

series SPOTLIGHT



Photo Rick Rater

RUSH SPRINT CARS

VETERANS VS. NEWBIES PUSH SERIES TO NEW HEIGHTS

BY DOUG KENNEDY

ALL GOOD THINGS come to those that wait; that statement certainly fits the Hovis Auto & Truck Supply non-wing RUSH Sprint Car Series presented by Born2Run Lubricants. Since its inception just a short five years ago in 2018, the class has proven it's here to stay garnering great fields of cars and showcasing exciting, traditional Sprint Car racing.

The RUSH Sprint Car division falls under the RUSH Racing Series banner, which also features Late Models, Sportsman Modifieds, Pro Mods and Stock Cars, all utilizing the Chevrolet Performance crate engine package. An estimated \$300,000 in championship points funds and actual product will be awarded to RUSH racers throughout the Northeast and Mid-Atlantic for their efforts in 2022.

Because of its affordability, the series has attracted a wide array of drivers ranging from their teens into their early sixties. "We couldn't be happier with the growth and development of the RUSH Sprint Car division," said Vicki Emig, co-director of the RUSH Racing Series. "All of our RUSH divisions took approximately five years to really hit their stride and we've now reached that target with our Sprints. We're consistently seeing strong fields of cars as well as great racing. It is one of the most, if not the, most cost contained racing divisions in the country

and has done exactly as we intended; allow racers to compete in a full size Sprint Car at an extremely affordable cost."

The combination of the Chevrolet Performance RUSH sealed 602 engine, spec Hoosier Tires, sealed/spec RUSH Bilstein Shocks, and methanol fuel has definitely leveled the playing field for competing drivers. Gale Ruth, Jr., who led the chase in late August for the \$5,000-to-win championship with seven feature wins campaigned throughout the season in a 2006 JEI Chassis with one of the original RUSH-sealed engines that was in the initial test session in 2017. It's been said that \$15,000 to \$22,000 will get you an extremely competitive race ready RUSH Sprint Car.

"It's awesome to watch veteran 410 racers mixing it up with the up and coming young racers, many coming right out of karting," Emig continued. "The quality of the racing is outstanding and most important is that the racers will tell you how much fun they're having."

The combination of the \$20,000+ Equipment Rental Options RUSH Championship program that awards \$5,000 to the champion, \$2,500 to the second place finisher and all the way down to 20th position as well as a strong schedule of \$600-\$1000 to-win events have proven to be a very successful

balance between the driver's investment in his/her car to purse/point funds available to him for his racing efforts. The class has also been great for the promoters, as the same equation works for them- a strong field of cars with an affordable purse.

Member drivers accumulate their best 12 point finishes throughout the season at all RUSH-sanctioned events. The Futures Cup is a separate points fund for eligible teenage racers. Membership not only allows drivers to be eligible for the point fund(s), but also includes a \$100,000 excess participant accident insurance policy when competing in RUSH events. All drivers are also eligible for valuable product at the annual "Manufacturers Night" presented by MSD Performance that this year saw a record \$14,500 in product, ranging from a \$950 Holley Methanol Carburetor to a minimum package value of \$350, distributed.

The "Manufacturers Night" that took place at the renowned Lernerville Speedway on August 12 produced a record car count of 28, but more interesting had drivers competing that had previously raced in 13 different divisions; 410/360/305 Sprint Cars, Super/Crate Late Models, Big-Block/Small-Block/Sportsman Modifieds, E-Mods, Econo Mod, Mod Lites, Super Sportsman, and Karting; a true testament

Photo Rick Rarer



Three-time RUSH champion Chad Ruhlman (68) leads RUSH newcomer Andy Priest (41), who owns 119 wins in his storied career.

to the overall appeal of the division.

This season featured 30 plus scheduled events at eight different speedways throughout western Pennsylvania, eastern Ohio and northern West Virginia at tracks including Sharon Speedway, Lernerville Speedway, Pittsburgh's Pennsylvania Motor Speedway, Knox Raceway, Marion Center Raceway, Tri-City Raceway Park, Tyler County Speedway, and Dog Hollow Speedway.

In 2017, veteran 410 racers Gale Ruth, Jr. and Arnie Kent tested their non-wing Sprint Cars for RUSH at Lernerville Speedway. Ruth Jr., began his Sprint Car career in 1997 when he hot lapped a car for his dad before driving a "410" Sprint full-time in 1998. Overall, he has six "410" feature wins and 22 RUSH Series wins.

"To be competitive every night is what most drivers want," said Ruth, who lives in Pleasantville, Pennsylvania. "Vicki (Emig) has done a lot for the RUSH Series. We have nice tracks to race on and Vicki keeps things going well. I think the RUSH Sprint Series is going to continue to grow. We have young guys and old pros. There are probably 15 different guys that can win on any given night. My last two seasons have been very productive," said Ruth, Jr., who has been the man to beat leading the points with seven wins driving for the McConnell Family.

The family tradition is very strong with the Ruth family. Gale, Sr., raced for a number of years in a modified and

a sprint since the late '70s. Now at 71 years of age, he has also raced a RUSH Sprint Car competing against his son, too. "It was nice being on the track with him," said Ruth, Jr. Ruth, Junior's cousin, Ricky Tucker, Jr., who's having his best season yet also races in the Series. "It's a great family thing," said Ruth, Jr.

Arnie Kent of New Castle, Pennsylvania, is one of the leading veterans of the group at age 58. Kent didn't begin his racing career until he was 30. He began with circle track bikes in 1988 before moving to a Micro Sprint in 1990. Five years later, he raced a 360 sprint and

by 1997, he was in a 410. In 2001, Kent won the "Triathlon" Championship for 410s in Western PA.

"There are a lot of good racers in the division - it's tough," said Kent of the RUSH Sprint Car Series. "If you start in the back, it's hard to come up through the pack because the cars are so equal. There's a lot of younger guys who keep coming into the division, which is great for the sport. At this point I really don't want anything but to be a local weekend racer and the RUSH Sprints have been a perfect fit for me."

When he's not racing, Kent is the



Tyler Newhart is in his 2nd full season of RUSH sprint car racing and has steadily improved. He's on the gas at West Virginia's Tyler County Speedway.

Photo Zach Yost



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Andy Priest gets suited up and gets ready to go racing at Knox Raceway in Pennsylvania. Photo Gary Thayer

co-owner of Equipment Rental Options, a company that deals with the rental of various equipment for residential, commercial and industrial use, ERO has been the presenting sponsor of the RUSH Sprint Car Weekly Series Championship since 2020.

Ted Hull, now 61 years old, has been owning race cars since 1979 and his father Cal has over 500 feature wins to his credit throughout his 50+ year career, mainly as a Modified driver. Hull owned the car driven by Jeremy Weaver that captured the 2020 RUSH Sprint Car Championship. Ted's current driver is Andy Priest, who previously drove modifieds and sprint cars for Hull for over 20 years; Priest, who has 119 wins to his resume including his first in a RUSH Sprint Car on August 21 at Knox.

"This past winter Andy said let's go racing again so we put him in this car," said Hull after a brief pause with Priest behind the wheel. "I really enjoy it," said Hull of the RUSH series. "It's so much more affordable. You can do one of these full-fledged RUSH Sprints cheaper than you can for say a good pro stock as well as many other divisions, in fact way cheaper. There are some outfits that are not policed very well, but with the RUSH Series, it is spot on with regards to the teching."

Fifty-year-old Brian Hartzell is having his best year in RUSH. "I really enjoy it. It's a way to race a Sprint Car economically. The class is super competitive. Eight to ten cars can win on any given night. Vicki (Emig) and Mike (Leone) have done a super job in giving us great economical packages."

Another grizzled veteran is 51-year-old

John Mollick of Toronto, Ohio. Mollick began racing in 1984 and has done so ever since, competing in everything from three-wheelers, street stocks, mod lites, late models, big block modifieds and finally a sprint car. "It's definitely a different type of car than I've ever raced before," said Mollick of the RUSH Sprint Car. "As the class continues to evolve, the competition is getting stiffer. Everybody is on equal footing. It keeps the costs of the cars within a reasonable amount of money."

Zack Wilson, who works as a recruiting manager for McClymonds Supply and Transit, is a very close friend of World of Outlaw Late Model driver Max Blair and his father Rob. "I've learned so much from them," said Wilson, who has a top five, 10 top 10 and sits ninth in overall Weekly points in his rookie RUSH season. "Max has helped me with mechanical knowledge and information about the different tracks. I love it. If it wasn't for the RUSH Series I wouldn't be able to race. The rules package keeps the costs down to where we don't have to have crazy money to find speed. Besides the strict rules I like the travel to the different tracks. I'm very thrilled how things have worked out for me this year and would like to get more consistent and hopefully get a win next year!"

Tyler Newhart of New Franklin, Ohio, has four top fives and ten top for the 2022 season. This is the 32-year-old's second full year in a Sprint Car and has steadily improved becoming very competitive. On a scale of 1 to 10 he rates his season as an eight. Before racing, Newhart played college baseball at Wright State, but got injured and

finished his collegiate career at Malone University in Canton, Ohio. "We figured the set-up on the cars and also the new tracks we were going," said Newhart. "We were out two weeks after an accident and missed six races during that time period. However, it's been a great year for the team. Next year, I want to build on the momentum from what we had this year. RUSH is an awesome series where anyone can go out and race a sprint car at an affordable cost."

At 17 years old, Brian Cressley of Corry, Pennsylvania, is already in his tenth year of racing. Most of that time was spent racing karts. In 2021, he was the RUSH Sprint Car "Futures Cup" Champion. "So far this year, we've been doing good when we don't have stuff breaking. This Series is a lot of fun! Everybody in the class is very nice and helpful and the competition is so even."

Brandon Shughart is 13th in points with two top 10s this year. So far his racing career has been three years in a kart and three in a RUSH Sprint Car. "If it wasn't for Vicki (Emig) and Mike (Leone) I wouldn't be racing," said the 35-year-old who hails from Weirton, West Virginia. "I can't afford to go out and race a 410. It's a growing series and I'm looking forward to how far it can go. It allows me to run competitively on a low budget every night."

At 23 years old, Charlie Utsinger of Boardman, Ohio, is in his very first year of racing, a raw rookie. Charlie's late father Buzzy owned and sponsored race cars for many years and was a very good friend of Emig and Leone. The Utsinger name was well known for many years throughout western Pennsylvania and eastern Ohio for fielding winning Sprint Cars and Modifieds. Charlie's Uncle Arlie, who currently helps him on his race car, was also a successful 360 sprint car racer in the '90s. "This year has been a learning experience for me," explained Utsinger. "Next year I want to be more competitive. Everything is still in one piece. RUSH is so much more affordable than anything else out there; the cost of the motor is the big thing. I also really like going to the different tracks."

"I'm really excited about the future and the continued success of the RUSH Sprint Car Series," said Vicki Emig. "The RUSH Sprint Cars have really showed there is a benefit and place for an affordable 'cost containment' package in the world of sprint car racing as each year we've seen an increase in the number of cars competing. I'm betting we've just scratched the surface of the possibilities for the division's future." ■



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