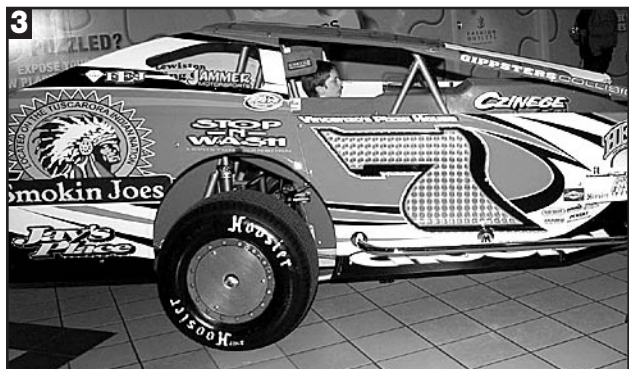
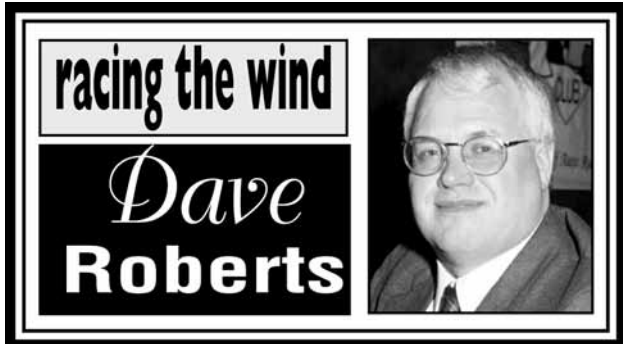


Matt Barndt Is Making The Commitment



AT THE OUTLETS MALL IN NIAGARA FALLS, N.Y., several Ransomville (N.Y.) Speedway competitors displayed their cars. 1) Ryan Susice (No. 38) is moving up to the DIRTcar Sportsman ranks; 2) Scott Kerwin's No. 28 Troyer will be a force this season; and 3) Sam Crogan is ready for action at the Big R; 4) Looking to advance his career is Matt Barndt, who 5) races a pavement Late Model. (Photos 1-3 by Alex & Helen Bruce; 4&5 from Matt Barndt)



Like many young drivers with aspirations of making it into NASCAR'S top traveling road show, Matt Barndt is making the commitment to get himself into that glorious position.

Barndt, a 17-year-old junior at Saucon Valley High School in Bethlehem, Pa., will be set to run the entire 2008 ASA North Late Model schedule beginning next weekend at Toledo (Ohio) Speedway.

The youngster has a boatload of talent on his side and looks to be ready to handle the experienced group of racers than run the popular tour annually.

"I'm ready to start," says Barndt, who also holds a grade point average of 3.8 while getting prepared to run a busy schedule. In addition to ASA, Barndt will also run a limited schedule at both Lake Erie (Pa.) Speedway and Jennerstown (Pa.) Speedway.

"I've never been to Toledo but from what I've been told, it's similar to Lake Erie."

Barndt spent his first full season in a Late Model in 2006 after a successful stint with Quarter Midgets and Mini Cups. He finished sixth in the now-dumped MAARA (Mid Atlantic Auto Racing Association) Series points chase and ran Lake Erie's 200-lap July extravaganza starting 33rd in an all-star field. He crossed the finish line in a respectable 10th-place showing.

He also won the MAARA Rookie of the Year honors.

"I was really happy with last year. I was a rookie and so was my team. We had to learn everything. It was tough at first but we learn a lot as the season went along."

Barndt is serious about his career and has even hired an agent to get him moving in the right direction. Like any of the young drivers looking to make a career in this sport, not everyone can make it to the level that is dreamed of, Barndt knows that the ASA Series carries a lot of weight and gets a lot of attention for those looking for exceptional talent.

Matt's father, Tim, is directly behind his effort. Barndt will see the difference from last season not only with the competition but the time off the race track as well.

"It's going to be different. Some of these races will see travel time of 1,000 miles one way," said Tim, who doubles as the team's car owner. "I know that he's ready for the challenge."

Barndt runs for Team Full Throttle NASCAR Driver Development. The job of Full Throttle will be to get Barndt to the next level. Ironically, he just completed his 12th season of racing meaning that he got an early start (1995) in his career. In that time, Matt has placed in nine of 10 National Quarter Midget appearances. He's won the Poughkeepsie (N.Y.) Speedway Mini Cup Championship and was the 2006 New York Mini Cup Racing Series Champion. His first year in a Late Model was deemed a success.

"I was happy with last season. It's going to help us with this season. The ASA Series has a bigger label. The one thing we are looking for now is a major sponsor to help with expenses."

Barndt realizes that ASA is his next step.

"It's a great series to get noticed. They have the resources and the connections to bigger things."

According to Tim, the team's goal last season was to finish races. This time, his goal is to win the ASA Rookie honors. He also realizes that just finishing races is now not enough.

"I want to run up front. Win some races and contend for the championship. If I can do that here, it will help me."

The "step up" is either a NASCAR Busch East Series or ARCA Series ride. Right now, Matt and his race team will be spending a large amount of time this season on the road. It'll be a great training ground for when his career continues upward. He's already turned some heads with his MAARA showing from last season. He's now looking to turn the racing world upside down. Starting next week at Toledo, he'll get his chance.

With this being the Asphalt Edition of *Area Auto Racing News*, it's important that we look at the local paved tracks and give them the mention they deserve.

It'll be the first to admit that paved racing has seen better days with the promoters scrambling to make it's facilities more fan-friendly and more financially stable. Some have had to go to gimmick events to help pay the bills and it's worked.

While my option is to see race cars with numbers on their sides going around in circles, I understand the different look with short tracks employing a staff year around.

At one time not too long ago, it was turned around with the clay ovals having to struggle. The off-season here has given me reason to be optimistic, especially with the changes at Lancaster

(N.Y.), now Dunn Tire Raceway Park.

There are some who feel that the rising costs of gasoline will keep the fans away. Race fans are race fans. They will continue to show up. They may have to make choices, but once a race fan - always a race fan.

The 2008 season is a time for hope and to see racing on the pavement take a step forward. Lets hope so.

Season Openers: Holland (N.Y.) Saturday - May 24; Lancaster (N.Y.) - May 10; Wyoming County (N.Y.) - Sun., May 11; Lake Erie (Pa.) - Sat., May 24; Spencer (N.Y.) - Fri., May 16; Oswego - Sun., May 4.

Wyoming County will spend just a couple of weeks on Sundays before moving to Fridays. Oswego is starting on a Sunday but will switch to Saturdays for much of the season. All of the tracks will have warmup/practice sessions free to the public. Check each track's respective website for more details.

The biggest news of the season was Dunn Tire Raceway Park. Up until the end of January nobody knew if the facility was even going to be open for the 2008 season.

Local businessman and drag racer Ralph Galuzzi stepped up and sign a contract to promote the race track. An "up-front" and "right-to-the-point" type of person, Galuzzi has made drag-racing program the headliner at the track. The speedway will have 13 stock car events with the Modifieds spending seven nights at the suburban Buffalo, N.Y., short track.

Galuzzi is looking for the stock car drivers to step up and support the track. What might've been nice is a Spencer/Dunn Tire Raceway Series for the Modifieds. The track has several support divisions including the SST Modifieds, Street Stocks and Midgets. One event that still has the attention of the local race fans is the 20th Annual U.S. Open, which closes the season. The speedway will celebrate its 50th anniversary with a 100-lap Race of Champions DartAsphalt Modified Tour event in July.

Holland was looking to turn the corner and move forward as the 2007 season was closing. The speedway will still headline the SST Modifieds but the lower cost LAMOT Late Models will make a dozen appearances beginning with its opener on May 24.

Right now, it's not known how many of those Late Models will show at Holland. If they can make the numbers grow in 2008....look out! The series would seem to be affordable to those who still have cars sitting in their garages due to the high costs to drive them. Holland has several divisions who compete weekly and will have a pair of "Eve of Destruction" events that draw large numbers to the Erie County-based oval. They will also have MAARA-style Late Models on three occasions, including the Labor Day Budweiser 100.

Wyoming County International Speedway will open for its 48th season running Sundays for the first couple of weeks then switching to Fridays. The speedway will have a Friday/Saturday weekend in June with the RoC Modifieds in attendance for their only appearance. Wyoming will also have some of those gimmick events on the schedule. The Fall Final will close the schedule for 2008. Wyoming County has relegated as the short track "out in the middle of nowhere" but track officials seemed to have noticed a change for the better in 2007. The hope to have 25 Mini-Stocks and between 15-20 SST Modifieds at the speedway weekly.

Lake Erie Speedway is going under some major changes for 2008 starting with it's management structure. Gone is Joe Lewandoski as general manager.

Enter Brandon Kaczay, who has been employed at the track for several years before picking up the job to lead the speedway in December. The speedway's biggest event is a July Late Model 150. Gone is the 200-lap event from last year.

Also gone is MAARA, a brainchild of Lewandoski. Lake Erie has a great field of Late Models with its drivers just once a week competitors. Lake Erie is one of the best-looking weekly short tracks in the United States. They need to get car counts up in the support classes. That's it.

Spencer Speedway will see the third season under the ownership of Long Island businessman John White. A Modified racer himself, White has dropped the number of events for the modifieds to seven for the 2008 season. Both the NASCAR Whelen Modified Tour and the RoC Dart Mod Tour will return to Spencer for the first time in several years. Coupled with Chemung (N.Y.) Speedway, White has developed a nice number of SST Modified competitors for both tracks.

Oswego Speedway will have the RoC Modifieds on hand four times and has once again placed several special events on its schedule. In that includes the first-ever paved event for the Empire Super Sprints (ESS) and the ever-popular Classic Weekend on Labor Day. The Sunoco Race of Champions Weekend will end the season in September.

That's it for this week. Send all news and notes to: DRobe72459@aol.com.



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