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Dave Doll And The Dirt Dawgs

“My father used to say that when you die, if you’ve got five great friends, you’ve led a great life.”-Lee Iacocca

To call Dave Doll a reluctant interview would be like calling Howard Hughes somewhat of a recluse. To define the Omaha businessman as a friend of the sport of racing brings unwanted, but deserved attention to a racer’s racer. And to spend even a few hours with him is to understand indeed he leads a great life.

According to Webster’s Dictionary, reluctant means unwilling, averse, marked by unwillingness. Averse? Probably means not answering repeated voicemails. Only with an approaching deadline and after enlisting the aid of daughter Sarah and fellow drivers Craig Preble and Brian Scott, was Doll convinced to do this article. “I guess Brian Scott can be my agent,” laughed Doll. “I can talk all day long about the dirt business, I just have a hard time talking about myself.” So the conference room at Double D Excavating became the setting for a group interview with Preble, Scott, driver Kevin Gigax and crew chief Bob Ward supporting Doll.

A Success Story

By any definition, Dave Doll is a highly successful businessman. He provides a service the public needs, at a price it is willing to pay, and makes a few bucks doing so. Doll began his dirt contracting company in 1986 with just two part-time employees, doing mainly residential retaining walls and some finish grading. Today, the northwest Omaha home of Double D Excavating is a new-ish building containing both offices and a huge shop. Large dirt movers and scores of dump trucks are on hand to meet the needs of the city’s building boom. A commercial snow removing division of Double D has 70 pieces of equipment. And, the company’s Hook ‘N Go division consists of 180 rentable dumpsters and 4 dumpster trucks. Still, dirt excavating is the company’s main business, and according to Midlands Business Journal, Double D’s handiwork can be seen throughout Omaha at such sites as the Henry Doorly Zoo, Bergan Mercy Hospital, the Hilton Hotel, and a Menards. Racing fans notice the company’s efforts every week at I-80 Speedway, where five years ago Double D lowered the track’s infield and installed pit area drains. And, 115 employees now depend on Double D for a paycheck-including son Nick and daughter Sarah(Dave’s daughter Jenny is a teacher, and daughter Jessie is a nurse).. Not bad at all for someone who quit high school to lay bricks. And modestly he attributes the success of the company to his employees, many who have been with him for well over ten years. And of course the support of wife Sue.

Playing In The Dirt

AND, Doll is not satisfied spending his time working in dirt. "Racing is my main hobby," stated Doll. "I work in dirt, and I play in dirt," driving a crate engine late model two nights a week at I-80 Speedway. Of course playing in dirt is more fun with friends, and Dave and his buddies form a unique racing team, the Dirt Dawgs. And yes they have fun. A LOT of fun.

Like so many area drivers, Doll's first taste of auto racing came at the grand old dame of Nebraska racing, Sunset Speedway "I grew up going to Sunset," stated Doll. "I started going there with my family in 1962. I can even remember when the track had grandstands on the west side."

At age 15 Doll began helping Bronco driver Dwayne Manchester. He later teamed with driver Jim Jorgenson for fourteen years. The "get in the car and drive" bug bit Doll in 1997, with the Omahan making eight races that season. Doll became a "full-time" driver in 1998. Doll has won eight features, his biggest being the 2003 Cornhusker Classic, and cars he owns have won 60 features-including the 2000 and 2001 Nebraska State Fair Championships and the 2002 Tiny Lund Memorial, according to team crew chief and statistician Bob Ward. Though not winning a points championship on his own, both Jorgenson and Preble have won championships in cars owned by Doll. Doll finished third in points at the Crawford County Speedway in Denison, Iowa in 2002, and had his best year ever in 2005, losing two championships-the Crate Engine Late Model and Grand National Divisions-at I-80 Speedway by four points.

"We were against the crate engine when it was introduced. Everything bad there was to say about it, we said," stated Doll. Now Doll praises the engine's reliability. "My only bad feelings about the crate engine is we have lots of parts at the shop that we can no longer use, that are still good parts." That he loaned Ed Kosiski-one of the owners of I-80 Speedway-his engine to run in the Crate Engine Nationals at East Bay Raceway Park in Tampa is certainly an endorsement of the engine. And Doll will once again run a crate engine in 2006, running either an '05 or '06 Rocket chassis two nights a week at I-80 Speedway.

"Economically it does not make sense for us to race two nights. Of course, economically it does not make sense to race one night. We are just trying to support the track and it's program," stated Doll.

And while team members did their best to roast Doll, there is genuine admiration and an intense loyalty among the group.

"People see Dave pull into the pits and there is the big red trailer, and they think 'money.' There is much more to Dave and his racing than that big red trailer," stated teammate Preble. "Dave looks for the betterment of the entire

racing community,” added Scott. “Yeah, he helps us out, but he helps out lots of other drivers, and that isn’t so widely known.”

The end of a season can be a tough time for drivers, especially those on a tight budget. A wreck or a broken part can sideline a driver for the remainder of a season, sometimes a driver in a tight points battle. On more than one occasion Doll has offered not only parts, but to lend cars to drivers as well. Such efforts led to the Nebraska Auto Racing Hall of Fame presenting the 2005 Gordie Shuck Memorial Sportsmanship Award to Doll. Like 2002 Shuck Award Winner Joe Kosiski, Doll’s display of unselfishness off the track is accompanied by a tough competitive streak on the track-which occasionally gets him into a little trouble at home track I-80 Speedway. “I just look up at Whitey(flagman Larry White) and show my thumb to the back, meaning to the back of the pack, and he nods his head yes,” laughed Doll.

The Dirt Dawgs race team isn’t just about Doll, or any one driver. “The team is about everyone,” stated Doll. “We don’t concentrate our resources on just one driver. We all have good equipment. Everyone contributes something to the team. It is always us, never I.”

Working in dirt is Dave Doll’s job, but playing in dirt is his relaxation. The Dirt Dawgs are all about having fun racing-not just at the track, but preparing for the races, and after the races too. If the Dirt Dawgs are a clue at all, Dave Doll really is living a great life.

Sidebar-A “Dawg” Roast

The conference room at Double D Excavating had the feel of a Celebrity Roast head table the evening of Doll’s interviews. No one was free from pointed remarks, not even Doll.

When asked about team victories last year, both Scott and Gigax were quick to point out that each went to victory lane at I-80 Speedway last season, while Preble did not. “Maybe I should have wrecked my car like Brian so it would run better,” quipped Preble. Preble was the 2005 TORA Rookie of The Year, so his season did not lack success.

Talking of working on the late models, crew chief Bob Ward stated Doll does “nothing on the car, knows nothing about the car, we just point him to the track.” When asked if this was like stories of famed NASCAR star Cale Yarborough, Ward said “no, I believe Cale knew much more than Dave.”

Doll replied to Ward that “Bobby sucks on engines, but he sure is good on set-ups.” But then added that “we are lucky to have Bobby. He is a key factor on the team. Without him just Preb would be racing.”

Brian Scott, as always, receives good natured teasing about being vertically challenged. Hitting a deer with Dave's new and unscratched hauler- while Dave was not present- was a topic of conversation. And so was what could be done with a starter's pistol and tootsie rolls brought a round of laughs. As did what could be done with, well, just call it "fireworks."

And while the team discussed being safety conscious- not a joke at all to them- they did mention that they were the only team with a tested fire suppressant system on their cars- Scott having apparently been the guinea pig for the test.

Talk turned to the hit series 'American Chopper,' and Doll said that if a series 'American Racer' was ever produced, they would have to do it at his shop. No question about that- and it would make a darn good series too.

While team members do not hesitate to take a shot at each other, make no mistake that members of Dave Doll's racing team are nothing but fiercely loyal to each other and the captain of the team. Laughed Ward, "we may be a daunting group to come up to, but once you're in, you're in."