

VOICE OF EXPERIENCE



BRETT DEYO

In His Own Words As told to Lew Boyd

KARL FREDRICKSON

- ***Born December 19, 1982 in New Windsor, New York***
- ***As if redefining the roles of a racing promoter, Deyo is 24/7, currently running the Short Track Super Series (STSS); the North, South, and Elite subseries; the winter Sunshine Swing in Florida, and the Cajun Series (returning in '25); promoting weekly at Utica-Rome and Fonda, New York, and Georgetown, Delaware; operating the BDR parts business and the BDR race team; and negotiating the purchase of Utica-Rome Speedway.***

At STSS, 2023 was our tenth year, and it was certainly our busiest. I bought a truck to start out the season at All-Tech in Florida, and by season's end it had 31,000 miles on it.

All considered, things went pretty well for us. We had some home runs, such as bringing Ross Chastain to Utica-Rome and featuring our one-dollar and five-dollar nights to attract new fans.

But the weather did interrupt our rhythm, as it did with tracks across the country. We probably had more rainouts last year than the prior three years added together. These days people seem to be able to psych themselves out about the weather the Wednesday before the race. But I am so thankful that we have our smorgasbord of events and so much going on these days. I can now spread out the loss and be okay. Normally we might have maybe 90 events per season, last year about 60. It sure would be much harder on a promoter with just one track that loses a bunch of shows.

All this really goes back to 2006, when I was working full-time for Len Sammons editing *Area Auto Racing News*. On kind of a flier, I hooked up with Pat and Janet Jordan at Afton (NY) Speedway to put on a "Working Man's Race" that year. I always say that when it was over, I ended up doubling my money: I started out with \$220 and ended up with \$430.

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I did a couple of one-off promotions over the next few seasons and in the winter of 2013 decided to go for it and launch a Short Track Super Series. The first race, offering a \$30,000 purse at Middletown, (NY), was a big score. I think folks there may have recognized me from the stands. I'd been going there since I was two.

The next year, I went full time with the STSS. It was still one great big risk. I had no sponsors, no TV, though I was personally a little better off than in '06. We put on six events at five different tracks and grew from there.

In 2016, I took over Georgetown Speedway, our first weekly track, and over time, Fonda and Utica Rome in New York. In that time, we also ran 173 Series shows.

I am constantly reminded that, unlike in a larger organization like World Racing Group, everything seems to point back to me—sort of like everyone knew Glenn Donnelly was DIRT Motorsports. When something goes wrong, it's my phone that blows up. One reason, I guess, is that I'm so present. I've never missed a race we're running unless there are two on one night. And if we run in Delaware on Friday, I'm up the next morning at 4:00 and on my way up to Fonda for Saturday.

You can never keep everyone happy. Fans like heavy tracks for better racing, while racers like dry slick surfaces for less expensive racing. There are always two—or more—sides, and I try so hard to get it right. There is an advantage to what has happened over the last ten years. I feel I'm in an unusual position to see things from different points of view—the fans,' the racers,' and the tracks.' On top of that, I even field a race car. I think people are aware of that perspective.

One of the biggest challenges I have had along the way has been the relationship with World Racing Group. For example, it hurt when they scheduled against my first \$53,000-to-win 200 at Fonda. It felt like they were trying to stunt my growth, but I will say that now, realizing that I am not going away like a USNA, things have gotten better. Dean Reynolds and I talk much more now about schedules and things.

I am still such a fan that a bad night can linger with me as a huge disappointment. At an autumn Gobbler race at Accord (New York), we spent all week shoveling snow from the stands and the pits, while 130 teams, some from a long distance, and thousands of fans showed up on race day. The grounds thawed, turning to mud, and we couldn't run. I'll never forget having to stand up in front of them.

I think one of the reasons our approach has been successful is that I understood from the very start that it was critical to pay better deeper into the field. And racers jumped right on board. Noticing that, other promoters also got the message—and that was good for the sport.

I've also concentrated on exposure, and it's definitely paid off. We're even international now. I'm proud of what we have done with FloRacing. It just works for us—a kind of magnifying glass on what we're doing. If you put on a great show, you get great publicity. And, at the end of the day, that's what brings a crowd.

I am really trying to be creative and to keep things growing and exciting. But you have to be very careful not to go too fast too quick. I knew the \$53K Fonda 200 would be a hit and that we would get the fans and racers—and the sponsorship to support it. When we tried emulating it in Pennsylvania at Port Royal, one of the country's finest tracks, it didn't start off too well. But I will keep digging at the race, slowly, and try to bring out its full potential there.

Other times, however, you have to bite your lip and own up to a mistake if you are going to survive. One of people's biggest misconceptions is that when you are racing, you're making money. When we started a Cajun tour around Louisiana in the late fall, it didn't go well at all. It was a societal mistake on my part. Our dates were in the middle of hunting season, and all the fans down there are up in their tree stands. We swallowed hard and pulled the plug on it for this year. We're planning a relaunch of the program in '25, this time in late February or March.

Going forward I have to say that I do worry a lot about something else in our culture—

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people not seeming to want to leave their homes for anything. People used to like to go out to dinner. Now it's DoorDash. Everyone in outdoor entertainment should be concerned. COVID certainly didn't help. Admittedly, as it began to fade, there was a rebound when the short tracks were packed. But then people seemed to have settled back into their houses. That's why we are so into putting interesting programs on FloRacing to try to bring them back out.

But I think, all considered, we are in good shape as we enter the spring of '24—certainly much more so than ten years ago. There will be 18 tracks on our STSS schedule in six states and two Canadian provinces. We haven't let up on the weekly shows whatsoever. In fact, I am just finalizing the purchase of Utica-Rome from Gene Cole, and I have just re-upped with Fonda for the next five years, the longest contract that the Fair Board has ever considered.

There is no question that without a strong base of weekly tracks grooming competitors, there will be no blockbuster events. It's kind of sad that some short-track promoters are trying to run extravaganzas like they are seeing on the Internet and end up taking a beating. They don't realize that the people putting on these events are not the promoters, they are the streaming companies.

As for me, this hasn't been without its tough moments and I have had offers to work for bigger companies. But I'm here for another 10 years, hoping very much to make the sport better for what we are doing. What still gets me psyched is a good night at the track—a full crowd, strong field, and racy surface, with everyone going home abuzz about what they had just seen. It keeps me fired up to do more.

For us, I will be looking at new facilities to approach and a few more marquee events to spice up the schedule. There definitely should be a replacement for Eastern States, as Middletown is likely to be going away.

And for the sport, I will also be reaching out to other players to get in a room and talk. Some discussions have already started with Bicknell and World Racing Group. If we can standardize the cars more, we will all be healthier. **FSW**