

Appeared in Dirt Late Model magazine.

## The Cowboy and The New Car Salesman

Ron Lee works a 12,000 acre calf and cattle operation on a Sandhills ranch 30 miles from nowhere. Brian Scott sells new cars for a Ford dealer in Omaha. Lee travels 125 miles to find the nearest race track. Scott could race at six different tracks before Lee arrived at one. Ron races with the CNCTA(Central Nebraska Circle Track Association), an IMCA late model tour. Brian participates in the NASCAR Weekly Racing Series Short Track division. What is their common link? For both racing is a hobby, not a job. Like many of the estimated 10,000 late model drivers in the U.S., both struggle pursuing this expensive hobby. Still, their passion overcomes many obstacles. While focusing on just two drivers, this article is a tribute to all drivers of similar passion who make racing a sport like no other.

"My Original Plan Was To Race For Two Years And Ride Broncs For Two Years."

In 1883, Ron Lee's great, great grandfather homesteaded a plot in the vast emptiness of Nebraska's Sandhills. A true pioneer, he had fought alongside the Pawnee against the Sioux, and operated a freight line between Deadwood and Laramie before taking up ranching. Over 120 years later, this ranch is still a Lee family operation. Working with his father and a brother, Ron is specifically in charge of the spring calving operation. The fall calving season begins in August, and that of course is still racing season in these parts. Being in charge of one specific operation does not mean Lee is able to slack off on others.

"There's literally hundreds of miles of barbed wire fence on the ranch that always needs repairing," stated Lee. "There are windmills to repair and maintain, along with other farm equipment. I am in charge of mowing hay, and each summer we put up 4,000 bales weighing about 1,500 lbs. each. In the winter there are cattle to feed; in the spring is calving; in the summer besides cutting hay, we grow some corn for feed; and the fall is calving again." How did Lee become a racer when the nearest track is 125 miles away and there are far more cattle than race fans in the surrounding area?

"My mother grew up on a farm north of Omaha," said Lee. "She told us stories of when she was in high school and watched her cousins Bill and Virgil Wrich race stock cars at the long gone fairgrounds track in Arlington, Ne, and later at the famous Sunset Speedway in Omaha."

"I must have been 9 or 10 when on a visit to my grandparents farm we went to visit the Wrich farm on a Sunday afternoon. I still remember the bright orange Camaro sitting on a trailer ready for the short tow to Sunset Speedway. Through plenty of begging I got my dad to take my brothers and I to the races that evening. And when I heard roar of the engines as the cars came out of turn four to take the green, I KNEW that was something I was gonna do someday."

After graduating from high school Lee attended college in Milford, NE, and got a degree in automotive technology. He worked in a GM dealership for a few years before returning to the ranch. And bought a '68 Camaro to do some drag racing-organized and otherwise.

In 1991 Lee attended the races in Winner, SD, 125 miles northwest of home. Over the winter he built a hobby stock to compete at the track. "Looking back I sure did it the hard way," laughed Lee. "I bought a roll cage and welded it in an old Monte Carlo myself. "I built my own motor and put the car together going off things I read in magazines. I really didn't know any racers well enough to ask questions, and wouldn't have known what questions to ask if I had."

"Funny now, but I really didn't know any better. Slowly, I got faster. I won a few heat races and trophy dashes that first year, had a lot of fun, and learned a lot with that car." "My original plan was to race for two years, ride broncs for two years, and then pursue whatever I won the most money at." That plan never worked out as Lee got engaged and then married. Lee moved to Chadron so his wife could attend college, and during the years there, his children Jayden and Shevelle were born. "Racing and other plans got shelved indefinitely as I worked to support my growing family," stated Lee.

Lee's family moved to Omaha and he went to work in a transmission shop owned by area late model driver Roger Hadan.

"That was really my first exposure to late models," said Lee. "I learned a lot from just being around. Roger was putting together a two car operation with the intent of running for Hav-A-Tampa rookie of the year. That was the season Dan Schliepper also contended for HAT rookie of the year, and combined with a work related hand injury, Roger's run for rookie of the year didn't really get going."

As sometimes happens, differences in direction ended Lee's marriage. Along with his children, Lee moved back to the ranch. The kids spend summers with their mother, so free of this responsibility, Lee once more went looking for a race car. A late model race car. In 1999 Lee ran a sportsman, a stock stub, late model appearing car. In 2000 he tried to run both a sportsman and an LM, but parked the sportsman for good by mid-season.

Racing two nights a week, Lee found early success in the late model. He became a top ten fixture and won a feature as well. More important he learned the value of true friends. Living 125 miles from the nearest track and racing two weekend nights would mean traveling great distances both nights or staying at a motel. Either option would be very expensive. However, the Ravenna home of Lester Dean Duncan became a Sandhills oasis for Lee. "Dean, his pit helper Dan Schmidt, and their families welcomed me into their homes," stated Lee. "This allowed me to race those two day weekends without an extra trip or a motel."

In 2002 Lee decided to run with CNCTA, an IMCA Midwest tour. The organization fills a niche between weekly racing and larger tours. Lee has gained valuable experience traveling to many different tracks and racing against stiff competition, and finished 9<sup>th</sup> in point standings for the 2003 season. And again found racing friends-the Kempts, who not only lessen the travel burden for Lee, but let him use their shop as well. For 2004 Lee is once more racing with CNCTA as well as some weekly racing. He celebrated July 4<sup>th</sup> with the proverbial bang, an A feature victory at Dawson County Raceway in Lexington, NE.

CNCTA competitor Steve Hansen had this to say about Lee.

"Though he seems quiet and shy, he is a fierce competitor. He is on a limited budget and builds his own bodies. Most of the time he has no pit crew, so he works on the car by himself not only in the shop, but at the track too. He is a great ambassador for the sport, and if he had the budget to race with that many of his competitors do, he would be even more of a force to reckon with than he is now."

Ron Lee may be low budget, but he is not a "have not." The pioneer self-reliance of his great, great grandfather abounds within this cowboy racer, and coupled with an intense desire to be a part of the sport, Ron exemplifies what is good about racing. He may not be a star, but he is a wonderful role model for racers and fans alike.

### Racing Just For The Love Of The Sport

Thirty four year old Brian Scott is a new car sales person for Atchley Ford in Omaha. He works 65 hours a week at the dealership. His wife Connie works 50 hours weekly on her job. Scott has five sons between the ages of 3 and 16, and "all are good boys."

"My wife and I make decent wages," stated Scott, "but family always comes first and most of our income is slated for the boys. I do have sponsors, but my racing budget is very tight."

In the late 90's, Scott was a crewman for his brother Rick Havenridge at Sunset Speedway in Omaha. Havenridge was going out of town on a family vacation and he asked Scott if he would race his Camaro that week. Scott agreed, caught the racing bug, and decided to go racing on his own. A Camaro that hadn't been raced in five years was Scott's first purchase.

"My shop at the time had only two 75 watt lights, no heat, and no air compressor," stated Scott. "I didn't know much, but put the car together on my own, even the engine. No it wasn't very fast. The first year we got our butts spanked every week. But we did make some really good friends who happened to be the fastest Pro-

Am drivers around. They really bent over backwards to help get my car updated to what they were doing.”

“A Christmas gift from my father in-law allowed me to go to a racing school in Arizona. We installed new lights in the shop, got a compressor and some much needed heat. And, we purchased a professionally built motor too.”

“We did well in the final season at Sunset,” said Scott. “We won many heats, and finished fifth in points in the super tough Pro-Am division.”

On the final night of racing at Sunset Speedway, Scott’s friend Craig Preble let him drive his GN late model.

“I led 8 laps of the 10 lap B feature,” laughed Scott, “but ended the race over the back wall with a broken tranny.”

After driving his Camaro for a season at Nebraska Raceway Park, Scott moved up to a GN Late Model at NRP last year. The step from the Camaro to the GN was a large one, but Scott’s comfort with the 2001 Rocket grew weekly, and he finished the season as runner-up for rookie of the year honors in that division. The GN division at NRP averages 35-40 cars weekly. Many of the drivers who race there have been racing GN’s since this division was established in the late 90’s. It is not easy to do well in the class, but Scott has continued improving. Despite working with a far smaller budget than many drivers, Scott is knocking on the door for an A feature win, and just might knock the door down this season.

Scott is a person that can’t help smiling, and is always good for a laugh at the track. He has the perfect attitude for racer’s who love this expensive hobby.

“The main reason for me doing this is the friendships,” stated Scott. “I cannot overstate the caliber of people that I have had the privilege of meeting in this sport. This is one strange and wonderful group of guys and gals. They will bend over backward to help a buddy, or even a complete stranger. They care for one another and it shows. I have thought of quitting, but knowing I wouldn’t be able to see these people on a weekly basis keeps me coming back. I have made many friendships that will last much longer than my racing “career” and that is better than winning ANY race or championship in my book.”

Brian Scott. No way can anyone with so many racing friends be called a have not.

Sidebar-It’s A REALLY Bad Feeling When You Have Time To See The Cars That Are Going To Hit You.

Early in the 2004 season, Scott was involved in a multi-car melee at NRP. "The 56 car switched from the bottom groove to the top. I had my nose under his car and was on the brakes hard trying not to spin him out, and around I went. It's a really bad feeling when you have time to see the cars that are going to hit you," stated Scott. "Although tearing up the car so badly doesn't happen too often, it does happen and we have to deal with it or miss a week. We have never missed a week yet."

Ron Lee's passion for the sport has been displayed through his ability to overcome both distance and lack of support and still be competitive. The following describes Scott's accident and the next week, in Brian's own words. Brian's passion for racing is unmistakable as the long hours and hard work of this week mount up. Just as important, the true spirit of the sport shines through as fellow racers help to get his car back on the track.

SUNDAY..... Racing is going fine until lap 12 in the A feature. A spin on the high side and a head on collision at speed leave my car very wrecked and mangled. In the pits Dave Doll's crew chief Bob Ward and I conduct a survey of the damage. I can't afford to fix this one on my budget, but Dave says he will help with the bill and to get it fixed. We decide it can't be fixed at my shop and will need to go to Dave's better equipped shop, aptly named Dirt Dawgs Racing. We get a list of things needed to repair the car. Bob says he will want the car Monday night after I get off work, and he will get the needed parts. We pull home making a game plan on who can be where on what day, and who is going to help. I leave the car on the trailer and leave it hooked to the truck and head to bed at 1:45 a.m.

MONDAY.... The alarm goes off at 7:30 a.m. I awake and get the kids ready for daycare. My wife has left for work an hour ago. I drop the boys off at 8:30 and pull into the back lot at work by 8:45. During the day I phone Bob to make sure we are still on for tonight and he assures me we are. I also phone my wife and tell her it will be a long week and I can't be around to help with the kids too much. She understands and tells me to do what I need to do. I'm off work by 9:00 p.m., arrive at Dirt Dawgs by 9:30 and unload the car. We decided the body is too damaged to repair, and will need to be completely replaced. The right front suspension is junk, and the front frame horns, cross member, and bumper will need replacing also. We get to work stripping the car and cutting the damaged frame parts out. Crew member Brian shows up at 10:00 p.m. and lends a hand. At 2:00 a.m. the car is stripped and the remaining frame is straightened with the use of some VERY long poles and a Bobcat tractor. We're ready to start replacing parts and put the car together. We call it a night and I climb into bed at 2:45 a.m.

TUESDAY...My late day in. The boys and I sleep late. I get some house cleaning done and dishes done, the kids dropped off at daycare and am at work by 12:30 p.m. I'm off at 9:00 p.m. again, and get to the shop by 9:30. Bob and I start cutting aluminum for the body. At 1:00 a.m. we decide we have a full day ahead of us and pack it up. I hit the bed at 1:45 a.m.

WEDNESDAY...My day off. We sleep late again, and I drop the boys off at day care and head to the shop. I'm there by noon and ready to work. We spend some time cutting tubing for the frame and getting everything measured, placed and ready for (SLM driver) Craig Preble to start welding. At 5:30 p.m. Preb arrives and we start welding. By midnight Preb is done with all the welds, and Brian and I have the suspension back on. The three of us have a few much needed beers. 2:00 a.m. and finally in bed.

THURSDAY...I'm at work by 9:00 a.m. and I'm starting to get worried about our progress. No work will be done tonight because Brandon is celebrating his fifth birthday at Chucky Cheese Pizza. I leave work early(5:30 p.m.), pick up the boys, and head to the party. We get home, get the kids to bed, and get to sleep around midnight.

FRIDAY...Knowing we are running out of time I ask my boss for a vacation day. He understands the situation and lets me take the day off. I'm at the shop by 11:00 a.m. I get started by welding the fender supports together and painting the frame and bumper. Bob is done with the body panels, and we spend the rest of the day installing the new body and touching up any wrinkles in the deck and roof. My wife makes the 30 minute drive out to see the car and to drop off Tyler, my 12 year old, to help. By 10:00 p.m. the body is done. We decide that if we can get the graphics installed before we leave we'll be in great shape. Bob starts cutting vinyl and I start masking and installing the graphics. Again Brian shows up and lends a hand. At 3:00 a.m. the graphics are done and so are we. 3:45 a.m. and I'm home and out like a light.

SATURDAY....I love this day because I am the only person I have to get up and dressed. I'm not sure how I did it, but I was at work 20 minutes early. By 6:30 p.m. I was back at the shop and ready to start laying all the sponsor logos and numbers. Brian arrives at 7:30. We start laying vinyl. Bob is going nuts because we keep singing along with the radio and no, we can't sing. The vinyl process is easy, but takes hours to do. We finish my car at 1:30 a.m. and realize that Dave Doll's car still needs all the vinyl installed on the left side. Bob starts cutting and Brian and I start putting it on. Dave's car is finally done, and yes the sun is up. I crawl into bed at 5:30 a.m.

SUNDAY!!!!... My wife is awesome and lets me sleep until 1:00 p.m. Crew members Eric and Shorty have already called to find the whereabouts of my car. My wife informs them it is still at Dave's. They head to my shop and get what they need and then go to Dave's shop to do the weekly maintenance. Brian gets to the house by 1:30. We go buy ice, pop, and beer for the races and head to Dave's shop. We help get the last items done and load the car and head to the races. We arrive at the track at 4:30 p.m. and are unloaded and ready to race by 5:00. At 5:15 a thunderstorm hits the track. We hurry and get the car loaded and get out of the pits before we get stuck. Eric and Shorty are drenched, and the races are rained out. We stop in the NRP parking lot, and decide we have had enough for the week, and go home to see our

families. I got my lawn mowed by 8:00, and even made it to Blockbuster to rent a movie. I'm not sure how it ended though....I fell asleep halfway through it.

#### Sidebar-Secrets of Low Budget Racers

One "major" purchase each year. This year it was freshening the engine for both Scott and Lee. Scott also bought a new body, and Lee rebuilt the transmission and brakes on his car.

Three year old chassis'. A 2001 American Made for Lee, a 2001 Rocket for Scott.

Ron Lee buys 5 new tires during an average season-about one new tire for every other CNCTA race, and saves the best of his used tires for the CNCTA series, using the others for his weekly racing. Brian Scott bought 5 new Hoosiers for this season, but mostly gets used tires from a fellow competitor.

Scott does not hot lap-"it wastes fuel, tear offs, and equipment."

Lee gets oil for his race engine from sponsor Quik Lube in Valentine. Scott buys used parts wherever possible, and has no spare engine, and few spare parts.

Sponsor Jim Lee Ranch-named for Lee's grandfather and father-provides Ron with shop space and smaller maintenance items such as grease, and air filters. Scott receives help from racer Dave Doll and has a pit crew of five that have been with him since he started racing.

"Every week we show up and hope we don't break anything," said Scott. "Maybe that is why I am a bit more cautious than most on the track. I cannot afford to hurt the car and probably don't take the risks some of the faster guys do."

The bottom line for each? Scott tries to get by on a \$5-6,000 racing budget. For Lee the total is \$6-7,000 for the season, including pit passes, race fuel, and travel expenses. And how much does Scott Bloomquist's motor home cost? Maybe the better question might be, who is having more fun?

#### Sidebar: 'Hood'lums.

Brian Scott is always smiling or laughing, but has that look that he is also up to something. The kind of look that says "better get me first, because I am going to get you." A number of drivers have taken that to heart, and it seems Brian has a difficult time with the hood of his cars.

"It started the last year of Sunset," laughed Scott. "Every week somebody would steal a hood pin from our car. Just one. The internet played a big part in the

humor of it. I would post looking for my missing hood pins, and somebody would post back under the name of 'Hood Pin.' This went on the entire season. The last night of racing we came out of the Sunset Inn and the entire hood was gone!"

"That winter the hood would show up in pictures posted on the internet. Some were in Omaha, some were in Fremont, some as far away as North Bend. The pics were always in front of something, so you could tell it was really there. Then, at the Sunset season banquet, my hood was propped up behind all the trophies. Promoter Craig Kelley and Pro-Am Driver Jason Waite were behind the hood pin caper, and my own brother Rick Havenridge was the hood thief. Things kind of died down after the banquet." UNTIL-

Once again Scott's hood has turned up missing. No one has taken credit for the theft, and there have been no internet pictures or warnings.

"I do know the culprit this time, but I'm not letting on that I know," stated Scott. I have something big planned for him. We did make a new hood. It looks exactly like a missing child ad. We changed the 'Children' to 'Hoods,' and even made a picture of the old hood for it. The logo is on it, along with the website, [www.missinghoods.com](http://www.missinghoods.com). We will run this hood until our trap is set, and the rabbit takes the bait. I can't wait to see his face when the plan happens."