

In His Own Words

As told to **Lew Boyd**

Wes Moody



PRESENTED BY:

- Born January 23, 1940 in Saranac Lake, New York
- Outstanding, highly spirited 60-year career in dirt and pavement modifieds as a driver, builder, promoter, and car owner
- Famous 100-mph-plus run in 1971 led the New York State Fairgrounds track in Syracuse to be known henceforth as the "Moody Mile"

I can't believe I am still alive. Guess I'm the luckiest guy in the world. I've got a great family, and all they want is to be part of me. And my friends still want to come to the races, even after all these years.

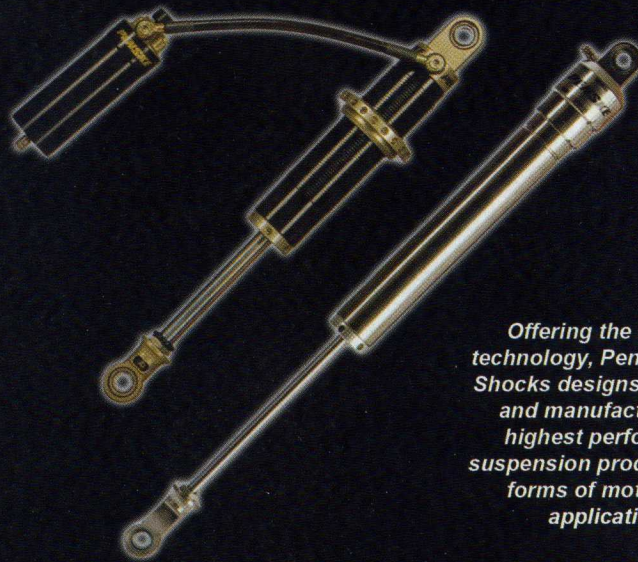
Now that I think about it, it's been going on for some time. Our racing actually started in sled dogs in the late '40s in the Adirondack Mountains in upstate New York. It's one long winter on the Saint Lawrence Seaway.

After that it was hydroplanes. My granddad had a boat-rental business up here on the Lake, so we were always on the water in the summer. We raced 7-½-horsepower hydroplanes and bigger ones, too. Pretty dangerous business, that.

Soon we discovered karts—and cars. I heard they started building a track in Saranac Lake. I was 17. I worked there and built a '34 Ford two-door to bang off the fence.

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Then came a '37 coupe, a 292 Ford up front. I took it down to Irish Jack Murphy, the Oswego [N.Y.] Speedway runner, to do the engine. Got to be such good friends with those pavement guys, even though the dirt was my deal—I always considered Fonda [Speedway, in New York] my home track.

Lebanon Valley in New York ran popular 100-lap open competitions the first Sunday of every month. I'd go there and then always get a letter from NASCAR saying I was banned and could never race with them again, and blah, blah. So, the next week I'd go to Fonda and see their promoter, Jim Gage. He'd say, "Oh, well, you come with me, my boy, and we'll get those NASCAR officials straightened out."

After Saranac Lake closed, we started going to Rolling Wheels near Syracuse. I was at Irish Jack's shop, and those asphalt guys were really picking on me. They said Jimmy Shampine would kick my ass at the Wheels. He'd won there five in a row or something.

Well, I went. Most of those guys were asphalt racers. So, I took that coupe right up to the wall, rim rode it, backed it into the turns big time, and blew them all off. They were pissed. The next week they put me on my roof.

Eventually Airborne Speedway in Plattsburgh, New York, paved, and we'd run there. I started hanging around with Richie Evans and Sonny Seamon. Sonny and I built all his cars, mine, and Richie's. Richie kicked our asses.

Those were fun days. I'd drink a lot of beer after the races. Sonny would drink twice as much. Richie was usually more under control. He knew he had to drive home. I just didn't care. But at the Rusty Nail, the bar in Rome, New York, where Richie lived, the sky was the limit. What a great person he was, but totally nuts.

I broke my leg in five places in a barroom fight in Lake Placid on a Thursday night. Got out of the hospital on Saturday with a huge cast and went to the garage on crutches. The crew was pissed we couldn't race. So I hobbled over, grabbed the

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Quote Worthy

You know who's the smartest announcer in the world? The one who doesn't assume that we're smart, too.

Bones Bourcier, Speedway Illustrated, May 2016

torches, and started rearranging the pedals. I told them we had to win the \$1000 at Devil's Bowl Speedway in Vermont that weekend. We did. It hurt so much, I cried in victory lane.

So off we went to Langhorne [Speedway in Pennsylvania], that cast still in place. Jim Hurtubise walked up and I shook his hand. Wow, did that feel disfigured and leathery from his 1964 fire at Milwaukee. He said, "I can't believe anyone would want to race that badly to go with a broken leg." I told him I was thinking that same way about him.

One time at Syracuse I was battling Dick Tobias and a couple others. Then I kinda lost concentration because going into the third turn, bullets were hitting the car. What the hell was going on? Richie and Sonny, standing next to the fence, were throwing ice cubes at me. My buddies!

I loved that Syracuse mile. And in 1971, I got lucky. It had been a tough season. That August we went to run the pavement at Airborne, and I was broke. We put our last \$15 into Sunoco 250 gasoline. C.J. Richards, the promoter, wouldn't let us in. Finally Richie lent us money for pit passes.

Everyone was running Firestone "steam rollers." Needless to say we couldn't afford them. Then I saw a guy had come over from Vermont with Goodyears. Nobody wanted them, because they weren't as wide. I went over to try to panhandle some—and he gave in.

We won the feature big time. There was a line at that Goodyear truck then. (Everyone except Richie who had a deal with Firestone.)

The next night we went to Devil's Bowl and won there, too. The Goodyear guy was *psyched*. He gave me some Goodyear "rain tires."

Then came Labor Day weekend, Syracuse time. We had run Friday, Saturday, and Sunday, struggling with a used stock bore 454. We were totally exhausted. We got to the Fairgrounds very early Monday morning and slept under the trailer.

The track looked smooth and hard. I decided to give the rain tires a shot. We kept our asphalt setup.

I couldn't believe the car in the heat race. The stars were just aligned. I got out front and going into the turn kept checking—and no one was behind. I certainly didn't expect we were setting a track record. That had belonged to Irish Jack at 38 seconds. We got down to 36 seconds, meaning we were the first to reach the 100-mph average. Jack changed his tune. He just said, "Holy shit!" And the announcer, Joe Marotta, really went wild. That's the moment when he renamed Syracuse "the Moody Mile." Even though, after leading the first 20 laps, that ancient 454 blew up, I still muttered "holy shit" all the way home.

I kept racing steadily though the '70s, holding back only when expenses became too much. I did some promoting, too, liked it, but funny how that works: I was usually considered a good guy when I raced, but when I promoted I was a real asshole.

My wife, Debbie, and I have been together for nearly 40 years. And with her, I ended up with a stepson, Patrick Dupree. He's the real deal. He led me back to the pits as a car owner. I've had some good runners in my cars—like Mike Perrotte and Karl Fredrickson [publisher of this magazine], and Jessica Zemken. She came to Airborne, first time on pavement, started down back, and got third. I loved it when she was under the car changing gears. She's a real wheel-girl, but Patrick has been my main guy the last 20 seasons. You know, kids can argue a lot at first, but somehow I don't now seem as dumb to him as I used to. He's one excellent young man.

We have fun, but the money just keeps getting more and more out of control—\$300 for a wheel. We've got six or seven sponsors plus our own business to help us, but it's still a struggle.

This year will be Airborne again. We've got a couple of Teo chassis and engines from Andy Costello over in Vermont. He's really good and he likes Patrick a lot. The track will again be dirt. Hope the new clay has some bite to it. We know it will be rough for a couple months, but that's racing. You watch. We'll be fast. 🏆

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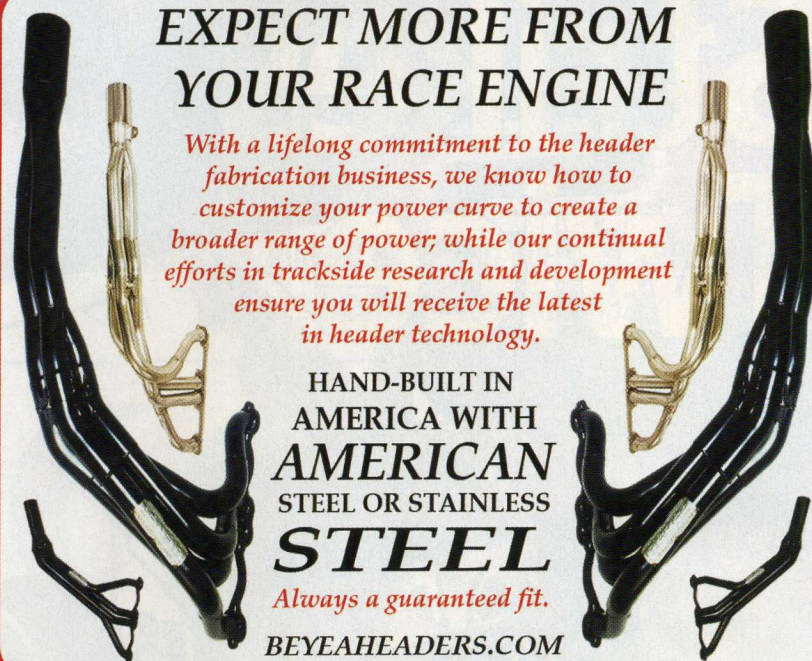
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