event, with Norway, Michigan racer John Ostermann chasing him down. The pair raced with each other the rest of the way, with both hugging the inside so as not to break out of their time. Orts would get back around in the late going, but slid sideways, and being the good dirt track racer that he is he was able to lose only the one position to Ostermann. From there the pair sliced and diced and both put on an outstanding display of driving. Ostermann would hold off Orts for the win with Breanna Riggins driving a very smart race to finish third. After the race was over, Ostermann went around to shake hands with all of the track workers that he could, and also spoke highly of Orts' driving. Orts also was very complimentary to Ostermann and was very happy with his second place. These two were class acts all the way.

The "A" feature for the fastest cars started out with Matthew Clossey looking as if he would run away with the win, but he broke out of his time shortly after. In the end, it was a pair of modifieds going at it, with Brett Wachowiak getting the win over perennial favorite Dave Edwards.

The "AA" feature saw track regular Josh Lundy get the win over another track regular, Chad Lounsbury. It was interesting that two drivers who had to go through the last chance race made their way up to the front, that being Dallas Conniff and Joe Shelby. both would drop out late in the race but made quite a showing.

The "AAA" feature saw veteran Rick Wilson charge to the front. Rick has raced in every one of these events except for the first one, so he wanted to win the last one, but was the victim of a "breakout" from his time. Kevin Memoli added to his championship season by winning his bracket, with "Rockstar" Russ Lorbiecki driving his exotic looking Corvette to second.

The four cylinder cars also had their bracket features, with Nick Schneider also adding to his amazing championship season here by winning the "B" feature over the always tough Phil Malouf.

The "BB" feature came down to Ryan Lagastee and Tom Elsinger running alongside each other for the latter part of the race, down to an exciting feature where Lagastee slid across the finish line, but broke out on his last lap, thus Elsinger taking the win. Another very exciting race. Proves sometimes the best racing is not done by the fastest cars.

Had a chance to talk to Iowa racer Bob Ahrendsen. Bob is a veteran racer who has seen just about everything at this event. "I was blessed to win it in 2015, then crashed the next year. I have not run the event since then, but since this is the last one, I had to run it," Said Bob. Unfortunately, mechanical issues would keep Bob from getting much track time, but he said that he still had fun watching everyone else race and had an enjoyable weekend.

Bob's hometrack is Hawkeye Downs in Cedar Rapids, and he has even been inducted to the Hall Of Fame for that track. Asphalt tracks in Iowa are few and far between, so Bob has also spent some time on the dirt tracks, saying, "I raced for about 5 or 6 years on tracks including Independence, Lee County, Boone, and Marshalltown, but I never was very good on the dirt. I like racing on the small track at Hawkeye Downs, I guess I am just that kind of driver."

Also of note, is the fact that Bob's car still has all of it's original body panels on it from day one. Bob also noted that it still has a lot of older mechanicals on it, but still gets the job done, as does Bob. He is a very pleasant person to chat with.

A couple of other BB notes.... After crashing hard last year in the point while upside down, Sycamore Speedway racer Danny Deutsch was on hand and drove the wheels off his car once again. He didn't make a feature event, but he is so much fun to watch, as he really puts on a show.

Shaun Wiltjer was present and racing once again. His Dad, Billy Bob Wiltjer even came back to race in this final BB event here at this track. Between the pair, they have raced in every one of these events. Another team that is a true credit to the sport of auto racing.

Dirt racer Veronica Anderson was racing for the first time ever on an asphalt track, and was a bit hesitant. She did just fine.

We had a group of Ford Crown Vics come to race all the way from Kentucky, as the St. Claire family came to race. I had a chat with Kaitlyn St. Clair, who told me that they are from Kentucky, but race in Indiana, most notably at Salem, Ind. Their cars all looked like they are extremely well-built, and would have to be to take on that track! She reported that the Crown Vic class is very big in the area, with cars being readily available for cheap cost.

The last two Saturdays at the track were reserved for those who wanted to have one last chance to race at the track. Pretty much every division was given a race day to compete in, even for divisions which did not have a chance to do so very often. Everyone was

given an opportunity to race at the famed track before it goes away for good.

I was kind of surprised that more people did not take this opportunity. Some of the "support" divisions had drivers come from a long ways away to do this. Four cylinder racers, especially, showed up from quite a distance to race.

Jon Reynolds Jr. will go down in history as the last ever late model feature winner, as he took the win on the final race date, October 28th. Jake Gille and Willie Nelson followed.

I have always enjoyed talking with Willie Nelson. He will go on to see much success in racing wherever he goes, I feel. I don't think that I have ever seen him angry. He keeps his cool and remains calm no matter what. It is always fun to talk to people who are obviously doing their best to enjoy themselves in racing, no matter what. He is a great ambassador to the sport.

I enjoyed the vintage race cars on the final day of racing. One car that turned heads to anyone who has been around the track for a long time was the car of John Robinson. The car was his actual old late model that he raced back in the 1980s. I did not talk to John, but did talk to his Daughter. She said that the car had not been raced for 35 years, but was kept up all this time so as not to disintegrate. The lexan was still clean, the car had all of it's original body panels with period painted lettering, fender flares and the same engine that was from that time period and so forth. It is a true vintage car. She noted that John had not raced in all this time, but had fun and is talking of racing more vintage shows next year.

When all is said and done, I am going to miss this track and the people here in a big way. It has always been one of my "home" tracks since about 1969, when I first set foot on the property. I met a lot of very good people here. Some have become lifelong friends. I saw some fantastic racing here over the years, I won't repeat them now, as early in the year I wrote a column on this and do not want to be redundant.

At this time I want to thank the Deery family for their hospitality and their unwavering support of my writings over the years. They have been most kind. I also want to thank all of the folks at the pit sign-in shack who have been so kind over the years. Big thanks to Rick, Ginger, and Lindsey Stopa, and Cori McCoy, who have always been sure that I was taken care of, and of course, Brad Gerke, Terri Gehrke, and others. A big THANK YOU! I hope to see some of you around other tracks, but if not, please know how grateful that I am.

Finally, with great sadness I must report that we recently lost a racing icon in the state of Wisconsin and really, everywhere, as Tom Reffner passed away in late October. Tom was my very first racing hero, with his blue "Mercury Mind Stomper" Comet. I always liked the way he raced so hard but clean. I had a few chances to talk with Tom over the years and got to know the Reffner family. They are all first class all the way. It has been an honor!



NASCAR Home Track State Champions



Jacobo Goede wrapped up his 10th consecutive championship at Elko Speedway and Skylar Houlzhausen came out of a short retirement to capture the LaCrosse Fairgrounds Speedway championship. In addition to their track championships, they wrapped up their respective NASCAR Home Track State Championship titles, garnering each of them additional accolades.



Talkin' Racin'
with Jason



Jason D. Searcy

The 3/8th mile asphalt track about a half-hour south of the Twin Cities, Elko Speedway just concluded their 58th season of racing.

The 2023 schedule had 10 of the very popular Eve of Destruction nights which featured double features in all five divisions plus acts such as Drifter cars, Motorcycle stunts, School Bus races, Spectator drags, Monster Trucks and other Action Sports acts. ELKO also had one NASCAR only ARCA event that saw ARCA champion and future Richard Childress Racing Xfinity driver Jesse Love edge the 16 year old home state hero William Sawalich who was racing the #18 for Joe Gibbs racing. The much anticipated return of the ThunderStruck93 ASA Super Late Model event never happened, it was the only night that was canceled by rain the entire season.

Jacob Goede #72 from Carver (MN) won his 10th consecutive premier division Championship at Elko Speedway in the NASCAR Late Model division. Goede has finally surpassed Donny Reuvers and has



now tied Jeff Martin for the most Premier division Championships at ELKO. Jake Ryan had a great season and finished just 11 points behind Goede for the Late Model title.

32 drivers scored points in the Late Model division in 2023, down from 33 in 2022 and 40 in 2021 and up from the 29 drivers in 2020. 8 different drivers scored wins this year down from the dozen drivers last year, 10 in 2021 and the same number as in 2020. Jake Ryan scored the most wins with 6, Jacob Goede had 5 and Chad Walen 4 on the season.

Dillon Sellner #07 from Randolph (MN) won his second NASCAR Thunder Car Championship, he was the only driver at ELKO to score a Top 5 finish in all 21 races in 2023. 21 cars scored points this year, one down from last year, 23 drivers raced in 2021 and 19



raced in 2020. Dillon Sellner had the most wins with 6 in 2023, Brent Kane and Tommy Sorem both had four wins each. Six different drivers scored a win at ELKO this year which is the same number as last year, 7 drivers won in 2021 and only 4 different drivers scored a win in 2020.

Julie Jorgenson #83 from Lakeville (MN) won her first NASCAR Power Stock title at Elko Speedway after finishing runner-up twice before. She joins



2023 Elko Seson Wrap

her father Conrad Jorgenson on the list of Champions, he won a total of 7 of them during his 30+ year racing career at Elko Speedway. Dusty Mann had a great season but finished 16 points short in his hunt for a third title at ELKO. 25 different cars raced this year in the Power Stocks at ELKO, the same number as last year, up from 24 in 2021 and 22 in the Covid year of 2020.

Mike Stoer had the most wins for the second year in a row with 5 wins, siblings Julie and Jimmie Jorgenson both finished the year with 4 wins each. Seven different drivers scored wins in 2023 down from the 8 winners in each of the previous three seasons at ELKO.

Colin Stocker #8 from Northfield (MN) won his second INEX Legends division Championship at



ELKO. He scored an ultra-consistent 19 Top 5 finishes out of the 20 events at Elko Speedway in 2023. A whopping 42 different cars scored points this season compared to 40 last year, 39 in 2021 and 31 in the pandemic marred 2020 season.

Baiden Heskett impressed by winning 6 of the 16 races he entered, Tristan Swanson had the most wins with 9 and what makes it even more amazing is that he only raced 12 times, that is a 75% winning percentage. Just 5 drivers scored wins in 2023, down from 9 last year, 8 in 2021 and 7 in 2020.

Jackson Kottschade #07 from Ramsey (MN) won his first INEX

Talkin' Racin' continued
on page 15

Talkin' Racin' continued from page 14

Bandolero Championship at Elko Speedway.

The car count is on the rise with 27 different cars scoring points this season, up from 19 last year, 14 in 2021 and 16 in 2020. Five different drivers won this season with Jackson Kottschade and Leighton Rose both scoring 7 wins each. Pen Sauter, son of NASCAR Truck series Champion Johnny Sauter, won at ELKO on Championship night. Six different drivers scored a win last year and there were just four winners in 2021 and 2020.



This was my 11th season as announcer at Elko Speedway, the numbers prove that the car counts remain strong and the racing was as good as ever during my time at ELKO. A big THANK YOU to the drivers for providing the best competition, real-life drama and entertainment anyone could ask for and to the Fans for their continued support of the sport that everyone who reads this newspaper loves. Now we can look forward to the Racers Banquet in February and the 2024 ELKO season opener Memorial day Weekend.

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Minnesota racer Bryan Seyer-Keske picked up the ASA Midwest Tour Rookie of the Year title for 2023. We recently caught up with Bryan following a successful season.

Did you start your racing career in the Legends division?

Nope, I started in Quarter Midgets back in 2003, so this is my 20th year in racing.

Who were some of the guys that raced quarter midgets when you started?

Realistically, one that still races would be Michael Ostdiek, but he was a year or 2 behind me. I raced with his brother Matt and Nick Barstad.

Did you go directly from Legends to Super Lates?

Yep, I went directly from Legend Cars to Super Late Models. That would have been around 2012 when I had my first year in Super Lates.

Was your goal at the beginning of the year to run for the ASA Midwest Tour Rookie of the Year title?

Yeah it was. I wanted to go for it last year, but we had motor issues right away and kind of pulled out. The whole goal this year was to run the whole Midwest Tour and go for Rookie of the Year.

At the beginning of the year at Madison, I believe you ran 36 on your car to get owner points for Dan Fredrickson on the ASA National Tour, correct?

Correct, it was a combined Midwest Tour and Stars National event. I got the driver points for the race.



Rookie Report

Did you run any other events outside of The Midwest Tour?

I did not. I only ran the Midwest Tour and National Tour races.

Does your entire team basically consist of you and your dad?

Yeah, it's basically me, my dad and Daulton Lamont. Everybody else shows up when they can. Sometimes they can help and sometimes they can't. We just try to do the best we can to keep a handful of people on rotation, I guess.

The Midwest Tour doesn't have a large number of races, but it is a big time commitment for a team from Minnesota.

Exactly. Grundy is 8 and a half hours away.

Trying to get people to leave Friday right after work and drive to Grundy to race and then drive back, your whole weekend is shot. I understand why people can't fully commit. It gets really stressful when I don't know what's going on until the very last second and you have to thrash trying to get more help.

What did it feel like to wrap up the season with a second place finish at Oktoberfest and

securing the Rookie of the Year title?

That was pretty cool. Basically, I we had to do was start the race. I felt we were going to run good, but honestly I didn't think we would run that good. I figured maybe a top 5, but then to lead the race and finish second that was pretty dang cool. It was something we always strived for. From my aspect, we were the underdog when it came to the Midwest

Tour racing realistically.



Do you still get to test an ARCA car at Daytona for winning the Midwest Tour Rookie of the Year Title?

I actually do. I was talking Gregg McKarns and it sounds like it will be January 12th & 13th. I've been to Daytona, but never been to the actual track. I think it will be pretty cool to run a couple laps around that place with so much history there. Just to run there and experience running a big, heavy ARCA car at 170 mph is kind of cool.

What are your plans for the 2024 season?

I don't know at this time. Realistically, there really are no plans. With the financial stress I kind of put on me and my father without having a lot of sponsors, it has put us in a tight spot. We'll probably run a few races next year, but we won't be able to race the whole tour again. I figure we'll run the Madison 200-lap race, Hawkeye, Elko and Oktoberfest. Basically, the bigger shows.

Tom Reffner Tribute

Late in the month of October 2023, news came out that Tom Reffner had passed away. Tom was a significant part of the racing history for the upper-Midwest and was still frequently seen at numerous tracks. He was either helping out with the Dick Trickle Memorial or helping his grandson, Colin Reffner.

Like many in the racing community, I grew up reading about Tom's racing success weekly through The Checkered Flag Racing News. I first met Tom in person 11 years ago when Elko Speedway was conducting Hall of Fame inductions. I worked with the Elko race director at the time (Tim Johnson) to coordinate the induction of all of the SuperAmerica Knights into the Hall of Fame. I had spoken with Tom for an interview in the past, and Tom helped coordinate getting Johnny Boegeman, Dick Trickle and SuperAmerica rep Don Englbrit to Elko for the induction.

Two of my favorite moments from this the Hall of Fame night were a couple of stories I exchanged with Tom and his wife DeeDee. The first story I told them is how I used to run to the mailbox on Friday afternoons during the record setting 1975 season to get the latest issue of The



Checkered Flag Racing News. One week during that summer the headline on the front page read; "Reffner Wins in Oregon." I remember thinking, wow, this guy drove all of the way from Rudolph, WI to Oregon and won. When I showed the headline to my mom, she explained to me that Capital Super Speedway (now Madison International Speedway) was located in a town name Oregon in Wisconsin, and Tom hadn't travelled 2,000 miles to the state of Oregon. This drew a pretty big grin from Tom.

Next, I asked DeeDee what it was like to be married all of these years to a celebrity race car driver. She simply answered, "He's always just been my husband to me." That's when I knew these were really good people.

After my first time meeting Tom in person in 2012, he always made me feel special the few times I would see him each year. When I would be walking through the pits and Tom would say "Hey Dan" as I walked by. I felt honored. Each time he said hello, it brought a smile to my face. I was like wow, Tom Reffner knows who I am. God Speed Tom.



Dan Plan photo



Dan Plan photo



Martin DeFries photo



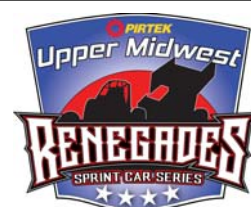
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