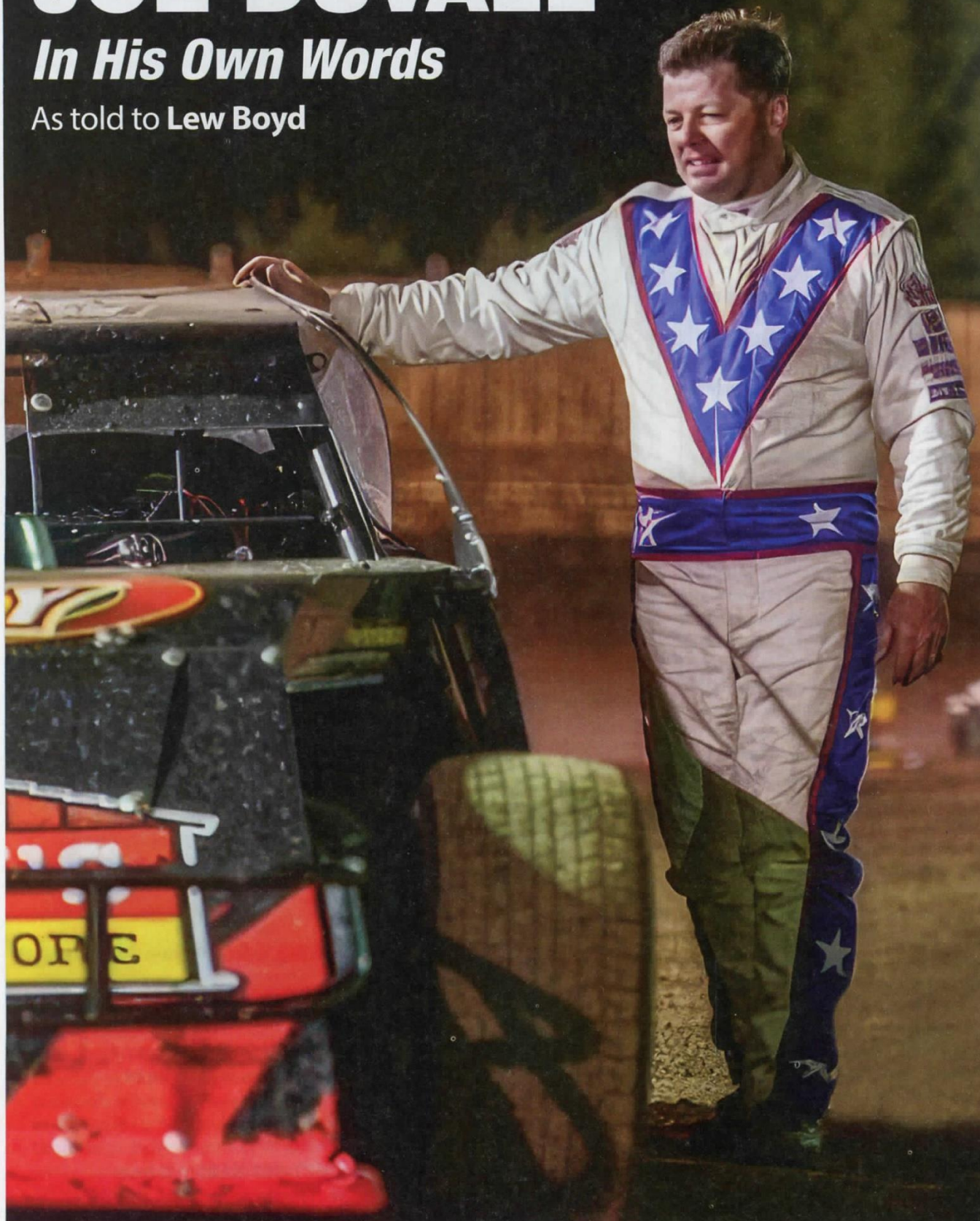


# JOE DUVALL

*In His Own Words*

As told to Lew Boyd



TEEJAY CRAWFORD

- ***Born July 18, 1972, in Tulsa, Oklahoma***
- ***A feisty, irreverent standout in middle America, starting out in flat-track racing, followed by decades of winning in modifieds. He's flashy and opinionated, always focused on putting on a show, sometimes not geared for perfectly polite company.***

**I**t was 9/11, and there I was, flat on my back in a hospital in Utica, New York, every bone you're not supposed to break, busted.

I had crashed flat-tracking on the mile at Vernon Downs. It was the worst one of my racing career. I went down in turn one at 100 mph and got smashed by my bike and the hay bales. It made me contemplate my life a bit while recuperating.

It was no surprise that I was a racer. I'd been at a track every Saturday night since diapers—and my dad even went AWOL from the service in 1963 to go car racing.

I got going on motorcycles at 14, and a couple of things were immediately obvious. I liked to go fast, and I was infatuated with the road. So, it was off flat-tracking as soon as I could. I persuaded my sister, uncle, or friends to take me to the races, while at times I told my mom something else.

As I got older, I raced professionally, full time, all over the place. It was not easy going. One time we were headed to the races down in Boyd, Texas. That was back when we knew only two or three people who had cell phones, and they were rich. We certainly weren't. We blew a tire on a two-lane in the middle of Nowhere, Texas. Flat broke, we walked four hours in the blistering afternoon sun in our Justin boots

## VOICE OF EXPERIENCE

and jeans to a pay phone to call Oklahoma City for help. It was four hours back, and, wouldn't you know, the races were canceled.

Eventually, I had pretty much burned out on racing professionally, running all over the country, for short money and having to sleep for so long on my mom's couch. By 1999, all I had was a \$9,000 house, a \$2,500 van, and \$1,000 in the bank. To improve my finances, I started a little contracting company, Duvall Electric. The company did seem to spark, but it was hard to build it and race, especially at any distance away.

Understandably, lying there in the hospital after my crash led to some game changes in my life. The next year, 2002, I got married to Shelley, being very careful to tell her that I wasn't putting my fire suit on the hook. And by 2004, I had switched over to modified dirt cars. On four wheels, I figured I would have a better chance of leaving racing on my own terms when the time came. So far, the cars have been pretty smooth. I think I got a hangnail once.

It was finances that at first somewhat limited my getting out on the road with cars, which were a lot more expensive than bikes. It takes years to get all the equipment, parts, and personnel to form a good team.

One thing that never held me back, though, was a lack of self-confidence. I've never been short on that. I'm the guy who always wanted to fight the biggest guy in the bar just for the fun of it. I've always wanted to run against the fastest guys, whether or not I thought I could actually line up with them. I figure it's true that steel can sharpen steel, iron can sharpen iron.

Because of that, I race with those sanctions with the most open rules like USMTS and UMP. That's where the big dogs are. When you race, you always have to fit into a certain box of restrictions, but we race against some really cool hot rods. We're not tied down. Some series operate within a much smaller box, and that's the smoothest public relations way I can say it.

I've always had a running joke that's not particularly polite. I tell people, "I'm a prick—and that's one of the things I like

about myself." In fairness, I know I am feisty and, for better or worse, tell it as I see it.

When I got into cars, I was shocked. The bike world had been so different. In bikes there was so much flash and excitement, while the four-wheel guys seemed rigged up like a bunch of dorks. They seem to think that the racing business is about racing. It isn't. I say it's *entertainment*.

Doing my part, I really like to get people worked up—in the pits and in the stands. Give 'em something to talk about, even if it's outrageous. I've always had wild fire suits. Among them, one Evel Knievel-themed and a new one remembering the bike days in the '90s with wild zebra colors. And we once had a lime-green hauler. Anyone in the country who saw that blow by sure knew who it was. My goal is to be the 32nd flavor at Baskin-Robbins. I feel you've got to separate yourself from the crowd.

But actually, a lot of my branding comes from *Smokey and the Bandit*. I love that movie and what it says about people and the road. I have the nickname "Big Daddy." The Big Daddy thing started in a bar. After some incident, I commented, "Come over and sit in Big Daddy's lap, and I'll tell you about it." The name kinda stuck after that, and I went along with it.

As for "Bandit," in the movie someone refers to him as an "Egotistical son of a bitch." I resonate with that. We sell S&S Race Hauler rigs, and I put a huge and unmissable Wild West wrap down the side of ours, honoring the movie. It took a long time to get permission to use the artwork and to put it all together, but people of all shapes walk up and groove on it. So do I.

By this time, I figure we've got somewhere between 150 and 200 wins. Additionally, I have three to four track titles and a few NASCAR Weekly Series State Championships. To be honest, I never concentrated on points racing. I was a traveler and didn't want to be tied down.

Over the years, the amount of racing I could do was determined by how well Duvall Electric was doing. It was cyclical. Right now, things are cooking. I have 14 great guys working for me, and we can

## VOICE OF EXPERIENCE

easily undertake \$1.5 million projects. The guys are older, some have been racers, and they get it. (Just now we have someone younger, the grandson of Emmett Hahn, the Chili Bowl promoter).

I wear many hats, and I'm so grateful these guys understand my racing and help take care of the business when I'm playing race cars. They are joined by a group of friends who just want to be involved, be part of it, and support it. That way we have been able to remain independent without primary sponsors and to race the way we want to race.

I really try to provide value for them for their contributions. It's the way it has to be. One thing I often do is to have videos made of our activities, crediting folks for what they do. Have they ever become popular! We did one when we finished the Wild West trailer wrap, and we had 50,000 views in the first eight hours.

We don't do anything like building chassis. I write checks for expensive race cars, and

we go try to win races. We do have some special tricks and we do some testing now and then, but it's pretty much buy 'em, run 'em, and then send 'em down the road.

Right now, we are in a good patch with the business, so this year we will have a pretty strong schedule, probably about 60 events, putting 20,000 miles on the hauler. By May 1, we'd already run more than 20 shows.

At 51, I am still ready to go. I just love to set out and compete. We'll often be down in Amarillo, Texas, for Saturday night. When traveling I typically like to roll through the night because there is so much less traffic, and the pavement is less hot and easier on the rig itself. I enjoy the driving; I do 90% of it and am still comfortable pulling back up to the garage with Sunday's sunrise. I will admit, though, even as someone who thought for years all anyone did on Saturday night was go to the races, a little while back I discovered lakes and islands. There now will be the occasional Sunday afternoon pursuing that.

The future of racing in general seems mixed to me at the moment. I believe the bigger, more national sanctions like the World of Outlaw Sprint Cars, Lucas Oil Late Models, USMTS all seem to be going well. But regular, local Saturday-night shows appear to have problems. I can honestly say I don't know a promoter who isn't trying, but the programs just aren't exciting and are often not drawing like they used to.

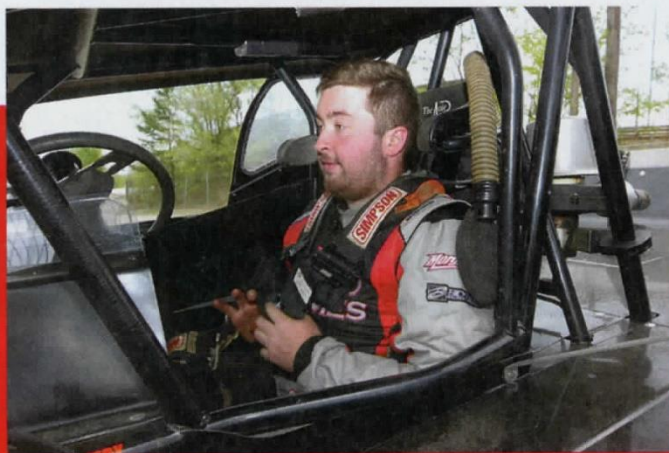
One thing that drives me crazy is the pandering that allows so many classes of cars, yet all looking alike. That divides the field up, reducing the number in each event and causing everything to run too late into the night. That should be streamlined. If the cars are not separated by at least a second, they should all be in the same class.

This probably won't sit well with everyone—and I may be called morbid—but I think that there always needs to be at least a perceived element of danger in racing. If bull riding was safe, who would go to see it? That's the allure. I honestly think that a good deal of lunch money is saved in order to buy a ticket to the races to see just how big someone's family jewels might be. I am certainly not advocating that we go back to racing's scarier days, but the sport would be a snore without honoring bravery. There has always been that tension in this sport. You have to really put out to win, but if you play too hard, you can pay a big price. That should never go away.

I have no crystal ball. I just love what I do, but I know there's not as much sand in the hourglass as there once was. When the time comes for me to move on, I think I will realize it. I will pay attention because I have seen a lot of guys race too long and come to resent it—but then have nothing else to do with their lives.

Not long ago, I was out to lunch with my wife and daughter. A bunch of kids wearing racing shirts came up to me and wanted to talk. They were excited and it felt nice. When they left, my wife asked if I knew their names, and I didn't. I guess that can make you feel like a bit of a rock star for a moment, but at the same time it made me wish I could have been friends with everyone who came to know me over the years. **FSW**

## Coming Soon



**New Jersey racer Brandon Grosso and his family's quest to save the area speedway.**

Only Inside

**Speedway**  
ILLUSTRATED  
"Faster. Safer. Wiser."