

Tim Huddleston

In His Own Words As told to Lew Boyd



Tim Huddleston, right, celebrates in victory lane with his son Trevor, wife, Lisa, son Tanner and daughter, Hailey.

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Behind the wheel or behind the desk, non-stop Tim Huddleston is a racer through and through. A fixture in Irwindale's Victory Lane in late models since 2000, he has racked up 45 wins and three NASCAR Whelen All-American Series track championships. Huddleston says, "With Walt Disney it started with a mouse. For me it was a stock car in high-school shop class." Then it was over to the old Saugus Speedway, where he met his wife, Lisa, daughter of California legend Oren Prosser. In 2017, at age 47, he was a winner in his final race, his son Tanner spotting. Today, aside from supporting his other son Trevor's own meteoric career behind the wheel, Huddleston has taken over the reins of Irwindale with Lisa, while still CEO of High Point Distribution and principal of a driver-development program that has mentored nearly 100 young aspirants.

How did you come up with the keys to Irwindale?

I had to. You see, it really is a crown-jewel facility for short-track racing, and I just knew that, if it went under, there would never be a facility like it again in L.A.

It was started in 1999 by a racing pioneer named Jim Williams, who set out to do it right—and he did. He reached out to our West Coast hero Ron Hornaday about how to design the perfect track. The conclusion was: Just like Tucson Raceway Park but with about 500 feet added to each straight. It turned out to be a beautiful facility with 6,500 seats, a third-mile with progressive banking where three-wide is common and four-wide sometimes.

Jim ran it until 2012 before having to move on. Five years of tough times followed. Nobody seemed to be able to lock in and make it work. Rumors hurt the grandstands and the car counts.

Then, a development group bought the whole property and planned a major project. Their plan did not pan out. Lisa and I just couldn't let the track go. We met with the developer and were able to sign a long-term lease to save the speedway. On Christmas Eve 2017, we signed a lease to open it back up. We partnered 50/50 with Bob and Maureen Bruncati from Sunrise Ford, huge benefactors of West Coast racing.

Quote Worthy

"You've gotta earn your way."

Tim McCreddie
Speedway Illustrated
June 2006

How did it go?

We were ready to work really hard, and the racers were ready to support us. The higher classes of cars showed up, and we built up an enduro class, making it possible for someone to become a NASCAR driver for \$1,000. We tried to encourage more future competitors. By 2019, our second year, we had an amazing summer with six sellouts. The ARCA race was huge. We had events paying \$10,000 to win with the open late models and \$25,000 with super late models.

How in the world did you draw the fans?

We run a tight, fast show with seven divisions. It's all about the racing for sure, but with extra passion. For us it's a family thing. We are in the media constantly, and my son Tanner produces a TV channel with our racing. Daughter Hailey comes back from school on weekends to do the National Anthem and to assist. Trevor, aside from racing, helps in training racers. And Lisa, she's really something. She gets them all moving, especially the kids. She'll run out in the stands with the Gummy Bear song blaring in the background. She'll toss out candy, and you should see those kids dancing.

There's also the element of surprise. Andrew Lloyd Weber says to do what they don't expect. We try to surprise the fans with some sort of gag each night to get them wondering what's going to happen next. We never advertise what it might be, but we might have a motor home do a barrel roll or a car do an outrageous jump of some kind over a ramp we have disguised. People like some chaos.

How did you cope with COVID-19?

It certainly was a concern for us, as for everybody. But our situation is a little different—and that's a good thing.

A constant issue here in California is land value. This facility, within an area populated by 18 million people, is currently worth about \$65,000,000. So we really need multiple revenue streams to satisfy our lease. We've been particularly fortunate with two things.

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Quote Worthy

"If you get a guy who starts out hot in Florida and then runs good all spring, he'll probably be a factor at The Dream."

Billy Moyer, Column
Speedway Illustrated
June 2011

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VOICE OF EXPERIENCE

First, we are within 30 miles of Hollywood's famous entertainment industry. We are called upon constantly for photo shoots, and, needless to say, they are very welcome. Filming has been a part of the speedway's life blood from the beginning, and there is no reason that should not continue.

Second, we had a short-term boost from our neighbor, a famous cancer-care hospital called the City of Hope. A major construction project left little room for their 1,500 employees to park each weekday, so we rented them our lots. It's been a life-saver.

Additionally, we were actually able to run a pretty normal schedule last year, but, of course, without fans. We managed to put on 12 nights of oval racing, featuring all seven classes. Virtually all of our competitors came, and fans tuned in on TV. Not a penny could be paid in purse money, but we lowered the pit passes enough to just cover the night's insurance and fire expenses. You can bet that we pushed sponsorships of our TV presentations really hard.

We also have an eighth-mile, street-legal drag course, which is highly valuable to us. It draws 250-500 cars each week and, without COVID, about 2,000 spectators each Thursday night.

So, all said and done, we were really lucky. We actually finished 2020 in the black.

How do things look going forward?

There is no question that racing has its issues, but we are optimistic. I do feel secure here, with a great future moving forward.

I know there's a lot of talk about dirt racing these days, and I love to watch it. But there is a strong tradition of pavement racing in California, and we are definitely intent on holding out and keeping the spirit of Saugus and the other fallen places going. There are currently five paved tracks out here—Kern, Madera, Stockton, All-American Speedway, and, of course, Irwindale Speedway. We all talk, we all feel the same way, and we all try to keep our rules together and to avoid date conflicts. 🏁

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