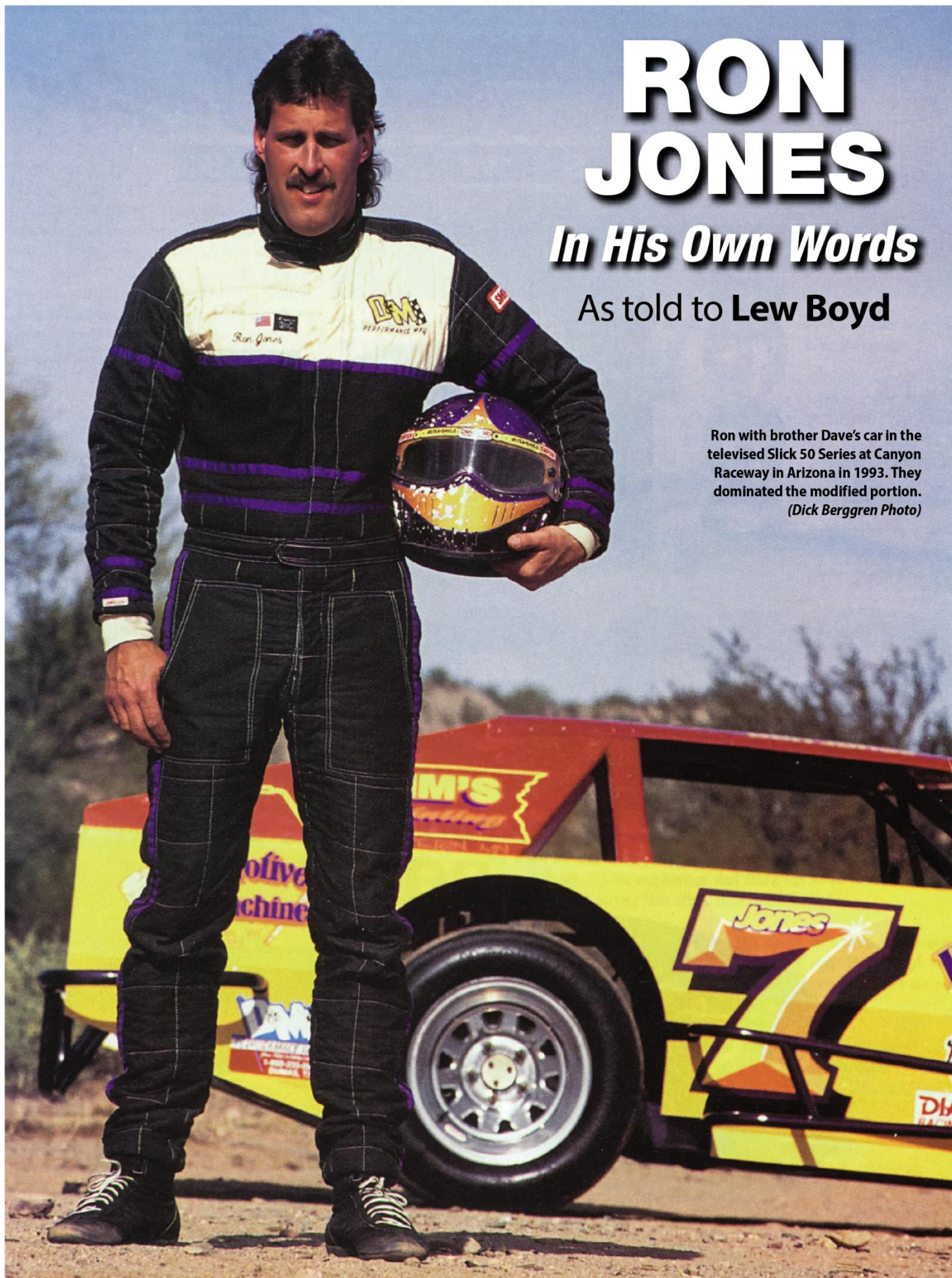


# RON JONES

*In His Own Words*

As told to **Lew Boyd**

Ron with brother Dave's car in the televised Slick 50 Series at Canyon Raceway in Arizona in 1993. They dominated the modified portion.  
*(Dick Berggren Photo)*





• **Born on March 26, 1958, in St. Paul, Minnesota**

• **A prodigious winner in the '80s, '90s, and early 2000s who was among the very first to make a living racing WISSOTA-type modifieds. Clever and edgy, he put together all the necessary pieces to become recognized as one of the finest modified campaigners in the country.**

In 1973 my family moved to Princeton, Minnesota, with two brothers and three sisters and not much else. I was a typical kid. During school I was completely focused on being good at baseball.

There's a little quarter-mile dirt track nearby, and my father had a race car, but I wasn't into it and didn't go. After high school I went through that typical young period of drinking and partying. I was working construction and then landed a union job.

My brother Dave was good mechanically and he'd later build chassis for folks. He had been working with Dad on the race car, but then he moved to Florida, so I stepped in to help. And when the driver quit, I started driving in 1979. I sure wasn't ready, but I found I really enjoyed it. Dad didn't support me much. He never stepped out to watch me, but my mom did. When I started running better, he didn't give me credit, at least to my face. That was actually very good for me because it fired me up. That same deep passion I'd had for baseball was back.

A couple of years later, I won 37 features. At that point I realized I could actually do this. I quit my job—drinking, too—to go racing full time.

I always liked Princeton Speedway because it's a two-lane track, and you can pass. I won 88 features there. But the local WISSOTA modified tracks typically paid \$300-400 to win, so you had to travel and seek out the big-paying shows. I started picking up rides and became one of the first from

Minnesota to go on the road. To do that you needed a whole lot of self-confidence. Doing it for a living, I had to win. On top of that, I had that "want" to be the best.

In 1987, a former sprint car owner, Jim Casci, approached me to drive for his new modified team. He was a case! Son of a family with real-estate money, he owned the agency that supplied girls to strip clubs far and wide. He flaunted his money. There were always a couple of girls around our car. That's why a whole lot of people would hang around our pit after the races.

It was so different then, so much cheaper. Jim could be flashy. He bought 10 motors for a total cost of \$8,000, shocks were \$39, and gas around a dollar.

A good thing with WISSOTA up in Minnesota was, when engine-claiming someone, you'd swap motors. We got claimed a lot, but when we did, we'd usually end up with better parts from their motor. I can't think of anyone who claimed us twice.

I admit it must have been a show when we pulled into town with our big hauler. I got booed a lot, especially back at Princeton—except when I was coming back to the pits on a wrecker. But everybody got real friendly when they needed some part. We worked so hard and were so prepared that we had everything, and they'd be right over to borrow it.

As things turned out, it was all over with Jim Casci by 1993. The money was gone. He soon passed away, and, of all things I hooked up with Dave, as we had once before. We ran really well for a couple years, but, like with my dad, things just didn't seem to work out for the two of us. Our relationship frayed, and we broke up again.

I always looked ahead in traffic because I knew we couldn't crash. But, when I did, I did. Whenever I drove for someone for the first time, it seemed I rolled their car. I'd say, "When you get it ready again, give me a call." I do take comfort that my brother Dave rolled more cars on the street than I did on the track. He never really raced, but twice he tried out the car we were running. Both times he came back on a wrecker. He said he couldn't understand why you have to slow down for the turns.

***"I remember taking in \$10,000 in a race in Arizona, and we stopped for gas on the way home. When we got to the motel, Chub and his wife realized they'd lost the packet with the money. Amazingly, a day later I got a call from my wife saying she'd received a call from the track. The gas station attendant had found the money left on the counter."***

From time to time, I had thought of other forms of racing. I considered pavement and ASA and had an opportunity, but the payoffs just weren't going to be enough. An uncle in California arranged an interview for me with a Winston West team. I was really enthusiastic about that, but soon could see that, like now, it's not just the talent of the driver, it's the money he brings. That left me out and back to the modifieds. Michael McDowell got the ride.

No matter what happened—even returning from some distant race in the middle of the night with a smashed-up car—I never lost that drive to be the *best*, to overcome everything. One night we won a \$10,000 show in Lubbock (Texas) and I towed all the way home to Wisconsin that night, so jacked up about winning.

I tried to keep going after Dave left, while everyone was telling me I'd never run as good again. That really got me fired up. I was constantly on the lookout for anyone who could help in any way. One night out in WaKeeney, Kansas, all alone, I whipped them big time. Chub Daniels was there and took notice of me. He owned D&M Manufacturing, the well-known racing parts company. We teamed up, and he gave me a stable of cars, the checkbook, and a credit card. We were fast right from the start.

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## VOICE OF EXPERIENCE

later I got a call from my wife saying she'd received a call from the track. The gas station attendant had found the money left on the counter. She noticed the address on the envelope and called the track, and the track called my home. Needless to say, the Daniels had been pretty worked up about this and gratefully gave the girl a few hundred bucks. I was completely calm about my piece of it. I reminded them I already had the checkbook.

I admit I was kind of a smart ass back then. I think it's from my mother's side of the family. In the 1990s, I was often winning over half the races we ran. I wanted to win and knew I could. Sometimes people would come up to me and say, "Anyone with the money and equipment you have could run strong." My answer was, "Then why didn't Chub call you?"

In 2006, Chub died, and actually so did my serious racing. The costs had become outrageous, and it ruined things. I was also facing neck surgery, but there was one more big event to go.

The speedway in Las Cruces, New Mexico, ran a big race each fall and each spring, and I won nine of them. One was the first Chub Daniels Memorial in March 2007, and the D&M boys built a special car for me. It was quite a race, but I managed to win, to me the biggest and most emotional one of my career.

After that I did some crewing with my son, who bought a modified and they did win some races. But they were kids, just as sure of themselves as I used to be, and they just wouldn't listen, so I dropped out. Somehow the males in the Jones family just had trouble working together!

I believe over the years I've won between 500 and 600 total features. A local guy here has won 800 running three divisions on local tracks. You can take it to the bank that with all those miles down the road to big shows, I won a whole lot more money.

I live happily alone now but with lots of friends and I have a better life than 90% of the people I know. But I have to admit sometimes I get to wondering how much more I might have in retirement if I'd stayed in that union job. **FSW**