

Cory Reed

In His Own Words As told to **Lew Boyd**

PRESENTED BY:



My career has been a natural progression. While at Indiana University, as a race fan I was lucky enough to become an intern for Glenn Donnelly and his DIRT Motorsports in 1995. It was perfect for me, and I vowed to stay until he kicked me out. He never did. I did all the everyday stuff he didn't want to worry about, and I traveled to all the DIRT Series races, wherever they happened to be.

When Glenn sold to Boundless Motor Sports in 2004, I bounced around New York a little—to Middletown, back to Weedsport, and then, nine years ago, to run Brewerton and Fulton speedways, along with my current Sportsman Series director position at DIRTcar.

Everyone knows that racing has been going through a challenging period. Both the pits and the stands have been impacted. Think of all the entertainment alternatives being offered up today as compared to the 1950s, '60s, and '70s. And, honestly, the economy might be good in some places, but you can't say that about Central New York.

Promoters need to be much more aggressive about bargains. So many people have the "Groupon philosophy" these days—looking for a deal. Minor league hockey is popular here—three and a half hours in an arena for \$17 to \$20. We need to try to get by at \$12 if we are going to be the alternative.

My biggest worry is how we can keep the next generation in it for the long haul. We need the kids to come. We let anyone in for free until they are 19. It is amazing how much the attention of that generation is being dragged off in other directions, more often electronic than real. But I do agree with those who have noticed a recent rebound in the short tracks. There is enthusiasm out there for this season. It's kind of too bad that some of it may stem from NASCAR's problems. Look at that emptiness at Bristol in April. Fans are

- Born July 19, 1971, in Berlin, Vermont
- Track manager, Brewerton and Fulton speedways in New York; series director, DIRTcar Sportsman Modified Series
- A passionate purveyor of short-track racing, with an outlook focused on the long-term health of the sport

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likely thinking that they can come to our track for a full season for what it costs to go to a race at Bristol or one of the super-speedways.

What is exploding for us is the sportsman division. Up here in the Northeast, they are center-steer dirt cars with GM 602 crate engines. Everybody keeps saying that everybody cheats with crates. We sure keep an eye on that, but, frankly, we don't find it that prevalent.

Teams work harder and spend more to get around the limited nature of the crate, more so than cheating with the internal components. They focus on lighter parts, tire prep, carbs, and distributors. Everyone knows we are looking at the engines. I take some of it with a grain of salt. Before crate engines, everyone's excuse for not winning was "I'm getting outspent." Now it's, "They must be cheating."

We're typically getting about 50 602 sportsman entries a week, 10 to 20 novices (a division with the same cars, but with only rookies), and this summer we're expecting 22 to 24 of our 358 modifieds.

I see three main benefits to the 602s. First, obviously, is the cost. A new one is about \$3,600, and there are tons of what I call "pre-loved" engines available all over the place for \$2,000 to \$3,000. That's a huge discount from the cost of a built engine these days.

Second is their bulletproof simplicity. We have varying mechanical skill sets in this division. Some entries are kids still entering the sport like they used to back in the day. Some are kids, boys and girls, who are being helped by their dads and moms as a family activity. There are the regular, experienced racers, age 20 to 40, that used to typify a pit area. Now there are a whole lot of 50-plus folks who wanted to race but never could, or who now are reentering the sport in the more affordable sportsman cars.

Lastly, because with three divisions with essentially the same car, you can find a good roller and get started very easily. If you are a good shopper, you can come through our gate for an outlay of about \$10,000, give or take.



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But, with the good comes the bad. Of course, some promoters feel the need to overpay the sportsman class. You still need to have racers aspire to go to another level and if you give them the full loaf in sportsman, they stay put. Also, some of our other classes have taken a hit because the sportsman class has grown so popular. A balance between classes is important at your weekly shows.

Our goal is to have strong weekly programs, featuring classes that follow a logical upward progression—up to the 358 modifieds or big blocks in this area. At Fulton, we recently transitioned to the 358s because of lower costs, and their lap times at our tracks are just as fast as the big blocks. We built a bridge between sportsman and big blocks. At Brewerton, we maintained big blocks as our headliner. In order to have good specials, you have to have a base of cars to start with, which is a product of a solid weekly program.

Sportsman-only racing may work in some places—like for C.V. Elms at Bear Ridge Speedway or Mike Bruno at Devil's Bowl Speedway in Vermont, but Central New York is modified country. Our fans want to see the stars on Friday and Saturday nights, and we have Larry Wight, Billy Decker, Pat Ward, Jimmy Phelps, Tim and Tom Sears, and the rest of them. We still need to post that \$8,000 modified purse even though we'd probably make more money if sportsman was our headliner.

There are some interesting things going on this year with special shows. One thing that has been a disappointment for the Northeast has been that Glenn Donnelly seems to have hit a brick wall with his massively planned, multi-purpose racing facility to be built right alongside Brewerton's property. He envisioned it as the permanent home of Super DIRT Week, when the Syracuse mile was decommissioned. He has tried like hell, and it would be a game-changer for all of us. I have to say that Oswego Speedway and DIRTcar have done a great job with Super DIRT Week, which has drawn great crowds. But what a project it is to transform a paved facility into a dirt track for one week a year, right on the shores of Lake Ontario, with its funky weather.

What has also happened this year, though, is that some enormously high-paying specials have been scheduled with great drama. Chris Larsen, an ultra-successful businessman and race fan, has taken over Orange County Fair Speedway in Middletown, New York, and appears to be giving back. Among his splashy announcements is a \$100,000-to-win modified event in August. You just have to take notice and support something like that. But I must say I sure am glad I am not next door and competing with him for cars.

Brett Deyo has taken over another legendary New York track, Fonda Speedway, with a similar spin. He's paying a sky-high \$53,000 to win the Fonda 200, run in October, right in football season. I respect Brett. He's so good at what he does—at capturing people who will support him financially. But will some of that sponsor enthusiasm wear off over time? Will the crowds be that much bigger to continue to support outlays like that?

Most people realize that those purses just aren't sustainable. I certainly couldn't do it, and I don't think it will last. There has been a tendency for years for promoters to jack up interest with top-heavy purses. I just can't see it. I say put on a great show and offer a fair payoff to all competitors. Tracks have to stay in business or there is no place for the race cars to race, and there is nothing worse than having to take back lavish things later.

Some of the most underrated, hard-working people in our sport are the track owners. I've had the privilege of working closely with a lot of them in my career. There are a lot of them that have been doing it a long time. It's no cakewalk for them. And these days if Mother Nature doesn't kill you, social media will.

Here it is Thursday, I'm talking with you, and I'm terrified about what looks like a terrible weather weekend at Fulton and Brewerton. But, I'm lucky. I'm the track manager. Sure, if we have a really bad season, I could lose my job. But if we lose both events this weekend, I will still get paid. Not so for those owners. They may end up eating bologna the next week. They are so underappreciated. ☹

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