



# **TIM McCREADIE**

*In His Own Words*

BRUCE A. BENNETT

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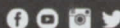


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- Born April 12, 1974, in Watertown, New York
- Tim "T-Mac" McCreddie, this year's Lucas Oil Late Model Dirt Series Champion, has emerged as one of the nation's most proficient and crowd-pleasing dirt trackers. (A Voice of Experience on his father "Barefoot" Bob McCreddie appeared in our July '21 issue.)

## As told to Lew Boyd

We won the Lucas (Oil Late Model Dirt Series) title in 2021, but we were second in five races, each paying \$50,000 to win. We have to be better. That's why we will spend the off-season testing.

I never dreamed all this would happen. I'm still the kid from Watertown, New York. It really started to hit me when we won the 2018 World 100. In Victory Lane, I couldn't believe about 20,000 people swarming around, cheering. I had no idea it was such a big deal. But, truthfully, I was not really surprised that I had been able to win. I had confidence in myself, and that goes back to Watertown—and my dad, "Barefoot."

He didn't want me to race at first, it being a roller-coaster livelihood financially. But, with my mind made up, he supported me and wanted me to do well. He was never like some of these aggressive soccer parents today, but he taught me never to leave anything on the table. That was his way. It's so true that you only get from something what you put into it. I got that. I'll never be as good as he was. No one will win 600 races anymore. But he's why I am who I am.

I began working as a helicopter mechanic at Fort Drum, which is near home, and all that required double-safety wiring certainly made me more meticulous. Dad sure reinforced that.

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## VOICE OF EXPERIENCE

While he was off racing, I was off with an old pickup, a 5-horsepower Briggs & Stratton kart on the back. I worked hard, and it seemed that I won every time I went, even with lots of borrowed parts. It got me thinking I must be good at it. So, in 1996 I went to Dad's driving school at Weed-sport Speedway, put together a small-block modified, and won the third night out at Brockville, Canada. Wow, this really is what I might do. I was young, confident, afraid of nothing. I quit my job, got a big block the next year, and won the first year with that, too. But it was tough going. I was about broke when, luckily, John Finch hired me to run his modifieds. Off we went.

I think it's been 59 big block modified wins, but some really stick out. At Fonda in 2004, Brett Hearn was in his prime, having everything he needed—and more, it seemed. He was the guy to beat, and we really went at it. Just the two of us out there, dueling back and forth, lap after lap. I thought it was just the best when I beat him. But Dad had always taught me to keep my eye on the future.

In 2002, I had stopped by the Sweetener Plus shop in Rochester and noticed a couple of dirt late models there. They fascinated me, and because I was winning in modifieds, I got to run one at Hagerstown's Oktoberfest. It was embarrassing. I spun out warming up the tires, right in front of everyone—and I was DQed for being light. Then we went to Eldora. Not good. Modifieds had hand clutches, and, when I went to brake, I mistakenly hit the clutch pedal—and then the wall! A miserable moment, but I still believed I'd be good if I kept at it. And I did.

The late models are the only division I didn't win in the first year, but by 2005, we were third in World of Outlaws points. What a great year. I was feeling racy. I'd read about Billy Pauch almost winning the Chili Bowl and I thought some USAC-type racing looked pretty cool. Then I got a call from Don Martin, a writer in Missouri, saying he could get me a ride for Tulsa. My dad wasn't too sure about this, but never having even sat in a midget before, I won my heat and was ninth in the feature. The next year, I got together with an Australian named Steve Smith. He came in with a

U-Haul truck with a Hawk [chassis] inside and an engine he built himself. We won! It was my biggest race yet, one of the coolest things I've ever done, especially without even knowing what I was doing.

In 2010, warming up down there in Greg Wilke's car, a rear axle broke. It launched me over the wall in turn one. I was hospitalized with a broken T3 vertebra and was told 90 percent of people with this injury were paralyzed. The luckiest thing in my life was that everything healed well. Tony Stewart was incredibly helpful, flying me to Dr. Terry Trammell in Indy.

That Tulsa win put me on the radar screen. If you win, people will call. For me, the big one came from Charlotte. Richard Childress said he appreciated my history, my family, what I had done with no money. We worked out a development contract. From the first testing, they could see that I could go fast, and we had top 15s at Gateway and O'Reilly Raceway Park. But I think they didn't realize how green I was. The big tracks felt more like dirt tracking to me. I loved Talladega, pushing guys around like that when you're really hauling ass. But the smaller venues like Milwaukee and Martinsville were really difficult. For example, they told me at those places I was at a couple hundred pounds of braking pressure while Harvick in the same car was at 2,300.

Everyone tried to help me, but sponsorships were hard then. Most eyes were on kids—Dale Jr, Brad K., and the Cup drivers who were running Nationwide. We did have our bright spots, but they didn't shine bright enough. I certainly don't regret the experience, but I do wish I had known more and communicated better.

Meanwhile, in the background, in 2006 we had won the World of Outlaws title. So, in 2007, it was the Sweetener's Plus No. 39 late model full-time, with an occasional fling with the modifieds. I had to go with late models. That's where the money flows, and I've been after it ever since. You can't make a living running for two, three thousand to win. In 2008, we won the Topless 100 in Batesville [Arkansas], the Jackson 100 at Brownstown [Indiana], and the Knoxville [Late Model] Nationals. I don't want you to think that charged me up!

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## VOICE OF EXPERIENCE

You can't take the late models for granted. They may look alike on the outside, but on the inside it's just insanity. There are zero suspension or cubic-inch rules. And, on top of that, every year there are advancements. It's so hard to keep up with all the moving parts. It's crazy that nothing on the car is square, but somehow everything can work together. It's more like Formula One or supermodifieds than sprint cars or Cup.

And driving the cars is a real challenge, too. In my early years, I'd work on the car until it gave me the "feel" I needed. No more. Now you have to adjust to the setup that makes the car fast, even if it doesn't feel comfortable. And today's drivers in the series are amazing. Many start so young now and have serious funding. But I think Kyle Larson is the only one who has come in and won right off the bat.

We've done well over 15 years, with some lean times for sure. I'd still like to win the Show-Me 100, the Dirt Track World Championship—and the Super DIRT Week Modified race.

Several years ago, I told Karen, my wife, that I'd be done at 50. Of course, now at 47, I'm not so sure. We have a great team of guys at Paylor Motorsports, and, believe me, I've learned to bring them lunch whenever I can. My own issue is health. I'll need a real regime to be successful at 55—eating better, doing more cardio. I'm feeling today those couple hundred laps we tested last night. I'll also monitor my eyesight. Some guys overlook that.

Additionally, there's the issue of Karen and our kids. We live in Rochester, New York, and I'm often away three weeks at a time. That's hard on us. So, maybe the schedule could be more local.

Beyond that, I keep my eye on the future, but nothing's certain yet. I know I'm not standoffish. I talk a lot of bullshit, and I like walking around being a funny guy. Years ago, I did color work with SpeedTV at Super DIRT Week. I loved it. Maybe there's something there.

Who knows? 🍷