

# Randy Williamson

*In His Own Words*

As told to **Lew Boyd**

**PRESENTED BY:**



- Born December 4, 1959,  
in St. Catharines, Ontario, Canada
- Co-owner of Bicknell Racing Products,  
proud father of a dirt modified racer,  
and a former track promoter.

Over the years I have seen racing from three different perspectives. They're all interrelated, but they're all different.

I was part owner, along with Pete Bicknell, and operator of Merrittville Speedway in St. Catharines, Ontario, from 2003 to 2016. That's tough—promoters just can't keep everybody happy and yet they have to. People get upset; everything can go wrong, like the hydro [aka water] going out at a dirt track. And it's a totally seasonal business.

I've been part owner with Pete Bicknell at Bicknell Racing Products (BRP) forever [since it started in 1988]. It's a little easier than promoting. We build race cars and only have to keep the owner and the driver happy.

Tracey and I are also parents to Mat, now 28, who races modifieds. With that I just make sure he is in the safest possible equipment and that he drives with his head instead of his ambition. Tracey thinks it's also her job to worry about him.

I have concerns about the sport, though. As a race car businessman, I want our customers to win big races and make lots of money. And, when my son is racing, I sure would like to see him take home \$20,000. But you have to realize that promoters are having a hard time paying big bucks. We can't ask them for more. There just aren't enough people in the stands—or sponsors signing marketing checks.

About 15 years ago at Merrittville, we began to notice a decline in our car count. There were only 12 sportsman [cars]. But at the same time, we'd have maybe 100 karters come in for kart night. That looked good, and it seemed to us that kids are the key to our future. The natural progression would be that the ones who liked it and showed some talent could move up and see what they could do with a sportsman.

But there's a problem. Somehow there are fewer kids these days that want to work with their hands. In a way, at BRP we've almost made things too convenient for them. Most everybody these days wants the whole car—not just some parts. Bottom line, if we build it at BRP, they will buy

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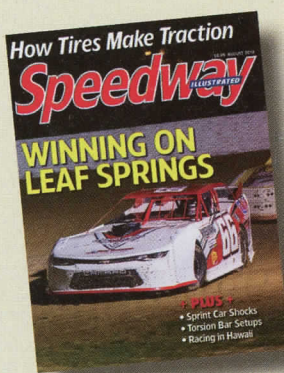
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it. That's the hard part. And, to be honest, there's all kinds of trinket stuff that guys don't really need. I urge our newer customers to talk with the older guys who've been there and won. They don't buy what's unnecessary, and they're not about to steer a kid in the wrong direction. Their motivation is to get that kid running straight so no one will get wrecked.

Things really started to get out of control with motors. Back in 2004, an open sportsman motor was running about \$20,000. You can't keep within a reasonable racing budget with that.

So we wanted to try a crate motor—the GM 602. That was in the \$3,500 range. We didn't know if it would work, but we had a good test opportunity. In 2004, Mat at age 14 had been racing karts for seven years. We decided to put him in a sportsman with a 602 to see what would happen. He did well. He almost won the third time out and he got two features by the end of the summer.

We were pleased, so we offered the car up for lease on race nights thinking that perhaps we could entice other people to go this route. But that was really impractical. Because of the maintenance, it was difficult to be competitive on a nightly basis.

Then we just went for it. We knew we had to be sensitive to the fact that some teams already had invested in open motors. We knew we'd have to phase things in. In 2006 we announced we would allow only crate motors, but we'd give everyone a year to use up what open equipment they had left. We became the first track to go crate-only with the DIRT sportsman division.

As you can imagine, some people wanted to throw us under the bus. There is no way we were intending to take money away from businesses that were building open motors, but we wanted to help our racers with costs, with the intent that eventually—having moved to sportsman from karts—they would then make the transition to 358s or the big block division.

In my mind that was the start of the sportsman craze. We build cars for the Northeastern region, and it has been noticeable. How about 66 sportsman at Weedsport, New York, the other week—and those huge weekly fields farther east in Malta?

Vicky Emig owned and promoted Mercer, Pennsylvania, for years. She has the RUSH Late Model Series and saw a need for something cheaper as a support division. She started with a sportsman division two years ago. She now has 40 of them.

As for Mat, along with running BRP's body shop, he runs a 358 and a big block modified as well as racing for Jeff Behrent in Brett Deyo's Short Track Super Series. I was proud that he recently got second behind Danny Johnson and ahead of Matt Sheppard in a Super DIRTcar Series 100-lapper at Canandaigua, which is a track where Danny and Mat both have extensive experience. But Mat is very lucky. I'll tell you this—he would never be doing that without a sponsor's help.

So, all in all, BRP is going along very well. It was big for Pete and me to bring in Bobby Slack, former owner of Slack Karts, as another partner in BRP. Bob has a vision and is very smart with design and performance; he'll assist us in producing the best product we can. We have grown, and we now have almost 50 employees. In 2017 we put out 244 cars. Right now, we're building our 238th, and we should end up with 20 more, for our best year yet.

As you can imagine, though, it's all in. Pete, Bob and I always answer the phone, emails, or text messages 24/7. An Australian called me at 2:00 am on a recent New Year's Eve in Canada but January 1 is race day in Australia. He had all kinds of setup questions for a race later that day. I won't vouch for the quality of my specific answers. 🍀