

PREPARED FOR BATTLE

DERIC KRAMER EXPECTS A BREAKOUT SEASON AFTER OFFSEASON SWITCH TO CHEVY, KB POWER

by Kevin McKenna

Is Deric Kramer NHRA's next first-time Pro winner?

If you ask Kramer, he certainly thinks so, and if you ask most of his Pro Stock competitors, they'll also likely agree that his stock is on the rise. Kramer competed in 13 NHRA Mello Yello Drag Racing Series events last year with his American Ethanol Dodge, so he had a front-row seat to watch fellow Pro Stock racer Bo Butner progress from a winless sophomore to a five-time national event winner and eventually an NHRA Mello Yello world champion. Having taken a similar career path from Sportsman racing to the Pros, it has been hard for Kramer not to think to himself, "Why not me?"

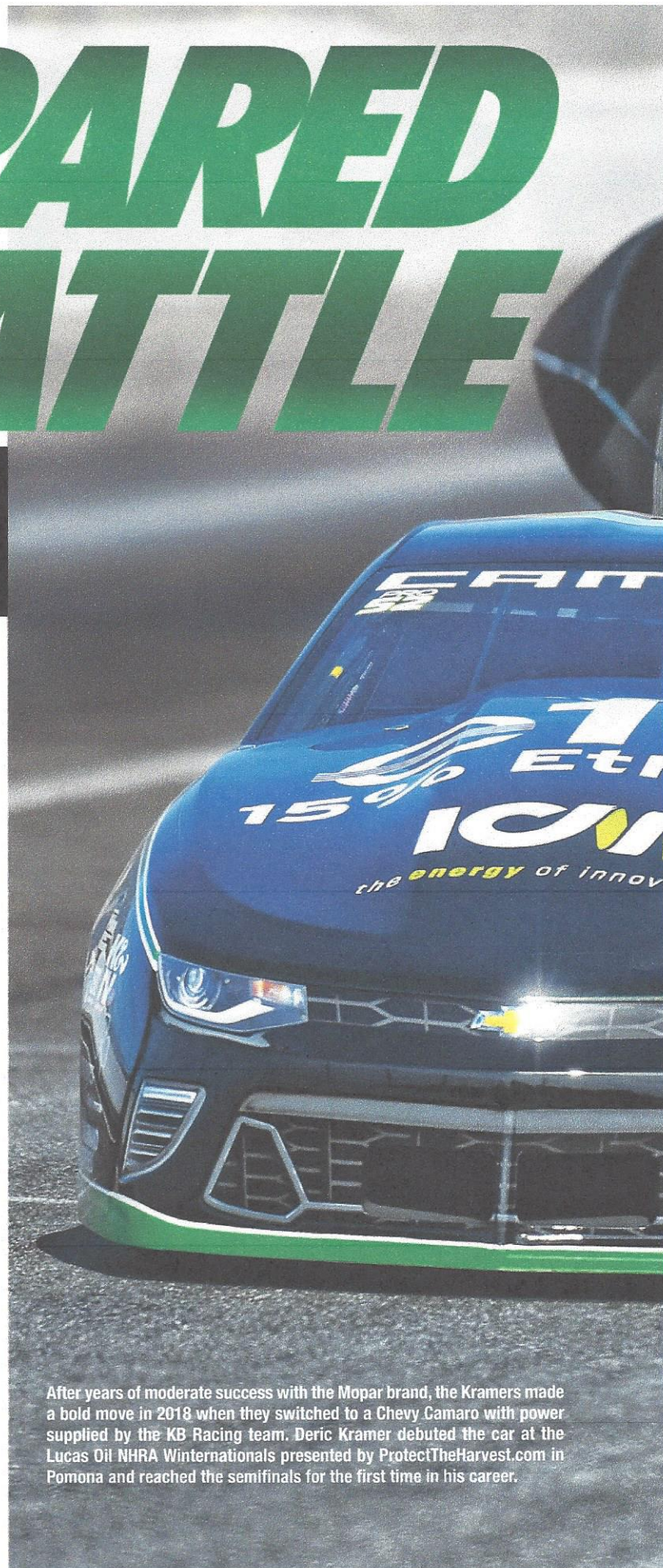
By now, the reason for the increased optimism should be fairly obvious. Kramer, along with his father, Comp veteran David, have made a big commitment to the class for 2018. The Colorado-based duo parked their Dodge Dart in favor of a new Chevy Camaro, and, more importantly, the Kramers signed an engine-leasing deal with Ken Black Racing, the same outfit that fueled Butner's championship run last year and has led drivers Greg Anderson and Jason Line to a combined eight Pro Stock world titles.

"I think we just reached a point where we either needed to make a serious commitment to winning in Pro Stock or go do something else," said Kramer. "We don't have the budget to fund our own [engine development] program to be as competitive as the KB, Elite, or Gray teams. We're also located in the middle of Colorado, which isn't exactly the motorsports capital of the U.S., and we just don't have the infrastructure to do what the other teams do.

"Last year, we did our [Dodge] deal with Madcap Engines," said Kramer. "V. [Gaines, Madcap owner] was not racing, so they did all our R&D and engine maintenance. We'd also previously worked with Chris McGaha, but he's got his own Chevy program, so that wasn't an ideal situation. It got to a point where we were not competitive enough to spend what we were spending. We talked to the KB guys last July to see if a deal would be possible. It really started as just a casual conversation, but it progressed from there. We talked to other teams, but my crew chief, Michael Hiner, has worked with Anderson in the past, so they have some history. We all know those KB guys are phenomenal. We eventually put a deal together, and I'm really happy about it."

This much is hard to argue: The KB team has been the class of the field since the dawn of the fuel-injection era in 2016. KB drivers Butner,

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After years of moderate success with the Mopar brand, the Kramers made a bold move in 2018 when they switched to a Chevy Camaro with power supplied by the KB Racing team. Deric Kramer debuted the car at the Lucas Oil NHRA Winternationals presented by ProtectTheHarvest.com in Pomona and reached the semifinals for the first time in his career.



Anderson, and Line have won more than half the races contested in 2016-17. Kramer is eager to join an outfit that has combined for nine championships and 143 national event titles with four drivers, including Swedish FIA champ Jimmy Alund.

“For a team like KB to accept someone like myself speaks volumes for them and their commitment to Pro Stock racing,” said Kramer. “When you look at what Bo did last year, it should inspire anyone. There is no reason anyone else out there, who wants to race Pro Stock, can’t make the connections and put these deals together. Thankfully, we never had to look at any other options. When we talked to the KB guys, we each outlined our expectations, worked on the logistics, and came up with something that worked for both of us.”

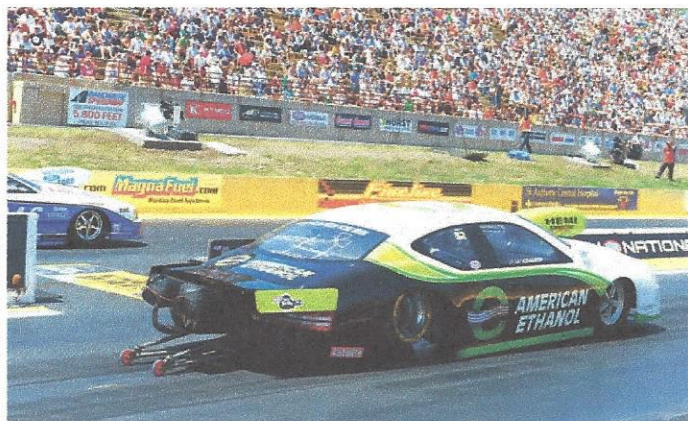
That enthusiasm goes both ways. In the past, the KB team might have been hesitant to add a fourth team car, but Kramer’s easy-going nature and his apparent untapped potential helped close the deal. Butner certainly thinks that Kramer will be a positive addition to the team.

“I’m sure he’ll be good,” said the reigning champ. “He is a very good driver. Now, there are four of us to deal with, and I think that’s awesome.”



Like many of today’s Pros, Kramer got his start in the NHRA Summit Racing Jr. Drag Racing League at the age of 8. He eventually progressed to a street car and then to the family’s six-second A/Econo Dragster, the same car his father used to win the Denver event in 2002.

“I had a ’69 Camaro in high



(Above) After a brief stint in Comp, Kramer made his Pro Stock debut at the 2012 Denver event and qualified his American Ethanol Dodge for the tough 16-car Pro Stock field. (Below) Deric Kramer’s father, David, earned his first and, so far, only national event win in Comp when he drove his A/Econo Dragster to a final-round win over Tom Snyder.



school, but the first real race car I drove was my dad’s dragster,” he recalled. “I think I had a really aggressive need for speed at the time. I just didn’t think anything of how fast I was going. I got plenty of speeding tickets as a kid, so this was the best place for me to be.”

Along the way, Kramer also got a quality education. He has a degree in electrical engineering

and currently works as a software developer who specializes in iPhone apps. Having a job in the technology sector is wonderful, provided it doesn’t interfere with racing season.

“It’s a very labor-intensive job and can be super hard, but I have a pretty liberal from-home policy that allows me to get to the races when I need to,” said Kramer. “Typically, I fly in Thursday night

and go back to work Monday morning. In between runs, I’m up in the lounge working.”

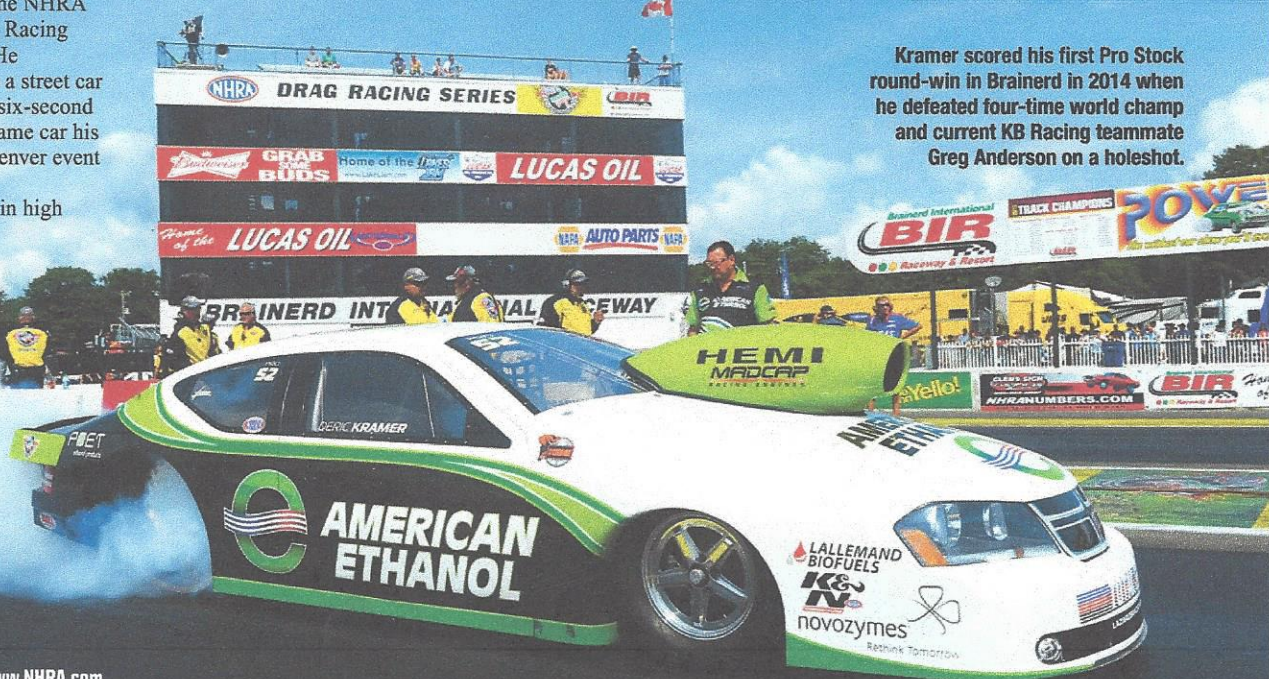
Kramer ran just three events in Comp during the 2011 season before making the seemingly giant leap into the Pro Stock class. He qualified in his debut at home-track Bandimere Speedway and made the field for his second appearance later that year in Las Vegas.

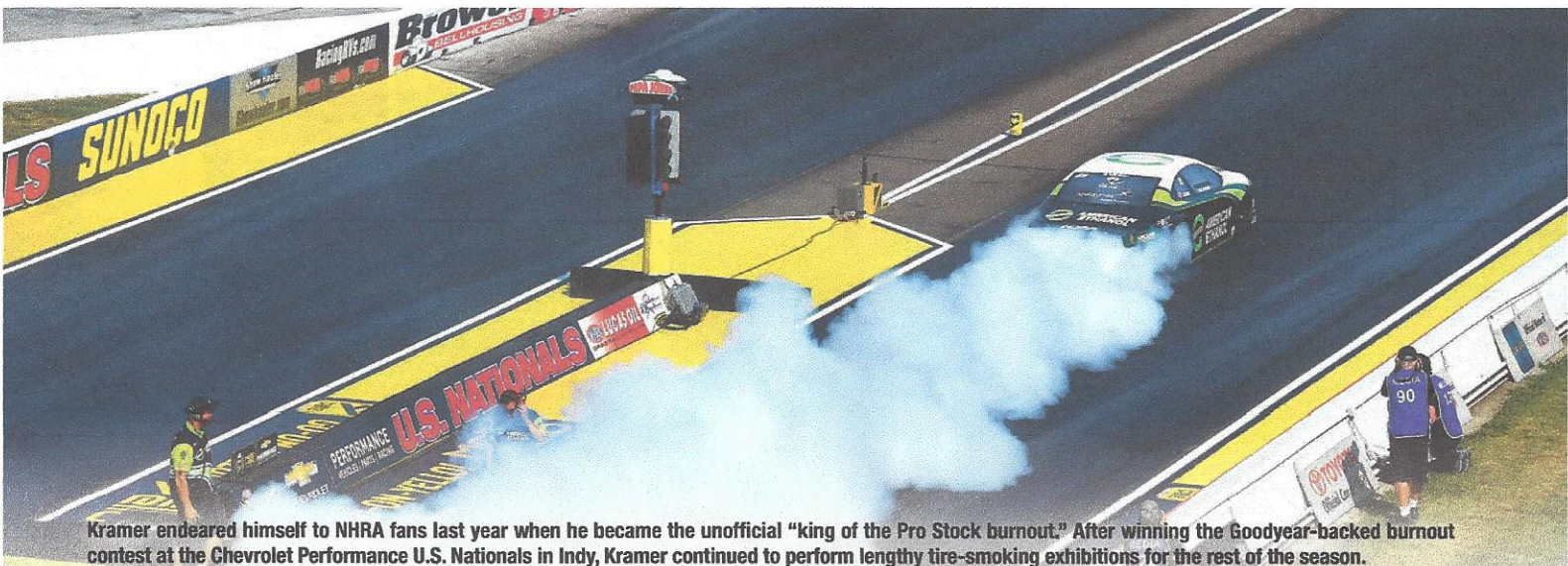
“Going from the dragster to a Pro Stock car, I actually slowed down, but there is so much more to do in a Pro Stock car,” said Kramer. “I remember the first time I sat in the car. V. Gaines was helping explain a few things to me. He grabbed the steering wheel and turned it down to where his arm was almost hitting my knee. He said, ‘You never want to turn this wheel more than that far.’ I thought, ‘Jeez, if you do that in a dragster, you’re going to be in the wall.’”

Kramer scored his first Professional round-win at the 2014 Lucas Oil NHRA Nationals in Brainerd when he strapped a huge holeshot on current teammate Anderson’s Summit Camaro. Using a nearly perfect .004 light, Kramer’s 6.641 held up against Anderson’s much-quicker 6.574. Kramer remembers it well.

“That was huge for me, but I actually felt for Greg because that’s his home track,” said Kramer. “It turns out that was the round that kept him out of the Countdown [to the Championship]. He went to Indy and needed to win one more round than Jonathan [Gray], and he missed it. Of course, my first loss came

Kramer scored his first Pro Stock round-win in Brainerd in 2014 when he defeated four-time world champ and current KB Racing teammate Greg Anderson on a holeshot.





Kramer endeared himself to NHRA fans last year when he became the unofficial "king of the Pro Stock burnout." After winning the Goodyear-backed burnout contest at the Chevrolet Performance U.S. Nationals in Indy, Kramer continued to perform lengthy tire-smoking exhibitions for the rest of the season.

against Line, so I'm sure I'll hear about that this year."

Another memorable event for Kramer came last year in Denver, where the American Ethanol team expanded to three entries for the weekend. Richie Stevens Jr., who wheeled a second Hemi-powered Dodge Dart, joined Kramer in Pro Stock. David Kramer also returned to the Comp class in the team's A/Econo Dragster, which is powered by one of their 500-cid Hemi engines.

Last year, Deric Kramer endeared himself to NHRA fans when he won the top prize in the Goodyear-backed Pro Stock Battle of the Burnouts contest at the Chevrolet Performance U.S. Nationals. Long burnouts quickly became Kramer's trademark, including one memorable tire-smoker in which he crossed the centerline at the 60-foot mark. The KB team isn't about to allow its engines to absorb that sort of abuse, so Kramer will likely have to change his starting routine, although he does allow for some wiggle room.

While he won't be racing a Dodge this year, Kramer does have a large inventory of Hemi engines left, and under the 2018 rules, he can install one in his Camaro. That might be an option either for a race where he isn't leasing a KB engine or for special events, specifically a burnout contest.

"We're going to keep one of our old Hemi engines in the trailer, and with the new rules, we can always put it in our Camaro for Q4 and

have at it," he said. "I still like doing the long burnouts, so we'll see. The problem is that the long burnouts do cost you a hundredth or two on the track, and when you're trying to win rounds, you just can't give up that much. If the situation was right, it's something I'd consider because I really enjoy them and so do the fans."

Aside from Pro Stock racing, Kramer's other passion is competitive fencing. He often competes in fencing events across the country promoted by the Society for Creative Anachronism (SCA). SCA fencing is a style of historical fencing where the primary focus is to study, replicate, and compete with styles of rapier sword fighting found in Europe during the Renaissance period, using blunted-steel swords and a variety of off-hand defensive items.

"It's similar to a Civil War reenactment or something from the Middle Ages," said Kramer. "We have tournaments all over the country, some of them as large as 155 people. We use the honor system where if I get hit, I tell my opponent. It's as close to true sword fighting as you can get. We use a true 16th century sword except the blades have been dulled and the tip blunted. Still, it's possible to cut a bicep or have some other injury. In fencing, you find that almost 100 percent of the time that you get hit it's because you're standing too close."

Kramer is convinced that the same discipline that allows him to be a competitive fencer is also

beneficial to his time behind the wheel of a Pro Stock car.

"Oh, they are absolutely one and the same," said Kramer. "The hand-eye coordination that goes with fencing or video games or driving a race car is all relevant."

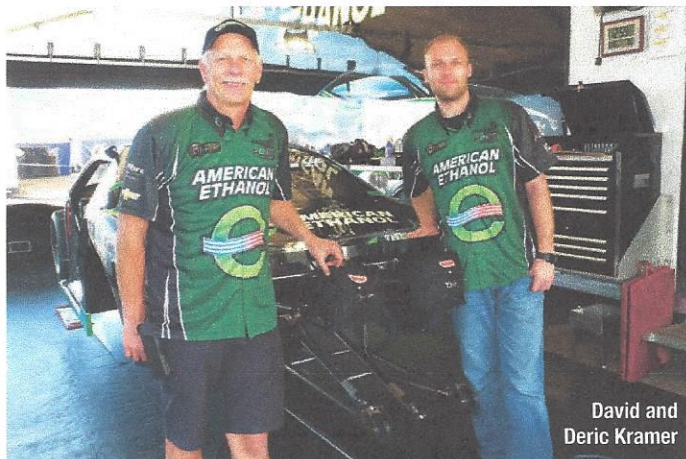
A week before the start of the 2018 season, Kramer headed to Wild Horse Pass Motorsports Park near Phoenix to test with many of the other Pro Stock teams. For perhaps the first time in his career, he didn't feel overmatched.

"Bo and I tested the first two days, and then Greg and Jason came in," Kramer said. "We really just wanted to make sure my car went straight and got down the track. On my second pass, I ran the same e.t. as Bo, so I wasn't too upset about that. We had a couple of issues the first day, but after we adjusted the front struts, the car was flawless."

Since his debut, Kramer has competed in 65 Pro Stock races and

qualified for 59 of them. He has also notched six career round-wins, a number that could easily quadruple this season.

"I hope so," he said. "That's the goal; that's why we did this. For the first time, I'll actually be part of a team, which is going to be really exciting. I won't feel like I'm on an island. Honestly, what I want out of this deal is validation that everything we've done as a team for the last five years has been worth it. I want to know that our past issues have been mostly motor-related because personally, I think we make good runs. Michael [Hiner] also wants to validate that we run the car the right way, and I want a chance to show what I can do as a driver. In the past, I've pretty much had to be .00 on the Tree in order to win a round. Now, it would be nice to get away with a .030 [light] from time to time. If you ask me if we can win a race this year, I'd have to say sure. Why not? We've got everything in place to do it. We just need to go out and make it happen." NHRA



David and Deric Kramer