

Drag Race Central - NHRA

Thu, 09 Aug 2012, 19:34 PM

By Bob Frey
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These Guys Belong Here

It's often been said that the racers in the Lucas Oil classes are the backbone of the sport, and while that may be a cliché to some, it really is true. There are more people competing in the sportsman ranks at any given race than there are in the Full Throttle classes, and if you count the number of racers across the country who compete at the "grass roots" level you'll find that it numbers in the thousands. While these racers come from a variety of backgrounds and are as diverse as they are plentiful, there are some similarities between them. First of all, most of them are following in the footsteps of a family member who raced or who was involved in the sport before them. Second, they get involved in the sport and have a tendency to stay involved for a number of years, or as my wife was told when we were engaged, "They don't grow out of it." Since that was over forty years ago it looks like that old adage is very true. And third, a lot of sportsman racers have a desire to move up in class, and not just to a higher level in the Lucas Oil ranks. No, a lot of sportsman racers desire to turn pro, even if it is only part time. All you have to do to prove that is look at the racers in the Full Throttle classes today and you'll see that a lot of them, if not a majority of them, once raced in the sportsman ranks. All of these points are applicable to the newest professional driver, Deric Kramer who made his first pro start at the recent Mopar Mile High Nationals.



Deric Kramer



Kramer won NHRA Best Appearing Car

things intervened. "I was going to college and was in a pretty aggressive program at DeVry University so I had to cut back on my racing." But he knew that it was only a temporary thing and that he would race again.

While Deric was attending school his father, David, was running the family's latest creation, a car that ran in the A/DA class. "Dad was pretty successful," Deric said. "He was the top qualifier a couple of times and he won the Mopar Mile High Nationals in 2002." At that race the senior Kramer beat Tom Snyder, one of the best Competition Eliminator racers in the country. "It was a good race, and to beat Tom made it even better because he had so much success at Bandimere." A few years after that win David turned over the keys to the family car to Deric and he has been racing fast cars ever since. "I loved Comp because there were no break-outs," he said. "I really hated that in the Jr. Dragster class and I knew that I wanted to race in a class where the first one to the finish line got the win." And Deric did just that at the Lucas Oil race in Montana in 2007 when he stopped Dean Carter for his first NHRA win.

The family's car of choice was a Mopar-powered dragster and they got their power from one of Colorado's best, V. Gaines. "We had known V. for a while and he was a big help with our car. The Hemi engine ran well, especially in Denver, and it made a lot of power. The folks at Madcap engines have been good to us for a long time." And it was that connection that eventually led to their latest car, a Dodge Avenger that runs in the Pro Stock class. "We ran the dragster for a while in the 'A' class, and then when the index got hit we added some weight to it and made it a 'B' car. When we decided to try Pro Stock we took the engine right out of the dragster and put it in this car." When asked what became of the dragster now that they have a Pro Stock car Deric said, "It's a really expensive engine stand now."

Deric, a twenty seven year old college grad, who has a degree in electrical engineering, is a second-generation racer who grew up within ear shot of the Bandimere facility. "My dad raced there and I was actually one of the first kids to race a Jr. Dragster at the track." That happened when he was eight years old and Deric stayed with the Jr. cars for a few years before moving up. "It wasn't so much a case of getting older but I simply outgrew the Jr. car," he said. "At that time my dad was racing a dragster and I knew that's what I wanted to do." Well, that is what he wanted to do in the immediate future, but long term he had other ideas. "I think every guy who races in the sportsman classes has a desire to turn pro," he said. "I knew I always did although I didn't know if it would happen, but it certainly was a dream."

Once he outgrew the Jr. car Deric did race a street car at the track, but only for a short time. "I had a '69 Camaro that I literally raced just one or two times. It was a ten-second car and I was just kind of messing around with it, it wasn't a serious race car. After that I got to drive our dragster and that was a lot of fun." That dragster, which competed in the A/ED class, was one that his father had raced for a few years, and Deric drove it for a while before other



David defeated Tom Snyder



David Kramer celebrates 2002 win.

Among those other drivers was Jason Line, Deric's first round opponent. "He was very nice and I wished him well before our race." Then he added, "I really said that it would be nice if he just beat us by a few thousandths," Deric said. Well, it almost turned out better than that because Deric put a big move on the reigning champ on the starting line and was harboring thoughts of an upset. "In the dragster, once I got out in front of someone there wasn't much of a chance that they would pass us in the lights," he said. "I found out in a hurry that it's different in Pro Stock. I was cruising along and then he just ran me down." Still, it was a very good race and an excellent debut for the team from Colorado. "It was everything that we expected and more and it was a dream come true for me."

The switch to Pro Stock is never an easy one and it wasn't for the Kramer's. "We got the car from V. and then began testing," Deric said. "Obviously it was a huge learning process for us." One of the biggest adjustments for him as a driver was the fact that he now had to shift a car. "Yeah, the dragster was an automatic so this was quite a challenge." And then there was the fact that they were now in the pro ranks and they didn't want to embarrass themselves at their home track. "We really hadn't made any full passes on the car before coming to the national event and we wanted to show the other guys that we belonged here, that we weren't just trying to show up. We wanted to be competitive." After their first qualifying run, which included a good burnout and a very representative pass, they came back and ran 7.06 at 194.80 miles per hour, a time that was good enough to get them in the top twelve on Friday and keep them there for the big show on Sunday. "I jacked up that first run," Deric said. "I missed the shifts and didn't do much right, but I learned from it. We were very happy after that second run, it was much better," Deric said. "We did what we wanted to do and I think we earned some respect from the other drivers."



Kramer vs. Line



Deric Kramer

The question now is where do they go from here? "We plan to run a few races and I know we'll go to Las Vegas, and after what we did here we may go to Brainerd, too." Another question is does dad want to drive the car. "Sure he does, but he works with the American Ethanol people, our sponsor, and he has an agreement with them that he won't drive." Too bad for David, but very good for Deric. "It's a nice family operation and I'm thankful for the chance to drive and compete with drivers that I have admired for years." And based on what we saw in Denver, Deric and the family definitely belong, and we may have seen the beginning of a good, long Pro Stock career from one more driver who dreamed big and achieved his goal of racing in the pro ranks. "I couldn't be happier and I can't wait to do it again."

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