

PRESENTED BY:



Rick Eckert

In His Own Words

As told to **Lew Boyd**

- Born December 14, 1965 in York, Pennsylvania
- The 2011 World of Outlaws Craftsman Late Model Series champion, 2002 UDTRA Great Northern Challenge champion, and winner of the 1999 Dirt Late Model Dream at Eldora Speedway; 2017 inductee into the National Dirt Late Model Hall of Fame
- A racer who enjoys all aspects of the sport.



J.A. ACKLEY

I'm just a racer. Love all forms of racing. When we're not out on the road somewhere, I go to the races around here in York, Pennsylvania. Sometimes the street stocks put on the best show.

Man, there have been some ups and downs. My national championships were cool, but the best night was at the Dream [at Eldora Speedway] in 1999. I had a good car and was running second to Steve Francis. I passed him late and then did that watching and listening for anything that could possibly screw up. It didn't. Coming off that fourth turn the last time was incredible. There was such an atmosphere back at Eldora when Earl Baltes owned it. Victory lane was crazy.

Probably my worst night—part of it anyway—came eight or nine years ago at Attica Raceway Park in Ohio. We were running my own team with the World of Outlaws, and it wasn't going well. I went to qualify and was second quick on my first lap. Then on the second [lap] I blew wide-open. I was ready to cry. I told Krystal, my wife, "I'm thinking I'm done. I just can't struggle this way any longer. I'm not going to unload our backup car."

She looked at me and said, "Are you crazy? We're going to unload anyway." So, we did and won the B-main. In the A-main I started way back in 19th or 20th and was able to get up to about fifth. Out came the red. Zach, one of my pit guys, came out on the track and said, "Did you just park in a puddle or what!?" I think I said, "Shit!"

A couple of teams helped us replace the radiator, and just as the green flew, I pulled into the last row. Wouldn't you know it, with two to go, I got by Josh Richards for the win.

It started as a horrible time, but I guess the racing gods made it possible for me not to commit suicide. Or, maybe, it was the racing goddess.

The York, Pennsylvania area has always had lots of sprint cars and modifieds. But my dad ran late models when I was growing up. I started in figure eights, then streeters, limiteds, and finally late models when I was a senior in high school in 1984.

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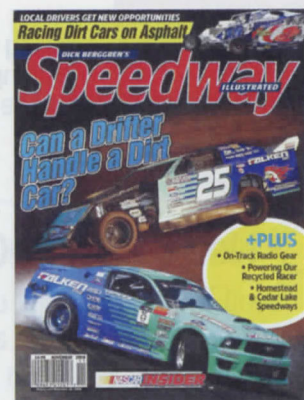
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Cover photo by Karl Fredrickson.



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Then I tried running both sprint cars and late models, often on the same night. It was too much. I went with the late models, but I'll tell you I sure would like to jump in a good sprint car today.

We travel about 50,000 miles a year, and I drive the hauler. We're the only ones from this area, but it isn't a bad place to be. There is so much racing here, and there are lots of parts and racing people. Charlotte would be a good place to live, too.

At one time there may have been more late models than any other form of race car, but now it might be the IMCA/UMP modifieds. They're cool.

The racing life is a busy life. We're pretty much on from February right through November. During high season we run four or five times a week, and it can get brutal. Other times can be a little lax, so we can get caught up making spare bodies and stuff. I would guess it averages out that we work as many hours as normal hard-working folks.

At 51 [years old] I suppose I should take more time to work out than I am right now. Things do hurt more when you get a little older. But I will tell you that doing a 100-lapper is serious exercise.

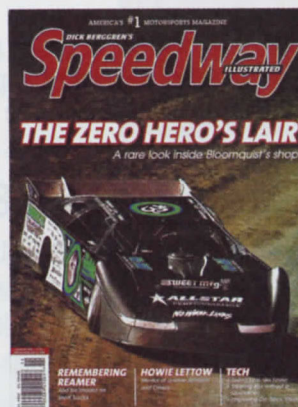
Technology really has taken over. It used to be that when the track was wet, you'd really manhandle the car, and when it dried out,

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Scott Bloomquist took us inside the Zero Hero's lair for a rare tour. Cover photo by Joey Millard.



you'd tip-toe around, trying so hard not to spin your tires. Now there isn't that big a difference in lap times over the course of the night. You have to charge all the time.

There's always something new to keep an eye on—almost a new tech fad. It's going to be air springs next, just as mentioned in *Speedway Illustrated* recently. Some guys had them—fairly hidden—last year and had a lot of success.

There are really no rules with our motors, so they're not an issue. It's been open comp, including wide-bore blocks. That really can't be changed now.

The amount of money needed to go on the late model circuit for a year would make you cry. We have a wonderful owner now, Paul Crowl, who got more sponsors than I ever had. He used to race and just does it for the love of the sport. Every time we go to the races we talk about how grateful we are.

I guess I am a little different. As I said, I really like racing. All of it. Even working on the car and working with sponsors and the media.

It's funny how that all works. The shop phone can really get ringing on Mondays, especially when we are running well. Sometimes we have to leave the phone off the hook so we can get everything all cleaned up from the weekend. I do know that Monday is the night—the one night—that I always have to be home for dinner.

My wife, Krystal, has a couple of Firehouse Subs franchises. I have a daughter, Courtney. She was on the road with me so much by the time she was 10 she was pretty much raced out. I don't have to worry about getting her a sprint car.

I know people have called me Mr. Consistency of the late models. It is true that I try hard not to tear too much stuff up. That, too, is probably from my dad. Back when we were racing together, we didn't have much of a budget. We had to fix everything ourselves.

So many drivers today are kids who come from money, and they tend to be gassers. If they bend something up, they can shrug it off. "Hey, that's no big deal." 🙄



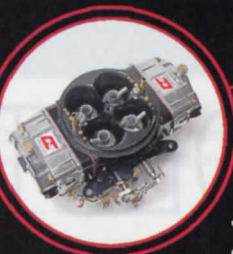
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After an ownership change that did not go well, the employees took control over the magazine and revived it. Since then, it has thrived. Cover photo by Tom Macht.

