



DOUG HEVERON

In His Own Words

- Born on March 29, 1961 in Rochester, New York
- Supremely talented, Doug Heveron blasted to the top of the world of supermodifieds, becoming branded "The Young One." Subsequently, his career-long success in Indy Cars, modifieds, sprint cars, and the Xfinity and NASCAR Cup Series positioned him as one of the country's most diversified performers ever.

As told to **Lew Boyd**

I was 17 when I started out in super-modifieds at Oswego, New York. Mom and Dad were the biggest part of my career. Dad never raced, but he certainly loved it, and he was organized—good with a yellow pad. We had picked up a Microd when I was eight, and, if I was gonna race it, for sure I was gonna work on it. Dad taught me discipline.

We won a lot, so it was down the road in quarter midgets at age 13. It went well everywhere, and I think I probably knew I was good. I got into the Quarter Midget Hall of Fame in Alabama—and began to dream of Indy.

I wish I had asked Dad before he died whether he saw something special in me as a kid and whether that was why we went supermodified racing. He sure was behind me, and it sure helped that he was good friends with Jimmy Shampine. I went to work for Jimmy while still in high school, and in 1978, we bought a super from him. He helped me a lot. I would ask him questions at work, and he'd watch me out on the track. It was unusual. I remember Jimmy Winks teasing him, saying, "That kid looks awful young!" But it taught me right then that to go fast you want to listen to the fast people.

Of course, I was very nervous. How many folks have gone directly from a quarter midget to a super? But somehow it came naturally to me. I knew what I was supposed to do. I was more excited than scared—just pumped up and ready.

When we started winning races and championships at Oswego and in ISMA, fans got a little restless with me. But some competitors—certainly Bentley Warren—accepted me. One time, he and I were racing Oswego incredibly hard, side-by-side, lap after lap, for \$10,000 to win. Those had to be some of the fastest laps like that, ever. I kept wondering, "How much deeper are you going to take me into those turns, Bentley?!" Then a motor disintegrated ahead of us, and we both piled into the wall big time. They say Bentley's neck stretched about a foot. We stumbled out of the cars, fell on the ground, and laughed

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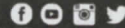


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I was especially jerky and nervous at the start, but adapted pretty well. The rear engine felt completely different, the turbulence did bother me at first, and I had never made a pit stop before.

and laughed. There we were—the grizzled veteran and the kid, best of friends. But we both moved pretty slowly the next day, and the cars were totally wrecked.

In 1983, we arranged a ride in Jack Rhoades' 1981 Wildcat Indy Car. I wanted to go there so badly, but realistically, although I'd had a lot of wins, I was hardly past puberty. We debuted at Atlanta, and you can bet my foot was shaking on the pedal. I was especially jerky and nervous at the start, but adapted pretty well. The rear engine felt completely different, the turbulence did bother me at first, and I had never made a pit stop before. When I tried to come in, I sailed right by our stall at about 100 mph. But we got 12th.

After a rain storm at Phoenix, it was off to Indy. I felt pretty young walking into that place. The younger generation, like Al Jr. and John Paul, had not yet arrived. But there was so much watching of rookie drivers by Wally Dallenbach and others. I felt I was doing okay, and that gave me confidence. The track is so big that speed really isn't a problem. But, I'll tell you, that frontstretch can seem like a narrow tunnel with those grandstands on each side. You look down at that first turn and think, "How are we gonna do that?!"

I was running 195 mph in warmups when my crew chief told me that wouldn't make the show. So, I dug deeper, only to end up in the first-turn wall with a shattered ankle. It really bummed me out when I learned that 188 would have actually gotten me in. Anyway, that kind of racing just left me with a bad taste in my mouth—and my family's. We came back to Oswego.

In 1984, thanks to Dad being so good at making friends, three Syracuse businessmen helped us go Cup racing with a couple of cars from Junior Johnson. We could see it wouldn't be easy. Being from the North was still an issue, and, whatever NASCAR said, you did.

Going from an 1800-pound Super to a 3,800-pound Cup car took some getting used to, but at a big track like Daytona, those big cars are a cinch to handle. It's racing against all your idols that screws you up more than anything.

We were always underfunded, but I think some people came to like us, and I got some rides. There were some great moments, like the first time at Daytona when I passed A. J. Foyt on the last lap of the Duels to sneak into the 500. And it was something qualifying for that '86 Talladega show, where everyone timed at over 200 mph. But somehow, I wasn't satisfied. By 1987, it was back to Oswego again.

Then I joined up with Lenny Boehler and his "Ole Blue" for five great seasons in the NASCAR Modified Tour. We were especially fast at places like Loudon and Nazareth, as my experience drafting was so useful. But Lenny was always Lenny, through and through. One time at Nazareth the sway bar broke. I came in, and Lenny simply wrapped a chain around it and yelled "GO!" I thought, "Are you kidding me? On this mile-and-an-eighth?" My dad's language was likely much more colorful. But Lenny was right. Ole Blue was as fast as before, held together, and we finished.

Honestly, the hardest thing I ever did in racing was to leave Lenny, but I did in 1994 to go with the Xfinity Series. I hadn't really liked Cup races and probably wasn't super good in them. The events were so long that I got impatient, wondering, "When is this thing gonna be over?" I hoped that Xfinity would work out better.

The car was Charlie Henderson's Food Country USA entry. We were underfunded once again, so I ended up with Mike Laughlin, and that was good. Five top-tens; three top-fives. We had some strong days at Dover and Nazareth. But then we lost our sponsor, and Mike's son

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We surprised everyone—and pissed off a few—by grabbing the pole with a new four-lap record and running up front until lap 376, when the oil pump quit.

wanted to give it a try. In order to find another ride, it was going to take \$1.5 million. So, I moved to Jensen Beach, Florida, to help take care of my mom. As it turned out, she saw me win a few more races before she died.

Back in 1989, a guy named Harold Wirtjes had called and asked when I'd last raced a sprint car. I said I couldn't remember, because I actually never had. He then asked if I'd run his car at the Little 500. I said sure, even though I'd hardly ever heard of it. Out to Indiana I went, and didn't that car feel good! We surprised everyone—and pissed off a few—by grabbing the pole with a new four-lap record and running up front until lap 376, when the oil pump quit.

Then in Florida I heard of the TBARA Sprint Car Series. I joined in 2000. What a thrill it was, especially with some incredible battles with David Steele. I liked fast. A supermodified is Cadillac fast; a sprint car is violent fast. I'd usually start around 12th, and the 25 laps were pure balls. Awesome.

After a couple of years my owner Norm Huntley and I decided to call it quits, opening the door for me to drive for Don and Beverly Heckman for the remaining five years of my career—and a crap load of wins. I told Don I was going to retire after we won the 2008 Little 500. We didn't win, but I got the pole yet again. What a thrill!

You never made money running those sprinters, but it sure was fun to be able to race a little more before I quit—and to go out on my own terms. 🍷