

THE MIDWEST RACING CONNECTION

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September 2026

Inside...



Racing is a Journey



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Publisher's Note Racing According to Plan



Dan Plan

Several years ago, while attending the USA Nationals at Cedar Lake Speedway, it occurred to me that this event now signifies to me the end of the season is near. While the event takes place early in August, the majority of normal tracks start winding down and wrap up the season championships prior to the Labor Day weekend. This gives the drivers at the tracks in the upper Midwest the opportunity to

travel to long standing, season ending special events that ramp up during the month of September.

Dirt Track racers kick off their special event season with the Silver 1000 at Proctor each year the Thursday prior to Labor Day weekend and then have the Labor Day Shootout in Hibbing. They now have the option of the Northern Nationals in Superior or the John Seitz Memorial in Grand Forks the following weekend.

The pavement racers have always had the Wisconsin State Championships (or the 2-Day show as the locals call it) at Jefferson the weekend following Labor Day. The asphalt racers then have events such as The National Short Track Championships (formerly at Rockford and now at Dells Raceway Park) and Oktoberfest at LaCrosse Fairgrounds Speedway.

This year it got me wondering, how an event becomes special with a large fan following. In this part of the country, it doesn't appear that the major factor is prize money. The biggest factor to me seems to be consistently being on the same weekend. An event will struggle to be "special" to fans out of the area if it bounces around from a weekend in July then September, then August and back then back to September. Consistency is key. Having an event on the same weekend every year allows fans and racers to plan the

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Bruce Nuttleman photo

The Midwest

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September 2026

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*Publisher's Note continued
from page 3*

month of September at the beginning of the year when they are putting their season schedules together.

With that being said, I'm really looking forward to all of the season ending special events coming up in the months of September and October. For the majority of my existence on this earth, my season would end with Oktoberfest at LaCrosse Fairgrounds Speedway, which is always the fifth weekend after Labor Day for those keeping track of consistent race event dates. When the Falloween event at Dells Raceway Park started several years ago towards the end of October, my season was gladly extended by a couple of weeks. Typically, I would have a week off between Oktoberfest and Falloween. As a Badger State resident now, I now have something close to home to fill the gap between Fest and Falloween. Cedar Lake Speedway has added a second Fall Fun Day on the 17th of October which fits well into my schedule. Now I'm hoping it's just a matter of time before somebody schedules Novemberfest here in the upper Midwest.



Going in Circles



Charlie Spry

By the time you read this, most tracks will have found their season champions for the 2026 season. The first of my regular tracks to do so did it back in the first week of August. That track being the Lafayette County Speedway.

The closest points battle was in the four cylinder division, as both Cole Ferrell and Ashton Foley found themselves tied going into the final night. Cole jumped out into the lead early and held off the challenges of Dustin Forbes and Foley to get the feature win and track title. Cole told me that he always tries to be alert at the start of races and to go wherever others weren't in order to get to the front. He was a master at this. Cole had won the first feature of the season, while Ashton won three in a row after that to grab the point lead. Then, Cole went on a late season tear and won the final five.

The modified title went to Jed Freiburger, who did not even have to sweat it out on the final night, as he had an insurmountable point lead. This is his fifth track title in a row here. On this night it was Brandon Leverington getting his first ever feature win here, after trying for thirteen years. Well done!

The SportMod class had some question marks, as Jarett Franzen and Kyle Hoffmann were very close. Franzen got the win while Hoffmann had a kind of troublesome night. This is Franzen's third track title here. He also scored the win in the final four feature events of the year to get the title. He got the track title by one point.

Hobby stock class was also close, with Kyler Hefty and Blaise Watters fighting it out. Watters finished second in the feature to get the title while Hefty had difficulty getting through the pack. Watters won two features this year, but I am sure he would tell you that he was the "king of second place finishes." Consistency will do it! Another first time winner tonight, as Dylan Kuhl got the job done in recording his first ever feature win. Dylan has had a lot of bad luck in racing, but he is an amazingly calm driver and person.

The late model title went to veteran D.J. Sweet over Watters, who also raced in this class. D.J. had a very strong start to the season, and won two features this year, but he also was consistently near the front.

Racing is a Journey



A good, smooth driver, like you would expect from someone with his experience. Watters did win the feature on this night, but it wasn't enough.

The new Crown Vic class saw Ross Crist not only win the feature on this night, but also the track title. He won four features here this year to go along with several more at other tracks. He took the lead early and held off Derrick Dean for the win. Dean finished second in the final points.

The Stock car class title came down to a battle between last years' champion Jeremy Christians, and Jason Robbins. Robbins drove off to an easy feature win while Christians DNF. Robbins was at times dominant in this class and pulled out to a huge lead early.

A couple of new drivers came out the last month or so of the season, and they are Brothers. Zach and Collin McClain are the sons of longtime competitor David McClain. David actually got his start racing pavement late model when he lived in Minnesota. Then after moving to southwestern Wisconsin, found himself in dirt track country, and made the switch. He still has a dirt modified that he races, but now he is kept even busier, as he has two more cars and drivers to attend to.

Zach is the older of the pair and is now turning his first laps in a hobby stock. He is about to enter his Junior year of college, at UW Platteville. He has also been involved in sports and currently is on the UWP football team at left tackle. He also has a specialty of blocking punts. He also played football and basketball in high school, where his high school basketball team came within one game of making it to the state tournament. Zach is majoring in construction management and is already working in the field.

If this isn't enough to keep him busy, he also has

started racing the hobby stock car here and at Dubuque. Taking back starts, he has quietly been learning the racing trade. Mind you, he has no prior racing experience.

His younger brother, Collin, will be starting his senior year of high school at Platteville H.S. He is also into sports and was actually at football practice on the night that I interviewed David and Zach. Collin has been racing a Late model. "It is the old Barry Wright car that I used to race," said David. "It was just sitting around, so we got it out and got it ready." Collin had a kind of rough first night but has quickly improved. Again, taking back starts, he has looked much more steady and consistent every time out. He also has no prior racing experience.

So, you may ask why the younger brother is racing a Late Model and the older one a hobby stock? Well, Zach stands 6'9" tall and cannot fit in a late model! So, he needs a car with a higher roofline, and the hobby stock fits that bill.

David told me that he thought athletics and racing kind of shared some similarities. "Both require a certain amount of discipline. Each require a great amount of focus. Racing is a journey." Well said.

I will be paying attention to what these young men accomplish in both sports and racing. I think that both are and will be a success in both things, and in life.

Up next, the Madison International Speedway was the next track to name 2026 season champions. The Late model title was pretty much already sewn up

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by Brent Edmunds. Edmunds had a great season, grabbing five main event wins here during the season. Jacob Gille never recorded a feature win this year but was very steady and consistent. True to form, he finished in third place in the feature tonight to maintain his second place spot in the points. Carter Nilson was the man on the move, especially late in the season, as on this night he scored his first ever weekly feature win here in the Late Models. He had to work hard for it, as he and race leader Ryan Goldade swapped the lead back and forth in the final laps, all while racing inches apart. Nilson was also consistent and finished third in the points.

In the MisFitz division, Nick Schneider came into the night leading the points, but almost saw it slip away after being involved in a wreck late in the race. He limped his car out of the pits and finished just barely adequately to keep his point lead and championship over rookie Waylon Robinson, who did all that he could by winning the feature on the final night. Kenny Storkson came into the night in the hunt for the title as well, and his second place feature finish was not quite good enough to maintain, as he dropped to third behind feature winner Robinson.

The Six Shooter division saw Dylan Klinger gain his third track title in a row. He was a dominant force in winning the feature on the final night, while second in points Joshua Zacharias was mired in traffic and could not gain any points on Klinger.

Prior to the start of the events tonight I had a chance to talk with Late Model racer Carter Nilson. Carter is turning heads, as thus far he has won three feature events in quick succession. A couple of weeks prior he won his first ever LM feature behind the

wheel of one of the Rubeck Motorsports cars at Grundy County, a track he had never raced on before that time. Then, he won a Big 8 series event here at Madison in his own car, and the following week won the regular season finale at that track.

Carter got his start in the sport in a go-kart at an early age. From there he progressed to racing in the Bandolero division, and at age thirteen became the youngest competitor in the Late Model division at the Rockford Speedway, getting the chance to race in the final 76 lap feature on the final day of competition at the track. “I am so glad that I had a chance to race a Late Model at Rockford before they closed,” said Carter. “I was at the back of the pack and just wanted to make laps and stay out of trouble and finish.” He would finish thirteenth in that race. (I was personally at that race and was amazed at how composed such a young driver was in this race!) He had already been practicing in the LM for two years prior to that, so he was ready!

Carter grew up around the sport, as both his Father AND Mother raced in the past. His Mom is Megan Ebrecht Nilson and raced in the American Short Tracker division at Rockford before the arrival of Carter. She was well known for an unusual AMC



Charlie Spry photo

Pacer race car!

Dad is Kris Nilson, who raced for several years in a couple of different divisions. Kris noted, “I raced in the Roadrunner and Sportsman divisions, so this is all new to me as well. We are learning together.”

They are learning quickly. Now sixteen years of age and in his third year in a Late Model, success is starting to show up. “Things are starting to click now,” Said Kris.

Carter is currently a high school student at Rockford Christian School. Most kids that age are just starting to drive. He is already a seasoned veteran!

Carter has improved every year that he has raced at MIS. “In 2024 I took back starts here just to learn the track and learn the ropes. The second year we started getting some top three feature finishes. This year we are improving on that. We are the only late model team to have 12 top ten finishes in 12 starts. That’s pretty cool,” said Carter.

And getting those top finishes and now feature wins means having an excellent springboard to the future. This team is going to be fun to watch in the future.

Carter is also learning critical people skills as a racer. I found him to be very articulate and friendly, easy to approach and not shy. He knows what he needs to do to move up in the sport and is going after it. His driving skills are proving it on the track and his ability to meet new people and interact are other skills he is gaining right now. He is a smooth racer with a remarkable ability. Stay tuned to see what this team can accomplish!

Of course, every race team at this level needs sponsorship, and this team has several. Aurum contracting, Twin towers embroidery and screen printing, Anderson automotive group, Go Rockford, Winnebago motor homes, Boone county auto body, Bonafide safe and lock, The pickin chicks, and Elements nursery and gift shop help out.

Now, onto the year end specials!



Charlie Spry photo

Talkin' Racin' with Jason



Jason D. Searcy

The NASCAR Late Model division point race at Elko Speedway has been up for grabs the last couple years since Jacob Goede decided to travel to Wisconsin to run for points at La Crosse Fairgrounds Speedway. Goede won the ELKO premier division title for 10 consecutive years from 2014-2023. Jake Ryan earned the title in 2024 and then Chris Marek won the Late Model Championship in 2025. This year the title fight is a great one with two of the most veteran racers racing each other for the Championship.

Chris Marek has travelled some over the years, but he started racing at his home track in 2005 winning the Hornets title. During that time, he also won one Power Stocks Championship at ELKO and 4 Late Model or "Big8" Championships at ELKO.

"I'm having a lot of fun this year, the car has had good speed and races pretty good all season long," said Marek. "I dug myself a pretty big hole in the point standings on opening night when the 94 car

(Hunter Paine) spun out and we both got penalized to the back, so I've been trying to work my way back up to the top. It has really gotten tight between Chad and I. Chad and the 52 team have also had a very fast car with wildly consistent race results. We have had some really hard fought battles on the track, and I really think we are both giving it our all. The races have been good clean races and as long as it stays that way the fans are in for a nail biting final month of racing," said Marek.

Chad Walen has two Raceway Park Championships, he started racing at ELKO in 2001 in the Modified division, he quickly switched to Late Models in 2003 when the Mods were discontinued at Elko Speedway. Walen said he has finished second place in the Championship 5 or 6 times over the years. "Chris really wants the Championship," said Walen. "I don't care for the pressure, I got married this year, both of my daughters are getting married this year. The older I get I realize that I just want to race and have fun. The Championship would be a great feather in my cap, but I'm not focused on it," said Walen. "When we raced side by side for 15 laps that one feature, I might have learned something that night."

Chad Walen has the advantage in qualifying this year, he has scored 15 more points than Marek on the season during qualifying.

In contrast, Chris Marek has the advantage in feature races, he has scored 15 more points than Walen on the season during feature events. Marek has scored 2 more points in heat races this year and the all-important tiebreaker is feature wins. Marek has four and Walen has zero going into the final three nights of racing.

Another interesting wrinkle during this point race will be the Thunderstruck event taking place on Saturday, September 12th. This will be a regular earning points event for the Late Model Championship but it's not just the regular crew of racers. So far 36 different Late Model drivers have signed up to compete in this event held annually in honor of former ELKO driver and car owner Dan Ryan who passed away due to ALS in 2009. The huge car count is due to an incentive of four free tires for pre-registered drivers put up by the track and the huge bonus money

put in by numerous local businesses and individuals. The charity aspect is also important and the prestige of winning the biggest event at Elko Speedway along with the iconic guitar trophy which is known as one of the best trophies in all of stock car racing. This event is a fundraiser for "A Race Worth Winning," donated proceeds go to help families affected by ALS and research to help fight the disease.

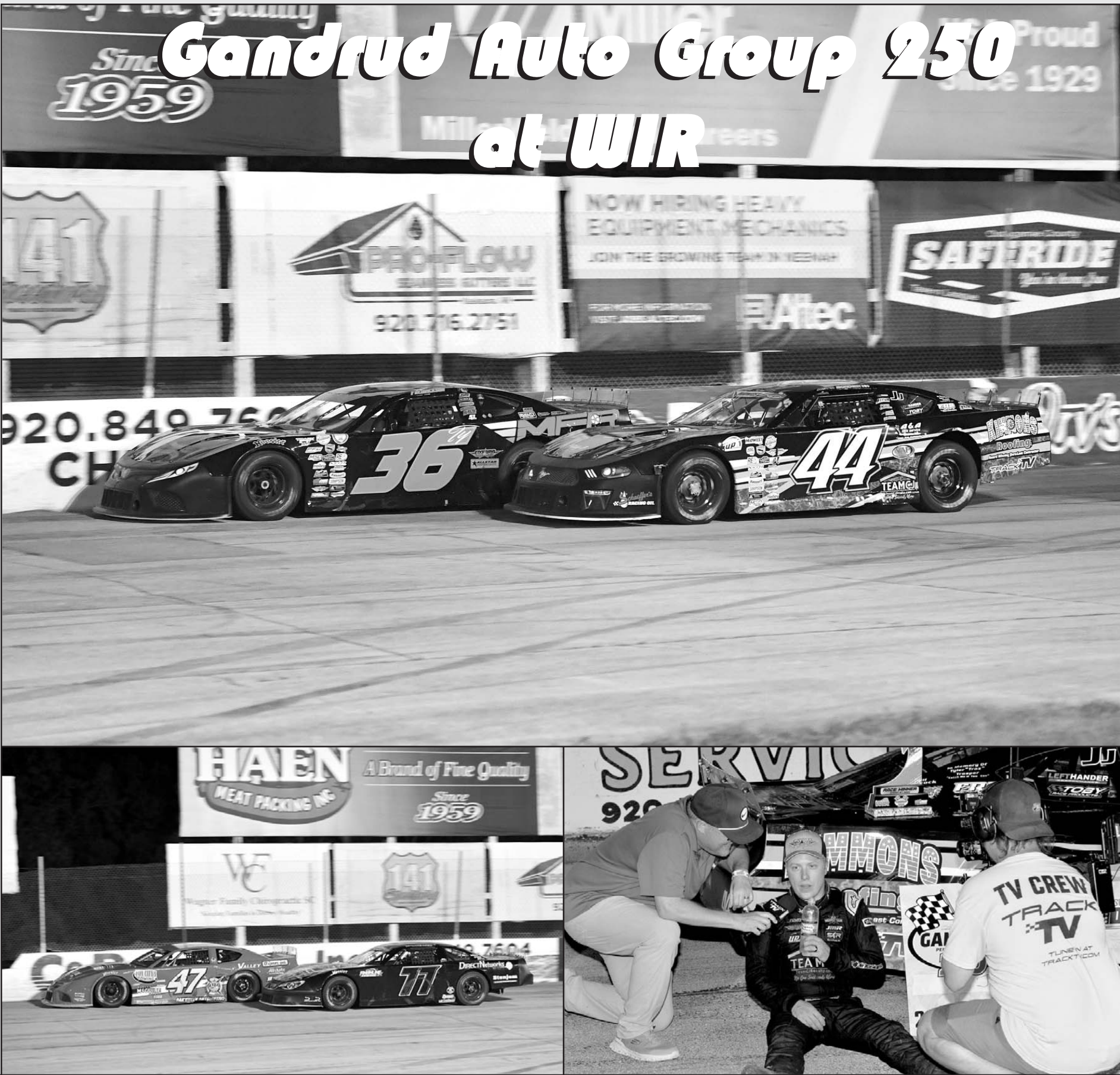
Some of the more recognizable names competing in the Thunderstruck 93 lap Late Model race at ELKO include: Big 8 Champion Randy Sargent from Illinois, 9-time ELKO Champion Donny Reuvers, 10-time ELKO Champion and defending La Crosse Champion Jacob Goede, Mike Lichtfeld a 4-time Dells Raceway Park Champion, Jesse Bernhagen from WI who is in contention for the National NASCAR Rookie of the year crown, Nick Nolden a 5-time Dells Late Model Champion, Hawkeye Downs Iowa Champion Kody King will also make his return to ELKO. Jake Ryan, son of Dan Ryan and a 2-time Elko Champion will also be competing during this event. Expect to see the #36 car racing in this event as well. Dan Fredrickson has won this event 5 times in that car and his 17 year old son Ty Fredrickson is the defending winner of this race. Ty is currently racing a part-time schedule in the ARCA series with Nitro Motorsports but rest assured someone talented will be behind the wheel of that car.

This race will certainly provide a memorable moment in the career of any racer but it also has added importance for the two drivers racing for the 2026 Elko Speedway Late Model title. NASCAR National points might also be very important as the points season will come to an end and numerous drivers in the field will be fighting for the National Division I title including Jacob Goede and Mike Lichtfeld who are already entered and I suspect Skylar Holzhausen might be a late entry, all those drivers are just a handful of points apart going into the last few nights of the year. With all the talent racing in this one race, it will probably be the determining factor in who wins the Championship at ELKO as well. Thunderstruck is now a can't miss Late Model race for any Minnesota race fan as well as a pivotal moment for the Walen and Marek rivalry.

Dan Plan photo



Dan Plan photo



Story by Kevin Ramsell - Photos by Doug Hornickel

Justin Mondeik scored his biggest win in his young career by winning the Appalachian Sucker Punch ASA Midwest Tour presented by Five Star Race Car Bodies Grandrud Auto Group 250 at Wisconsin International Raceway in Kaukauna, Wisconsin. The Gleason, Wisconsin driver took home \$15,000 in his fourth victory in the Tour. Which ended a winless drought going back to September 2024 when he won the Thunderstruck 93 at Elko Speedway in Elko, Minnesota.

Dangerous Dan



Dan Margetta

Two years ago, while in Daytona for Speed Weeks, I was invited by Slinger racer Rob Braun to go to Dan Pardus' shop in New Smyrna where they kept the team's NASCAR Xfinity (now O'Reilly) Series car. The team ran a limited NASCAR schedule with Preston Pardus and their main crew guy "Flash" helped Rob and his sons out when they ran the World Series of Asphalt races a few years prior. Anyways, I got the directions which included traveling down a private road where I was told to ignore the keep-out signs and just drive to the address. I followed instructions and pulled up to a driveway with big, closed gates that were clearly designed to keep out unwanted visitors. I became nervous when there was an occu-

pied car in the driveway pulled up to the gates figuring this was the homeowner wondering who the stranger was that just drove past the clearly marked signs. I was even more surprised to find out the driver of the car turned out to be non-other than Southeast Wisconsin Racing Hall of Fame member Conrad Morgan. Like myself, Conrad was invited by Rob to see the shop and thought I was the homeowner wondering what he was doing there. We laughed at the situation as we waited for Rob to arrive with the code to enter through the gates. Eventually Rob arrived and we all talked racing with "Flash" and checked out the shop and cars. Afterwards, we had a cold one at the famous Cabbage Patch tavern, ate dinner at the Deck Down Under, and spent the evening barhopping in Daytona Beach. When everything wrapped up, I had one of those "how cool was that?" moments on the walk back to my Airbnb. I mean, if you would've told a much younger me, I would one day be hanging out as friends in Daytona Beach with the same Conrad Morgan I was watching win everything at Slinger, I would've said "You're nuts!"

Memories such as those will be on everyone's mind right about the time this issue goes to print as on September 6th, Conrad Morgan will run his final super late model race at Slinger Speedway, culminating a spectacular 60-year racing career. Morgan began racing at Slinger four years before I was born so I've never seen a season there that he wasn't a part of and it seems surreal to me that after September 6th, the iconic #92 won't have him behind the wheel. Whether it was the "two toned blue" or "red, white and blue" 92, it will be the last time we hear the familiar introduction, "Conraaaaad Morrrrrgan" coming over the Slinger PA system. Conrad Morgan just loves to race and race he did...and win. His 13 total track championships include six super late model titles on Slinger's

tough high-banks and his name is on the Slinger Nationals champion list, having won the prestigious short track event in 1999. Other track championships came at Madison International Speedway, Jefferson Speedway and the old Lake Geneva Raceway. At one point in the early nineties, he ran the legendary Big Ten Series down in North Carolina at the Concord Speedway where he won a race and finished second in points. Think about that for a moment, Conrad Morgan would race Saturday night at Concord then haul all the way back up here to run Slinger on Sunday night. I made that drive for years when I went to the Coca-Cola 600 and it was always about 14 hours. I realize it's different now and running two events in the same weekend with one car is nearly impossible, but it still amazes me guys like Conrad Morgan and Rich Bickle would do that back in the day.

At one point Conrad Morgan almost won too much at Slinger and like most dominating race car drivers experience, a faction of fans emerged that just wanted to see someone else win for a change. But as the years went by and Conrad Morgan kept winning, even the boobbirds grew to respect his accomplishments and appreciate the history he was making. A hard, head-on crash into the frontstretch wall in 2016 nearly ended his career after leaving him with serious injuries including a broken back at age 67. The injuries kept him out of the race car for the second half of the 2016 season, but when the 2017 season rolled around, there was Conrad Morgan back behind the wheel for another go at it. When he won the Alan Kulwicki Memorial in May of that year at nearly 69 years old, you could feel the energy and joy from the crowd as it seemed everyone on the property was pulling for him as he completed the comeback. I know I had tears of joy in my eyes from behind the camera that night as it was quite a magical moment to watch Morgan triumphantly emerge from the car and head to victory lane. The victory and Morgan's comeback made the local TV News and I still remember his interview in the story where he said it bothered him if he had to stop racing because he got hurt and either "blind determination or pure stupidity" allowed him to come back and go out on his own terms. Conrad Morgan won again a year later and became Slinger Speedway's first (and I think only) driver to win a super late model feature at age 70.

Just like it is with your own home track, the group that shows up week in and week out during the season at the Slinger Speedway is really like one big family and Conrad Morgan has been a huge part of that. Mentoring last year's super late model track champion, Grant Griesbach is just one of many examples of his influence. As Conrad Morgan's career winds down I just wanted to take the opportunity to use this space to say THANK YOU for everything. He's provided countless memories to so many people over so many years. I know it is hard for drivers who have driven for so long, to "just watch" but I really hope Conrad Morgan still comes to the race track next season even if it is to just hang out with friends. It just wouldn't be Slinger without him.



Bruce Nuttleman photo

Racing History



Dale P. Danielski

Being that we are coming up on the anniversary of Tom Reffner's death, I thought I'd take excerpts from an interview I conducted with him back in 2005 and add a few new notes on his unbelievable career in stock car racing.

Tom Reffner, one of three from the tiny burg of Rudolph, WI., along with Dick Trickle and Marv Marzofka had a phenomenal career in racing, but like most others it was meager beginnings at the start of it. "I was over helping Marv Marzofka's Dad the summer I had just graduated from high school. I was 17 and I couldn't get a job anywhere, so I was actually staying with Marvin. His brother had raced at Crowns Speedway (Wis. Rapids, WI.) he was working at the Studebaker garage. They had an old Studebaker and he said, let's go race at Stratford. Stratford Speedway,

(Stratford, WI.) So we put a roll bar in the thing, which Ron his brother had said would be legal, but it really wasn't. Between the time when Crown's was running and Stratford got going, they changed to a four point roll bar, and we only had one bar behind the seat, so they wouldn't let Marv run. So we went home and put some more bars in it and went back the next week. Marv won the semi-feature the first time out! Marv was the first guy around here to race after Crowns closed and that would have been 1958. Marv took home \$40.00 for winning that race which was the same amount he made working for a week at his job. After that, when I turned 18 and had a job, I decided I had to have a stock car."

So according to Reffner stock car racing looked like fun and something you could make some money at. "We started racing on dirt, which I didn't like, you couldn't see, it was dusty and you didn't know where you were half the time on the track. Eventually we raced pavement and I enjoyed that a lot more."

It wasn't long and Reffner continuing to hone his skills was winning regularly. The 1950s and early 1960's came and went to get laps and experience, and it was then Reffner could be found regularly in the headlines. With Sam Bartus promoting a number of tracks, pavement became the way to go for the asphalt set. Stratford, Black River Falls, Tomah-Sparta, Griffith Park, State Park Speedway, Golden Sands Speedway, Capital Super Speedway, were all regular, weekly stops where Reffner won. Capital and Golden Sands brought the era of high-banked track racing. "I always liked the banked tracks. I liked running them over the flat tracks. Maybe it was just because I ran better there. I always liked the Capital

track, Golden Sands, I-70, (Odessa, MO.) even Winchester, (Indiana) got to be fun after awhile, after you made yourself drive up right next to the wall."

Reffner won 15 features in just a couple seasons, 1969, '70 racing at the Capital speedway in a Mercury Mind Stomper Comet. "It was amazing then. We didn't know anything about tire stagger, weight bias, front end set-ups, just dumb! But we won so I guess the other guys didn't either."

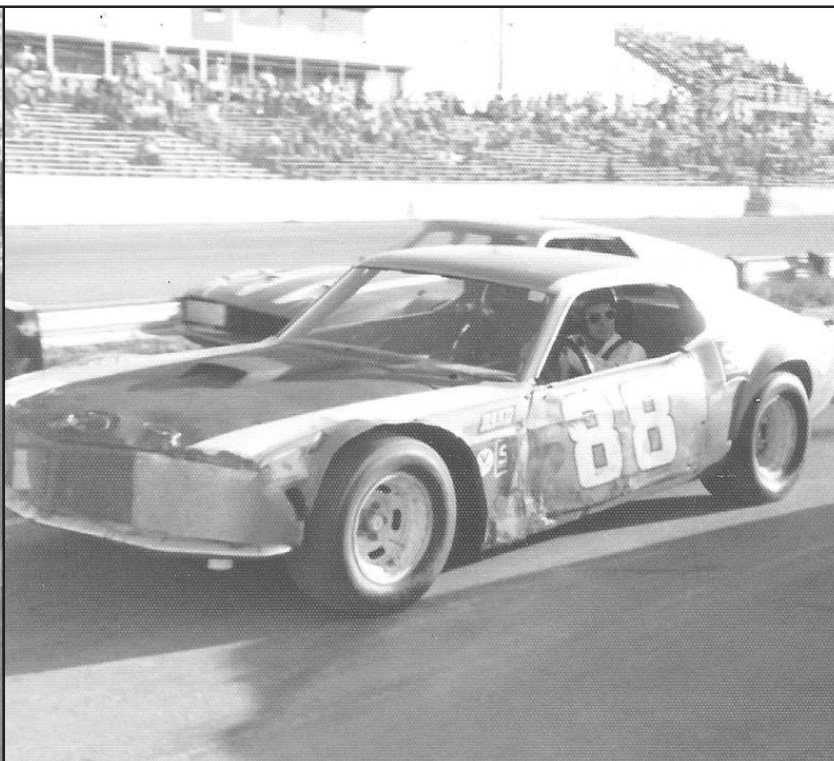
Racing Ford products all those years, change was coming. Departing from Comets, Cyclones and Mustangs, Reffner decided to go with AMC power in 1975. In 1974 the rule was weight to cubic inch and Dick (Trickle) was having so much trouble with Bud Moore 351 CI engines, which got the weight of the cars down, I just couldn't see switching to that. With Super America convenience store backing the time was right. I bought all of (Ed) Howe's AMC stuff he'd worked a lot of the bugs out, and we started building an AMC Javelin for 1975.

No one knew what was to transpire that year including Tom himself. "We had built all our race cars ourselves. We used Ford front end geometry, and it worked. That was on the Javelin and the combination of power to handling, it was a combination that was hard to beat." As nearly everyone is aware, Reffner went on to win 67 features that year tying Dick Trickle's National record. According to Reffner, the wins didn't come easy as the leaf spring set up required regular maintenance. We were constantly heating and bending springs. You had to so the car would work. It was a lot of labor, but I guess you could say it paid off!"

1975 was the beginning of the Art Frigo/John McKarns ARTGO series, which Reffner won the first event held and also the championship that year. Having Super America convenience stores as sponsor played a huge role in the success as well. "Dick (Trickle) had picked them up first, but since Dick and I were sharing a garage together, I got talking to Don (Englebrecht, the advertising manager for SA) and we got some help in 1974. It became a full sponsorship like Dick had in 1975. That was a great thing for me. By far the best sponsorship I ever had the entire time I raced."

The AMC continued

*Racing History continued
on page 16*



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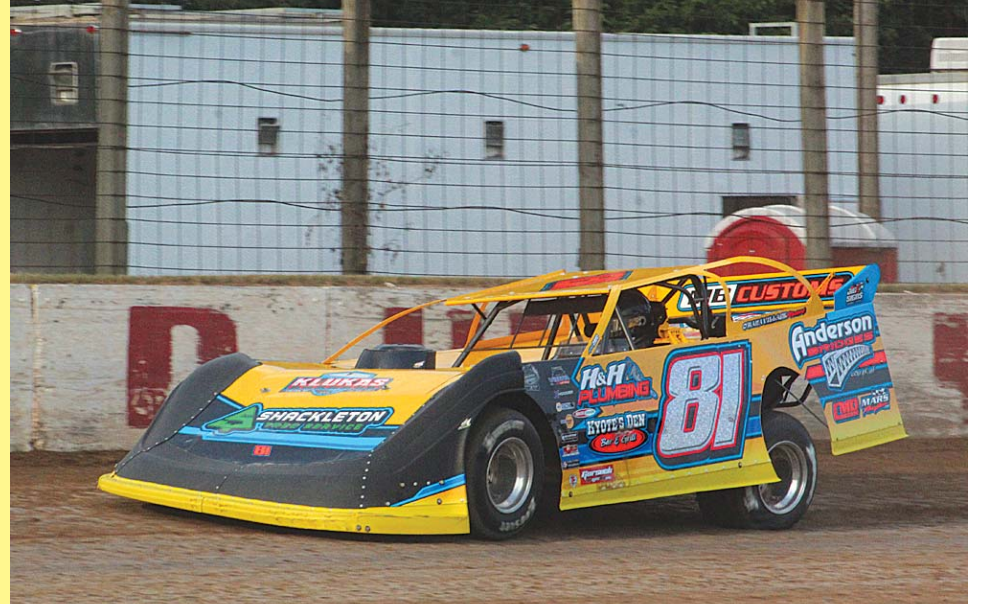
ARRIVE AND DRIVE STARTS AT 10AM
FULL PROGRAM AT 7PM

THE MIDWEST RACING CONNECTION

Photo Gallery



*Mike Tuma came out of retirement to run the Behrens race at Elko
(Dan Plan photo)*



*Red Cedar Speedway Late Model track champion Ashley Anderson
(Dan Plan photo)*



*Kyle Larson on his way to winning the Knoxville Nationals
(Tyler Carr photo)*



*Swanson and Johnson during the Detjens Memorial at The Dells
(Doug Hornickel photo)*



*Ty Fredrickson and Penn Sauter battle for position a WIR
(Doug Hornickel photo)*



*Cam Panitzke won the USRA Late Model championship at The Lake
(Junior Jackson photo)*

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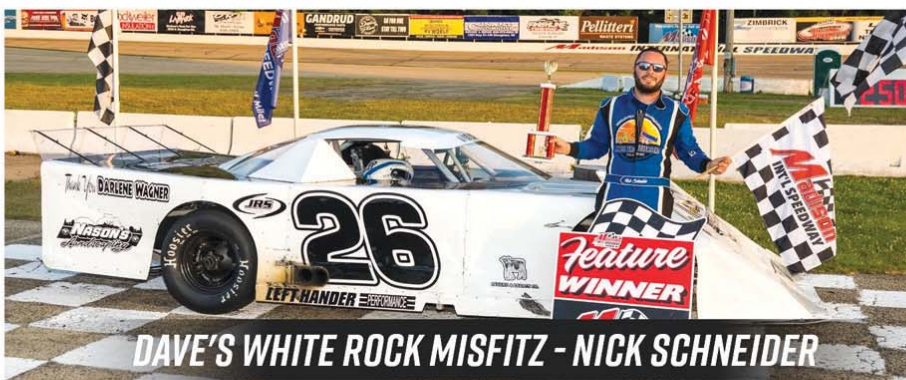


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World Champion

Missie Kane sporting her World Champion Fun Haver hat during the Behrens Memorial race at Elko Speedway.



Racing Nuggets



PJ "Jacklyn" Nuttleman

I can't believe how fast time is flying.

My mother once told me, when I was a teenager, that "time goes faster the older you get." I recall being a little snot and telling her, "Mom, time is constant."

Pffft.

Life sure does serve up some perspective, doesn't it?

Yeah, Mom. You were right. Time DOES go faster the older we get. August turned faster than qualifying at Slinger. I can smell Fall in the air, and Oktoberfest is just around the corner.

Oktoberfest will mark one year since my mother suffered the stroke that turned her life upside down. I'm hopeful that she continues to regain what she lost with cognition and speech, and that this year's Oktoberfest is blessedly free of health emergencies.

But before we roll into Fest, we still have plenty of Fall racing on the schedule this month.

One of the more popular events—and one that has long been part of the Midwest Tour—has taken a different path this year. The Thunderstruck 93 at Elko Speedway will return as a stand-alone event, without a sanctioning body.

It's a race that has been a memorial, a major regional event, a mostly Super Late Model race, and a fundraiser for Amyotrophic Lateral Sclerosis (ALS), commonly known as Lou Gehrig's disease.

A scheduling agreement couldn't be reached between the ASA Midwest Tour and Elko Speedway for the event honoring the memory of racer Dan Ryan, who lost his battle with ALS. The event was originally scheduled with the ASA Midwest Tour for August 15, despite traditionally being held in September. It was ultimately removed from the Tour schedule, and Elko Speedway and its ownership group announced that Thunderstruck 93 would continue as a legacy event on September 12.

And honestly, that feels fitting. Because while the format may change, the reason for the race hasn't.

The event began in 2009, shortly after the death of Elko racer and car owner Dan "Thunder" Ryan Sr., and it has changed a bit over the years. But the basic idea has remained remarkably consistent:

Remember Dan Ryan. Race hard. Raise money and awareness in the fight against ALS.

If you're not familiar with Dan Ryan Sr., he raced at Elko from 1991 through 2003, driving the distinctive No. 93. He was inducted into the Elko Speedway Hall of Fame in 2008. Eventually, he became a mentor and leader in the pits, helping younger racers—including his son, Jake—move through the sport.

Ryan was diagnosed with ALS in December 2005 and succumbed to the disease on January 2, 2009.

The race is called Thunderstruck 93 for a couple of very appropriate reasons.

Anyone who knew Dan Ryan knows that AC/DC's "Thunderstruck" was his favorite song. Whenever it blasted from nearby speakers, Dan was often seen playing air guitar along with it.

And, of course, the race is 93 laps—a nod to the number on his race car.

The trophy is an electric guitar, which is obvi-

ously better than an air guitar trophy. An air guitar trophy would be pretty difficult to show off.

It's also a nod to another of Ryan's favorites: the All-American 400 in Nashville, which features its own guitar-shaped trophy.

For me, though, things mean the most when you get into the stories behind the people and the relationships that connect them.

The Fredrickson family has a lot of history with Thunderstruck 93, stemming from Dan Fredrickson's relationship with Dan Ryan. The two were very close, and Fredrickson also served as crew chief for Ryan's son, Jake.

Fredrickson wanted to win the inaugural event in 2009 so badly he could taste it. But that honor went to Jacob Goede.

Still, Fredrickson has more Thunderstruck 93 wins than any other racer, with five titles to his credit.

And the next generation of Fredricksons picked up the most recent win when Dan's son, Ty, snagged the checkered flag last year.

That event was run under the ASA Midwest Tour banner. This year, however, Thunderstruck 93 is taking a different form. It will be a Late Model event in 2026, opening the door for a cast of Elko Speedway hot-shoe Late Model regulars to battle for one of the track's most prestigious wins.

The Fredrickson family has teased that there may be TWO Fredricksons on track, both vying for the trophy that honors the memory of their fallen friend, Dan Ryan.

If that's the case, it should make for a very intense race for the Fredrickson family to watch.

Trust me.

I've seen them in the stands.

They watch with an intensity that rivals turning the volume knob to 11.

Which, now that I think about it, seems pretty darn appropriate when you're honoring the memory of Dan Ryan.

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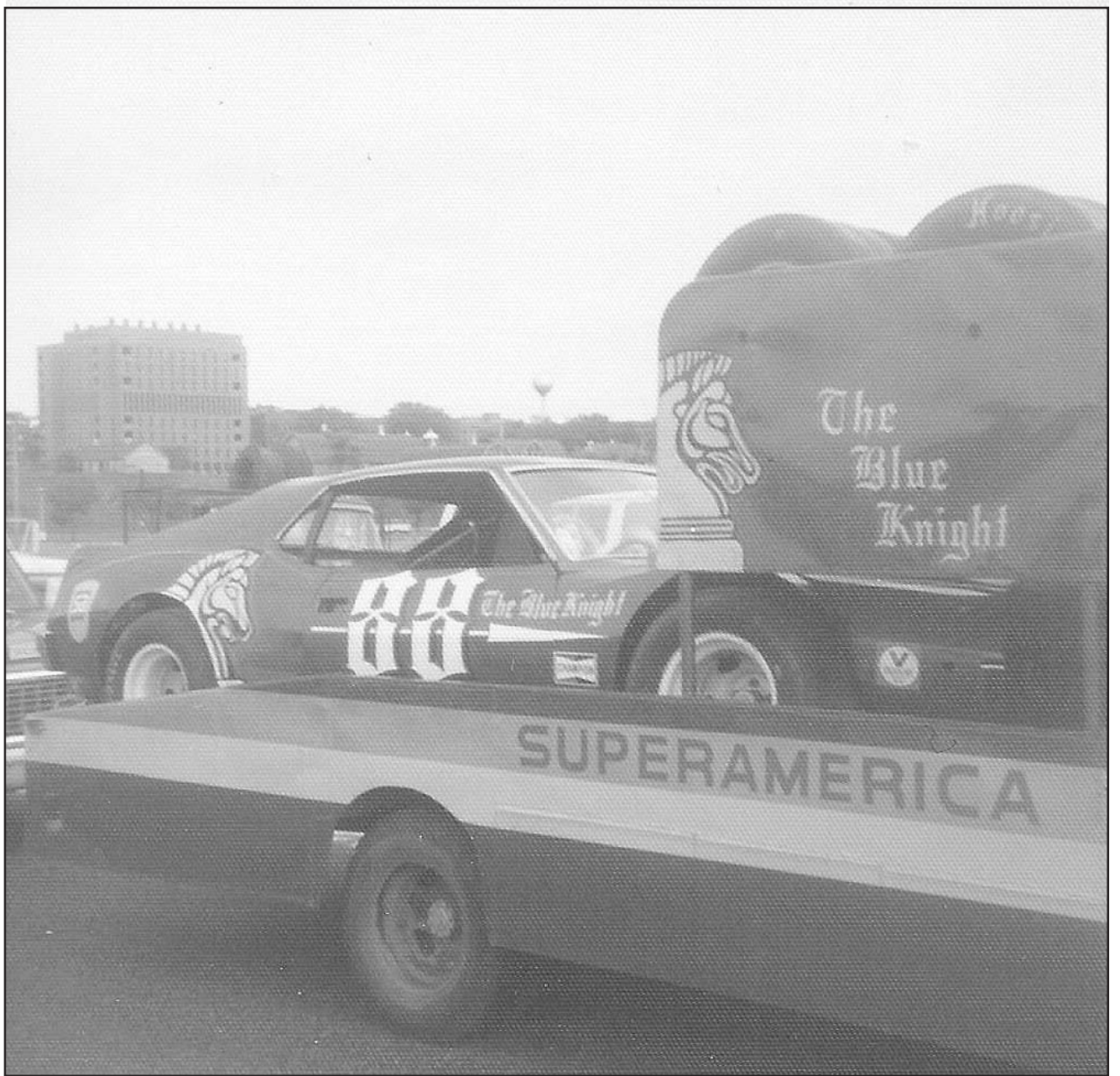
YouTube

Racing History from page 10

to be the best combination as Reffner proved in 1976 by winning the World Cup 400 at I-70 Speedway. Amazingly he did it by racing on the same set of tires for the entire 400 laps. "That was by far my biggest win ever, it paid \$10,000 to win which is probably like \$60,000 today. I was leading by over a lap, but the strap I had attached to my helmet holding my head up broke halfway through the race. I couldn't even hold my head up at the end, but we held on to win." Immediately after the race, Reffner headed off to Bobby Allison's shop to buy up all the AMC stuff he had. "Dee Dee (Delores, Tom's wife) wasn't very happy with that as I think we spent most of what I made at I-70 there."

The AMC product proved to be fast until 1980 when Chevy was the preferred choice. "Super America bought me a Dennis Frings chassis in 1978, which was the best bought on car I ever had. All the geometry was right on it. You could run any track without jumping through hoops to get it to run fast." This era was when fabricated race cars were all the rage. "Bill Bembinster (Bemco Engineering) had built a rocket ship, a really fast car in 1976, that Larry Detjens drove. I bought one in 1977, the first car I didn't build, but with the crankshaft height rule then it wasn't competitive. With the crank shaft lower to the ground, those cars were really fast. With it higher it wasn't a very good car."

With over 400 feature wins, two ARTGO Championships and numerous track championships, what does Tom Reffner think of the state of racing now. "You know we could race back in the day 5 or 6 times a week. We could make money then. I was lucky, I had John Bovee helping me a lot. Sarge, Ken Sather helped me. Pete Haferman was absolutely a fantastic guy to have and being crew chief when he was around. (Haferman went on to have a successful career with Hendrick Motorsports.) He was a big part



of my success when we were racing the AMC's. My kids Baird and Bryan were a huge help when they were old enough too. Without that help you just couldn't do it. It's even worse these days. The more you race the more you lose and get behind. A sponsor helps, but it's still not enough the way it's set up. With the entry fees and all the expenses. you could win every race and not make money. When the promoters workshops convinced the tracks to charge the guys that come to race it all changed. Maybe it would have happened anyway, but that started it. Originally, we worked with promoters who agreed to charge \$.50

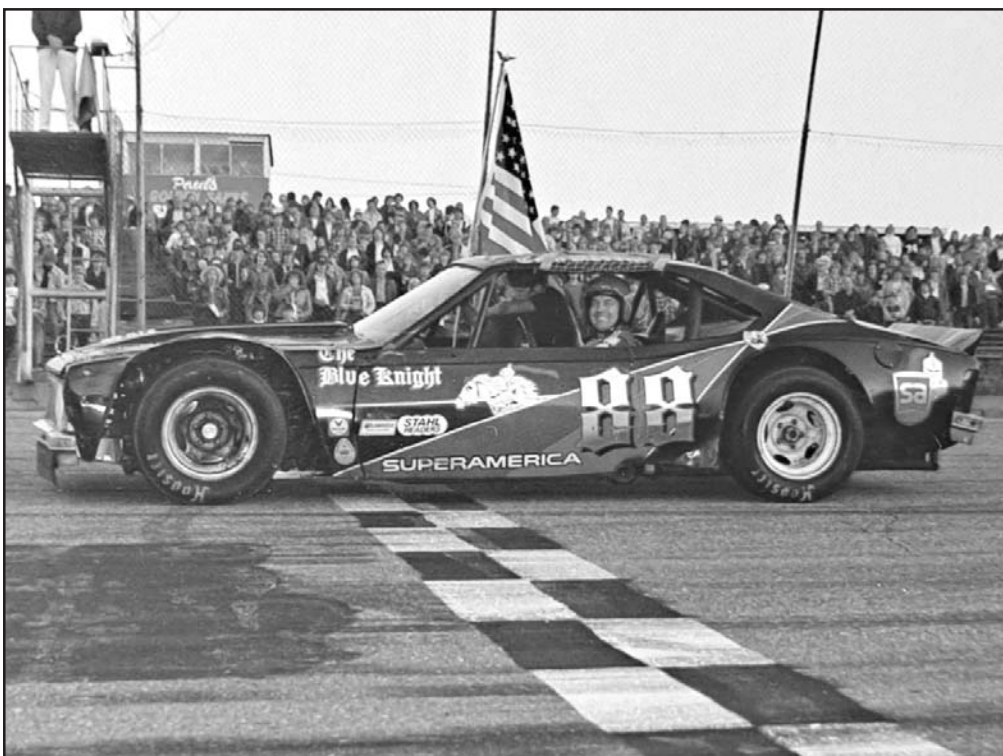
more in the pits than on the hill so that not so many people would be in the pits. That was about a 25% difference. Anymore it's 300 % more pits to grandstands. Just a bad deal for the guys that are there to put on the show."

Of all the racers Reffner competed against, he still rated Wisconsin's own as the best and toughest. The ones I didn't mind getting beat by were Dick, (Trickle) Marv, (Marzofka) Jim Back, Mike Miller, Larry Detjens, all them guys, any one of them could win. Every one of us had our times when we were really good. As far as guys out of the area, Ed Howe was a real good guy to race with. He didn't give you nothin' but he didn't run you over either. Tom Maier was one of the best guys I raced with out of town. Dick Anderson, their were a lot of tough competitors."

Reffner started racing in 1959 and raced until 1999. As far as getting back in the car at that time Reffner admitted it was doubtful. If I got in the last car I still had at the shop to race, it would have been a surprise to me."

But lo and behold, unknown to anyone but this writer, there was one last feature to be raced and that

Racing History continued on page 17



Racing History from page 16

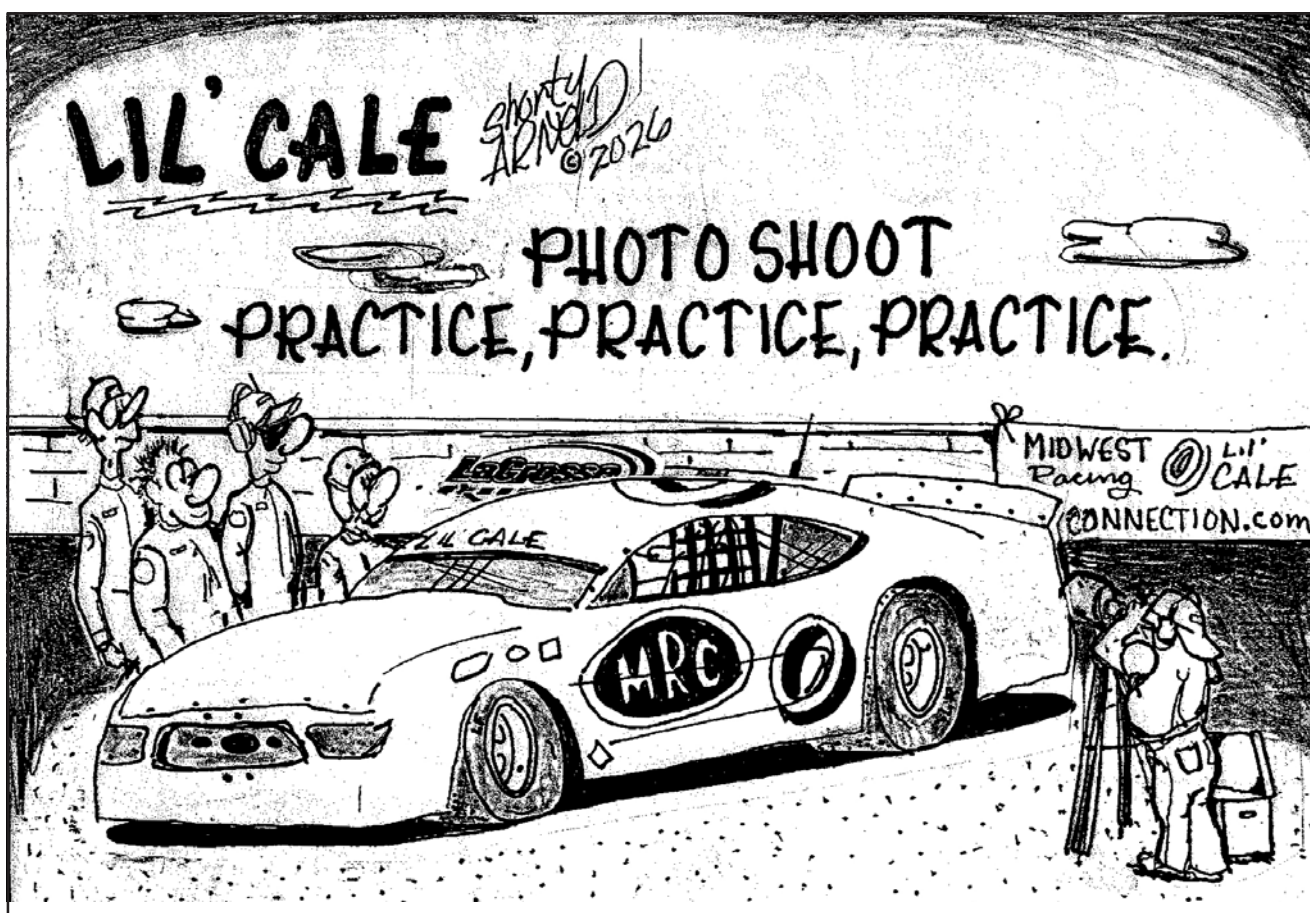
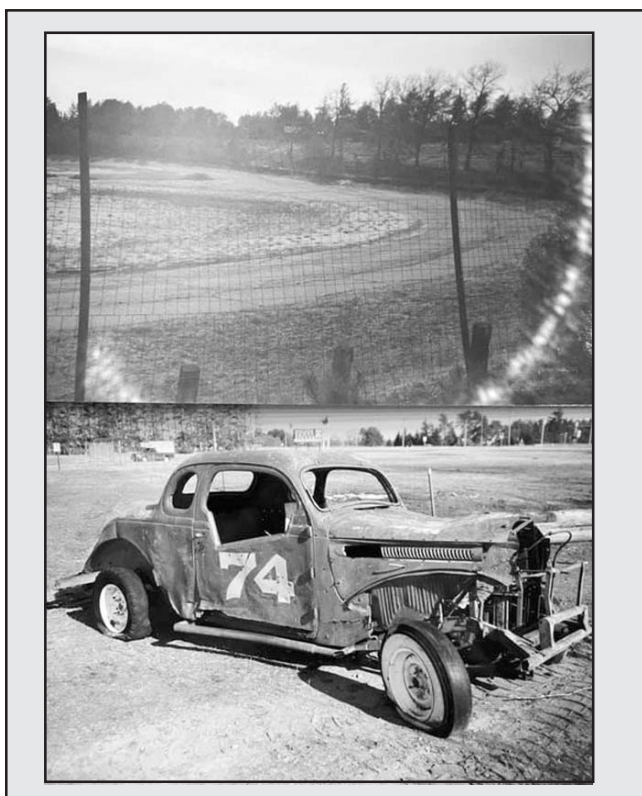
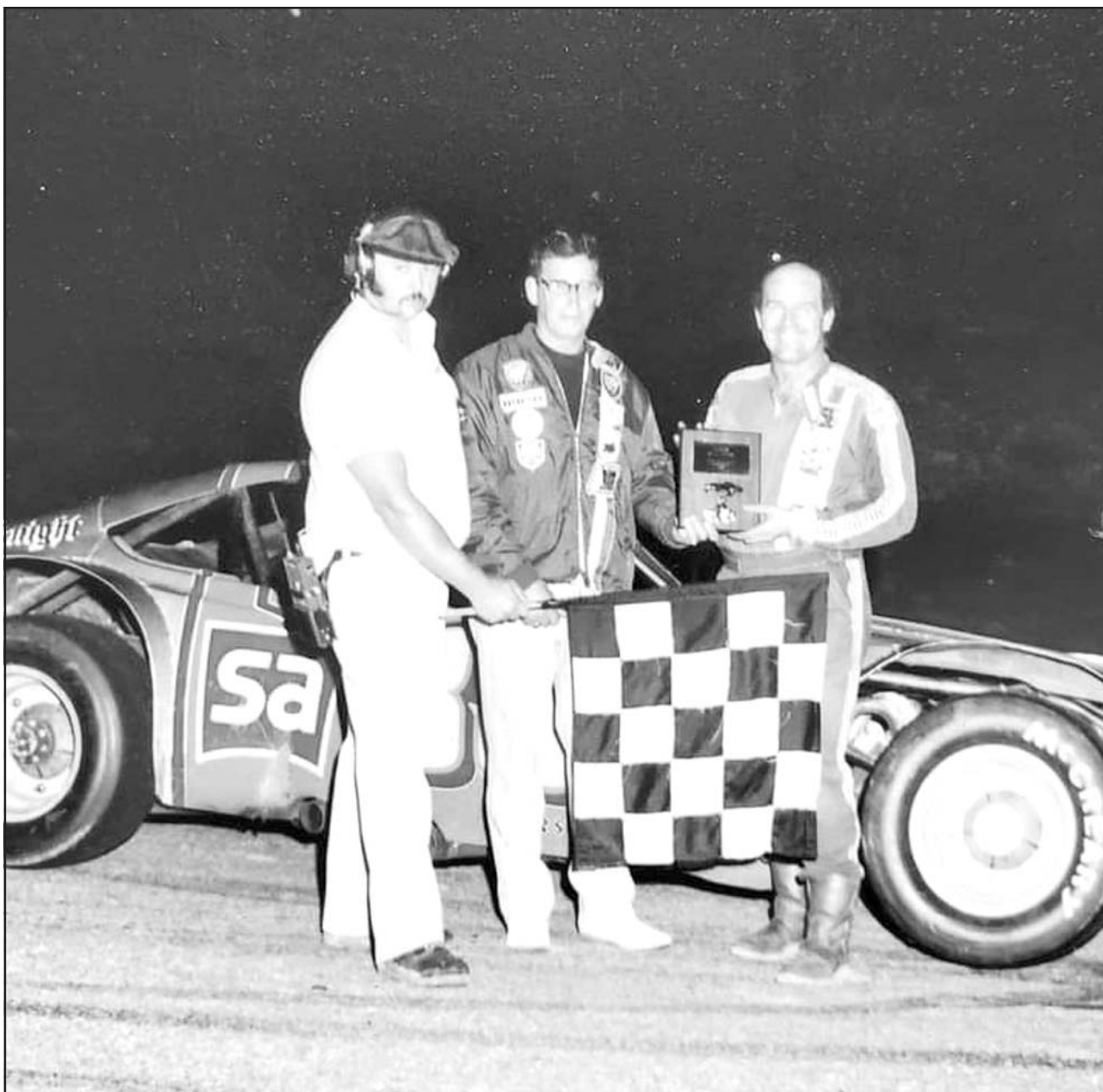
occurred as part of the Oktoberfest Racing weekend in 2018. With ye olde scribe trying to get Mike Miller back into his old race car which had been restored at 'Fest, he indicated he would do it if Marv Marzofka and Tom would do it. Marv just couldn't and Mike going on some trial runs couldn't get comfortable and declined also. But who should emerge, probably the least likely at the start, but Tom Reffner. According to Tom, when I called him about it, he said, "I'll do it if I can practice in the car before the race." The car just happened to be the John Gilbertson 1974 AMC Javelin look alike that Reffner raced to 67 wins in. Fitting in the car and getting comfortable was the biggest obstacle and early on it was a struggle. Things smoothed out though and choosing to start the vintage race toward the back, Reffner methodically made his way to the front finishing 3rd at the checkered flag. As is typical of a racer that has seen an enormous amount of success and knows what a car needs, Reffner stated, "With a couple more adjustments, I think we could have won."

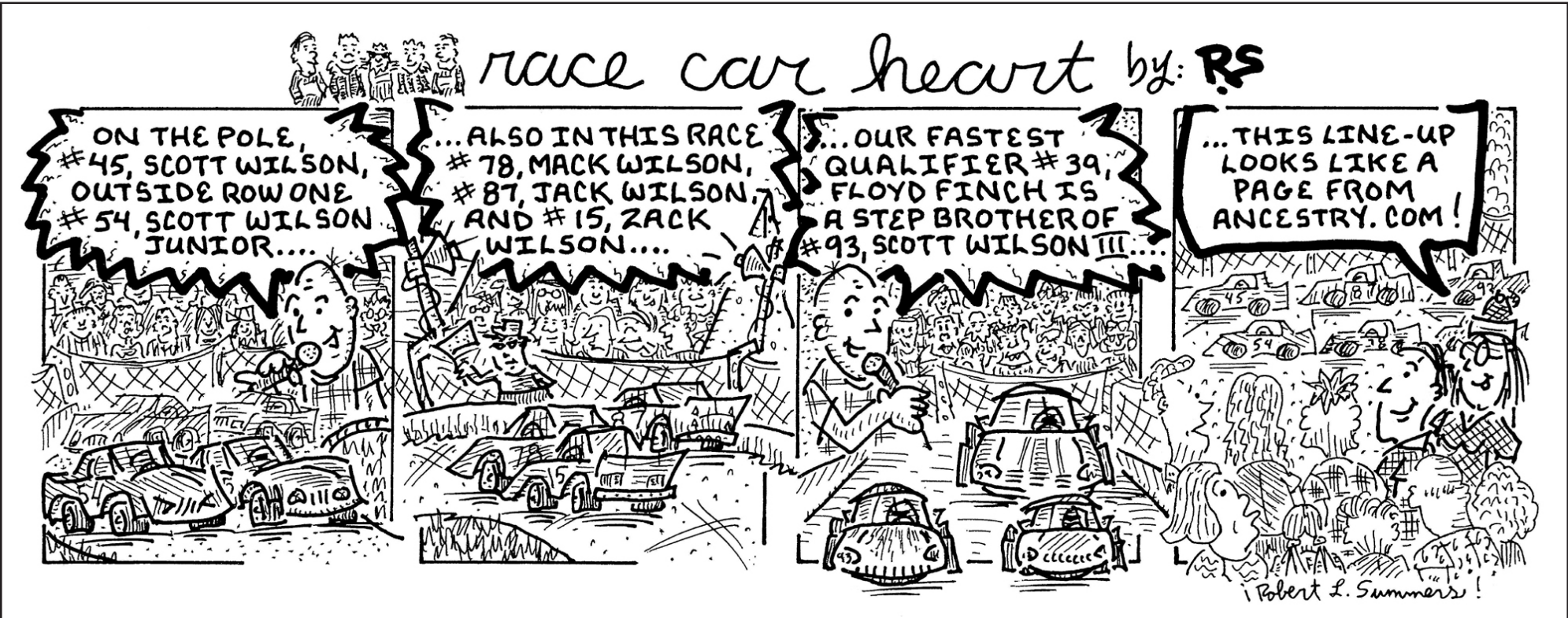
The true winners on the day were fans that saw a racing legend give it one last shot. No one was disappointed.

And the mystery photo from our last column was none other than #66 Rusty Wallace. Rusty learned a lot racing in Wisconsin and it carried him to a great career in NASCAR. And this column's mystery driver is, the # 74 of? This car sat at Griffith Park speedway for years.

Photos by Dale P. Danielski, Kurt Luoma, Rodney Dykeman. #88 record setting Javelin. #88 Reffner Mustang. #88 Reffner Ford. #88 Reffner Bemco Hornet. #88 Frings AMC Concord. Mystery car #74.

Questions, comments, opinions and other information should now be directed to Starmaker Multimedia 314 3rd Avenue South, Onalaska, WI. 54650. 608-518-2478 or to dale@starmakermultimedia.com





BIG 8 Late Models

2026 SCHEDULE

1

Sat, Apr 18

49th Spring Classic
Grundy Co. Speedway

2

Fri, May 22

Late Model Special
Madison Int'l Speedway

3

Fri, June 5

Clash at the Downs XII
Hawkeye Downs

4

Sat, July 18

Hawkeye Hoosier Classic
Hawkeye Downs

5

Fri, Aug 7

Union 464 Night
Madison Int'l Speedway

6

Fri, Sept 18

65th Bettenhausen Memorial
Grundy Co. Speedway

7

Sat, Sept 26

61st National Short
Track Champs
Dells Raceway Park

8

Sat, Oct 10

57th Oktoberfest
LaCrosse Speedway

2026 USA Nationals



Photos by Emily Schwanke

The 2026 USA Nationals at Cedar Lake Speedway saw World of Outlaws point leader Bobby Pearce start the weekend off with a sub-par performance on Thursday night. This type of performance did not last long, as Pearce came back on Saturday (after a Friday night rainout) and qualified 10th for the 100-lap main event. Pearce worked his way to the front and took over the lead late in the race and led the remainder of the event. This year's \$100K payday was Pearce's third USA Nationals title. Pearce also joins the likes of drivers such as Billy Moyer, Scott Bloomquist and Jonathan Davenport that have won the USA Nationals three or more times.

Behrens Memorial Race

The 2026 version of the annual Behrens Memorial Race at Elko Speedway featured a night of just racing, with no side shows. A rain storm hit the track just prior to opening ceremonies, but they got the show in. In what may have been a history making evening, a father/son combination picked up feature wins on the same evening. Typically it's the father winning the headliner and the son winning a support division feature. This night, the roles were reversed as Grant Brown went home with the Late Model feature and Doug Brown picked up the win in the Crown Vic's.









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Challenge Series Sweep



The WISSOTA Late Model Challenge Series made a two-day swing through Western Wisconsin early in the month of August. A Friday night stop at Red Cedar Speedway and a Saturday night show at Rice Lake Speedway saw the same driver finish on top. Jesse Glenz dominated the Friday show at Red Cedar and backed it up with a late race pass of Pat Doar to pick up the win at Rice Lake on Saturday to complete the weekend sweep.

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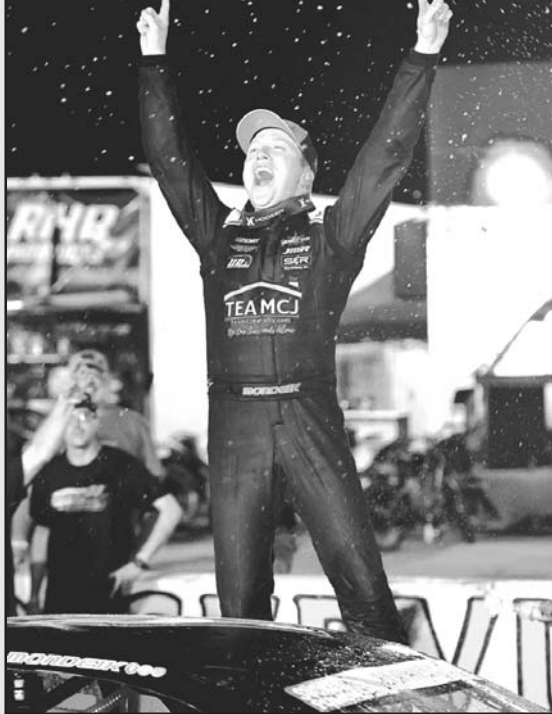


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*Justin Modiek celebrates his win in the Gandrud 250 at WIR
(Doug Hornickel photo)*



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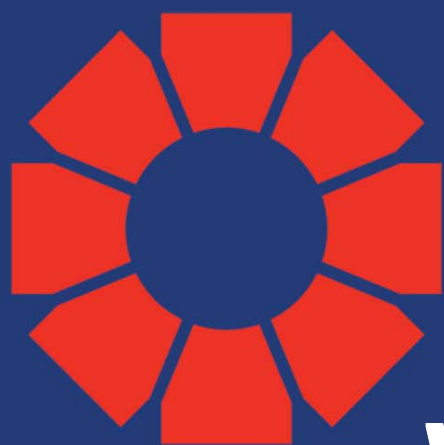
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The logo for Justice Bros. JIB Quality is centered on a stylized American flag background. The flag has horizontal stripes of yellow, red, and white, with a blue field at the top containing white stars. The words "JUSTICE BROS." are written in white, bold, sans-serif capital letters on a blue rectangular background at the top. Below this, the letters "JIB" are prominently displayed in a large, stylized, blue font with red and white vertical stripes. Underneath "JIB", the word "Quality" is written in a smaller, blue, cursive-style font. The entire logo is framed by a red and white circular border. To the left of the logo is a small American flag, and to the right is a small checkered racing flag. The background of the entire image is a light blue sky with white clouds.

A large collection of J-B automotive products is displayed on a paved road. The products are arranged in several rows, with some standing upright and others lying down. The products include various oils, cleaners, and additives, such as Engine Degreaser, Fuel Injection System Cleaner, Oil Treatment, Radiator System Service, and Brake Parts Cleaner. The background shows a road curving through a green, hilly landscape under a clear sky.

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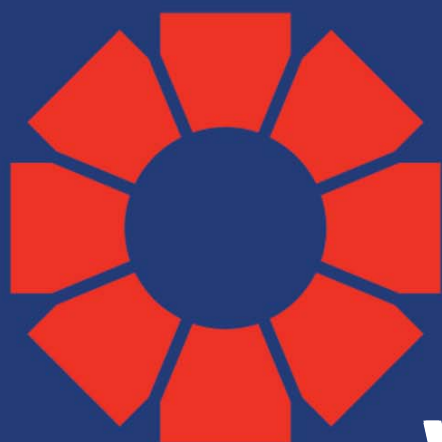
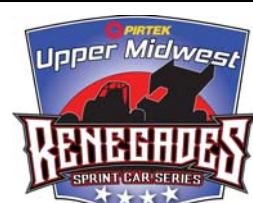


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