

Barefoot Bob McCreadie

In His Own Words

- Born on January 19, 1951, in Watertown, New York
- Driver of the iconic #9 East Coast dirt modified, bearded and bespectacled "Barefoot Bob" McCreadie compiled more than 500 wins in the US, Canada, and Australia. Over 25 seasons, McCreadie's unpretentious, down-home demeanor won him legions of rabid fans until he was struck and gravely injured by an SUV while riding his motorcycle in a protected lane at a shopping center.

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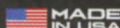
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Be aware to prepare

As told to **Lew Boyd**

I started racing late—in small-block modified cars in upstate New York, and, honestly, I was terrified. I'd done a little drag racing on the street, but nothing like this. I didn't have a clue.

I always figured, though, that anyone can get good at most anything if he works hard and has half a brain. I kept telling myself to give myself time to figure it out. It took five years to win that first race, and, once I learned how, I never wanted to stop. I worked endlessly on the car, went to bed thinking about racing, and I still was when I woke up. If you don't feel that way, I can't see how you can be successful in life.

You also can't do everything by yourself. I was lucky. Going to one of my first races—just me, the truck, and trailer—I stopped at a gas station to fuel up and this guy called Mike Hayslett walked over to see what I was doing. He asked if he could come along. He became my best friend and was with me for 25 years.

All the guys came to me that same way—by chance—and stayed on. None were experienced. I think they were just intrigued with racing, saw my work ethic, and wanted to be part of it. No one got paid. They may have been green at the beginning, but they became terrifically talented at what they learned to do. Mike took care of all the promoter and sponsor stuff, timing the cars, keeping all the records and the like. The others got good at more technical things.

At first with the small-block cars, there weren't many rules, and racers were week-enders. But some of them were pretty good. We were purposeful in what we did. You could run pretty much whatever you could dream up. We did not reach out to our competitors for help or advice. Our way was to reach out to experts nationally, wherever they might be. I was not afraid to call them—guys like Smokey Yunick, friends at Holman & Moody, and Dick Tobias, and they didn't seem to mind talking to me.

Once I asked Dick Tobias how narrow we could make a car. He scratched his chin

and said, "I guess 'til it starts to tip over just sitting there." So that's what we did. The front axle was only 34 inches, and it was so narrow that my boot couldn't fit between the transmission and the frame rail, so I took it off. As a kid, I'm told I was always running around barefoot and bare-chested, and now I really became "Barefoot" Bob.

We started winning races—maybe 35 a season—and got some recognition. Some people, of course, did not like me at all, but some apparently did. I was just not into flashy things and all the politics that came along over the years. I said what was on my mind. I wasn't any different because we were winning. I remember some years later Brett Hearn asked me, "Why are you always fooling the public about who you are?" Brett had it wrong. I was what I was. It was just me. My mother was a waitress, my dad a cab driver. I was comfortable with that.

When we moved up to DIRT big blocks in the 1980s, it was tough just to become competitive again. Before, the rule book was about two pages, but with DIRT it was around 35. As you can imagine, the thinner the rule book, the better as far as I am concerned. But I realize that some people like me tend to push things to the limit. So, constraints are probably necessary.

Our approach in DIRT was the same as we'd had before. We tried to get up to speed first and then to go beyond the competition with our own ideas. One was engine setback. Typically for DIRT modifieds it was 35 inches. I am shorter than some drivers, so we could get around 42 inches in our cars, and that rear percentage really helped out.

We never tried to hide anything, though. I was down at Richie Evans' shop once asking for advice. He said ask anything you want—go measure the car. That's the way I felt, too. I didn't hide anything. After all, my thinking might not even work for them.

On the DIRT circuit, the challenges I faced as a driver were more serious. A lot of the races were longer. I may have run around a lot as a kid, but I was no beefy Lou Lazzaro. So I worked out all the time,

VOICE OF EXPERIENCE

especially when getting older. I figure being in shape is a speed freebie. When I was in a race car, I was as big as anyone. Wouldn't you give up an hour a day for that?

Even in the regular DIRT shows, we'd be racing against five to 10 professional teams. And beware anyone in the roster named Johnson! Jack Johnson was something else, with his own way of racing. He taught me so much. If I was ever to pay to watch a race, I would have wanted him to be there. In just one lap, you could tell where he was coming from. Alan Johnson has been consistently fast forever, and you monitor his brother, Danny, closely because he drives with his own rule book.

In retrospect, you could say we were fast at Syracuse. Our fans followed us there, and our biggest win was the Miller 300 in 1986. But to be honest, I hated it and never wanted to go. My crew wanted to, so we went. I tried as hard as I could, but it never appealed to me as a racer's track. There was no side-by-side racing, unlike at the 1-1/8-mile at Nazareth. I liked that place, and we won a 100-lapper there.

Overall, I enjoyed racing all the way. I broke my back five times, but that's just part of the deal. What was really crushing, though, came in 2006, when I was hit in a shopping center parking lot on my motorcycle. Our lives were really altered, it took so long to recover.

I do keep track of racing through two of our boys, Tim and Jordan. Tim has won in everything he tried, but I feel so badly for him that he did not get a fair shake with NASCAR. But he continues to perform nationally in a top-notch dirt late model. Jordan runs a modified locally for a good car owner. I could see him race regularly, but I don't because honestly it scares me. I just want both of them to be happy.

With all the politics—and money that never seems to trickle down from the top of racing these days, I don't feel the sport will ever be the same. It is true that, as NASCAR has declined—the short tracks seem to be coming back somewhat. But I know this in my heart: All the thinking and hard work that we did over the years would never be enough to make it today. ☞