

Two rookie honorees thank KDDP titlist

In December Derek Gluchacki was named the winner of the Kulwicki Driver Development Program. The 24-year-old now has a trophy honoring Alan Kulwicki, the Wisconsin short-tracker-turned-NASCAR Winston Cup champion whose legacy is making grassroots racing – particularly pavement Late Models – a better community.

Gluchacki, from Dartmouth, Mass., has begun to establish his own legacy, and it goes past his nine career American-Canadian Tour victories and anything else he has done behind the wheel. Two New England drivers captured rookie of the year honors around the region: Jacob Burns in the Pro Stock division at Seekonk Speedway and Shawn Gaedeke in ACT-legal Late Models at New London-Waterford Speedbowl.

The 19-year-old “Rowdy” Burns is hardly a rookie in top-level competition, with several victories in the LMS class at Seekonk and some high-profile ACT starts dating back to 2021. Even though JPB Racing has dabbled in Pro Stock/Super Late Model competition, with appearances when the Pro All Stars Series dropped in on Seekonk in 2022 and 2024, he was considered a rookie in the top division last season at the “Cement Palace.”

Burns turned in three feature wins at the third-mile oval, good for Massachusetts state honors in the NASCAR Advance Auto Parts Weekly Series, even though the track points turned out with a different name on top. He raced three other classes at the ‘Konk in 2025, scoring LMS and legends wins. He also won the LMS season finale at Waterford.

In the early part of the summer Burns, from Rehoboth, Mass., began his alliance with Gluchacki. Even though his contributions were mostly on Burns’ ACT-legal #91 ride, a Dale Shaw Race Car owned by Robert Martin, he also saw a quick rise in performance in his #30. Those three Seekonk Pro Stock wins in his family-owned Distance Racing Products machine came in consecutive weeks, a very impressive feat considering that one Saturday’s winner has to start deep in the field the next time out.

“When we first started working to-

gether, our scales of how good and bad the car was were different,” Gluchacki said. “By the time the third race came around, it was like he either won or finished second every week, and he contended to win at Thompson every time he went.”

This season Burns, whose own Pro Stock is sponsored by JML Excavation, Quality Construction & Roofing, East Coast Towing & Recovery, Ayla Martin Motorsports, BankFive, Feeney Pinkerton, Mount Hope Garage Door, Cabral’s Gourmet Chicken, CNA Plastering, Builders FirstSource, Sportees Custom Apparel, BilRay Corporation, Richie’s Insulation, Custom Drywall and Flagman Graphics, will have all of his rides serviced by Gluchacki. He’ll likely provide the most work for the new Derek Gluchacki Racing shop, which starting this spring will be his full-time job. He’ll have plenty of time for Gaedeke, who moved up from street stocks last season. He started his top-division adventure at the Speedbowl at about the same time he became good friends with Gluchacki. Gaedeke (pronounced gay-duh-key and nicknamed “Giggity”) peaked with a victory late in the year and wound up a closer-than-expected second in points behind Devin Deshaies.

“I’ve seen a lot of people struggle in this division, which is so different than anything else,” said Gaedeke, from Groton, Conn. “When I became friends with Derek I thought, ‘This is perfect. I can use his knowledge.’ We tested before opening day, and he changed a lot of stuff on the car and about myself driving it, and I was able to pick it up pretty quick.”

His #09 is originally a BFR chassis that was built to a Distance jig, making it a similar ride to what Gluchacki currently races (and won in ACT action last summer at Seekonk). Most of Gluchacki’s race weekends were understandably busy, but he did make it to Waterford three times. And he’s also close with Burns, who sold Gaedeke an engine after the #09 had one let go in the second half of the season.

“We had four seconds leading up to that win,” said Gaedeke, sponsored by Critical Signs and Critical Apparel (com-



TK Photos

Shawn Gaedeke won a September race in ACT-legal Late Model competition and placed second in points at Waterford, Conn.



Ashley Ford Photography

Jacob ‘Rowdy’ Burns won three features as a first-year driver in the Pro Stock division at Seekonk, Mass.

panies owned by Shawn Monahan and his brother Diego; Shawn’s children Brody and Emma have LMS history at Waterford), plus Northeast Property Maintenance and Mystic Coffee.

The 30-year-old Gaedeke, whose car owner is Don Spence who was also on his side during his two street stock title years, hopes to improve one points position in his home track’s standings in 2026. Multi-time champion Jason Palmer is expected to return to a full-year schedule; he ran only half the season in 2025.

“Palmer’s gonna be fun to race with,” Gaedeke said. “We didn’t get to do it much, but the night we won, he finished second. We didn’t get too much side by side stuff, as once I took the lead I kinda drove away. He ran out of time, but if there was a restart it could’ve

gotten good. Our goal is to win more races, and let the championship follow along.”

Burns also has his 2026 plans set. He and Martin are eyeing the ACT campaign, which will take him Burns to four racetracks where he has never competed. Gluchacki has seen them all, and his advice on setup and in the seat will be invaluable. That won’t leave Gluchacki much time for his own racing, but he’s definitely willing to delay another full-season attempt to at least 2027.

“We want to get this off the ground and see how it goes,” he said. “All the cars are a whole lot different from each other. If you put something on Jacob’s car, you can’t turn around and put it on Shawn’s car. You’ve got to keep trying stuff to stay ahead of the competition.”

Tennessee

King's old throne fits Cole at Newport

Newport Speedway's reopening in the fall of 2024 brought a number of veteran racers in East Tennessee and western North Carolina back to short-track racing in one form or another. Perhaps the longest such drought – and one of the most surprising names to regularly be on the sign-in sheet at the .4-mile oval pit gate – is Mark King.

The native of Seymour, Tenn., was a regular in the old UARA Late Model Stock Car circuit in 2003-06, winning once in a visit to Newport. One year later he hung up his helmet and didn't really give pavement racing much of a thought until just over a year ago. The King family took over the Stinger chassis brand of dirt Late Models and had been focused on that racing surface for more than a decade.

One of King's primary sponsors was Copeland Creek Log Cabins, a company owned by Austin Green. Green's grandson is Walker Cole, who did a good bit of SCCA action and other road racing during his 20s.

When Green passed away in 2020, Cole inherited a 1998 Hedgcock chassis which King drove for a number of years and attached several victory stickers, mostly from Lonesome Pine Raceway. That's the #44 machine which Cole drove to Limited Late Model rookie of the year honors and placed third in points in 2025 at Newport.

"No one wanted anything to do with it, but I had dreams of driving it when I was also doing SCCA stuff," said Cole, from Sevierville, Tenn. "It had newer front and rear clips to make it a truck-arm car. It was at a friend's shop when Mitch West borrowed it; he wrapped it like a Kellogg's car for a flashback race at Bristol (in the early 2010s). Lee Tissot drove it for Mitch and almost won at Kingsport (in a UARA race), then ran it once at Myrtle Beach before it closed.

"After that Mitch let people take a lot of parts off this car. When I picked it up there was practically nothing on it - a bare chassis. I work for a Caterpillar dealership and had someone in a service truck follow me home one night, then he used a crane to get it in the garage be-



Randall Perry/RPM Racing Photos

Walker Cole drove a former Mark King car to third place in Limited Late Model points at Newport Speedway, behind veteran Lance Gatlin and Lee Tissot.

cause it wouldn't roll."

That transfer was in 2024, and Cole figured it would take a full year to rebuild the machine. The unveiling came just in time for Newport's 2025 opener, the Ted Caldwell Memorial 88-lap special named in memory of longtime area sponsor Jeff Caldwell's dad. King was one of the first numbers Cole dialed.

"He's 20 minutes up the road. Eventually it went to Mark's shop for about a week," Cole said. "I think he was a little shellshocked when I called him up. I swung by his shop once before that and showed him a picture of the car, and he was mind-blown about the shape it was in. I knew I had my work cut out for me. He was willing to help me and was invested in it. On a weekly basis on Wednesdays, he'd help me scale the car to the point where the numbers looked like it thought they should. It did exactly what he said it would do, and it drove exactly like he told me it would."

The car was in race shape before the driver was. Cole, who had just turned 31, was happy with his Caldwell effort, qualifying 19th and finishing 13th in his first oval race.

"We went to every open test prior to that race, but there were very little to no other cars on the track, so all of my seat time was by myself," he said. "It was different with 22 other cars, and it was a bit nerve-wracking. My goal was to try to finish all the laps and blend in with the guys like (track champion) Lance

Gatlin, Lee Tissot, Matt Leicht and (eventual race winner) Martin Nesbitt. Finishing the race was a success in my opinion."

For the rest of the season, his best feature finish was fifth. His priority was taking care of the car, because of its obvious sentimental value in the #44 sponsored by Hollywood Star Cars Museum, Rex Howard's Landscaping, King Chassis Works and a local Buddy's Bar-B-Q.

"I've got a picture from when I was 2 years old outside this hauler," Cole said. "I grew up going to the track everywhere this car went for years in the UARA tour. In the first few races I was scared to tear it up, so I wasn't pushing the envelope ... nervous about knocking the nose off it or spinning out and having somebody hit you in the door."

A turning point came in the season's final points race in October. Cole qualified third, ahead of Gatlin, Tissot and the other regulars and behind only a pair of Texans from Max Calles-McDonald's development team. The twin features didn't turn out as well for Cole (or the MCM duo), but it was still a confidence boost heading into his second season in the class.

"I really think we have momentum from last year," Cole said. "Our goal is to at least win a race, and ultimately finish every race and be there at the end. If we can do that, we should be a favorite to win the championship. I'm hearing Lee will run some, but he'll be focusing

on the new IHRA (Stock Car Series), and Lance will be in the same boat."

Newport's first 2026 race is the second annual Ted Caldwell tribute. That April 18 show has a \$2,000 minimum winner's prize plus lap leader bonuses totaling five digits. Newport will also have two events on the schedule of the new LeapFrog Landscaping Tri-State Triple Crown, with two set for Anderson Motor Speedway and Hickory Motor Speedway.



Randall Perry/RPM Racing Photos

Walker Cole transitioned from road racing to ovals in one off-season.

Colorado

One special night boosted Clark's year

Holly Clark was the Super Late Model rookie of the year at Colorado National Speedway, despite struggling to keep up with the regular frontrunners at the 3/8-mile oval. One July event proved that she could do just that.

Her best result at CNS was a fourth-place finish when the Spears CARS Tour West visited the bullring about two hours north of her home in Colorado Springs. That race brought a loaded field, most notably NASCAR standout Kevin Harvick who finished second. But the 19-year-old Clark held her own, crossing the stripe ahead of multi-time CNS champions Bruce Yackey and Darren Robertson and other big names such as three-time SRL Southwest Tour titlist Jacob Gomes.

"That really meant the world to me. It was definitely the highlight of my season," she said. "It really made me proud to know that everything we did and all the hardships were paying off, and that I am capable of taking the car and driving it through the field if given a car capable of doing that."

Since 2021 Clark had been splitting time between Late Models and modifieds, logging more

time in the open-wheel class. She ranked second in 2023 Lucas Oil Modified Series points and focused on the fenderless car again in 2024. Last season she ran only this Super Late Model, a Port City Phase II chassis which she and her father Steve Clark built from the ground up last winter.

Her target was actually the CARS West circuit, where she finished every lap in all but one of the races she started (and ran out of fuel in the season opener). She actually missed a couple of the CNS dates, but impressed enough when she did run her #17, with a Peters Racing Engine and support from Rocky Mountain Cycle Plaza, Pink Carburetors, Olson Plumbing & Heating, Afco and Longacre Racing Products, and Swift Springs.

"It was definitely a learning curve. This is very different from what we were used to," she said. "I definitely got a lot out of it. I'm looking forward to the next step and taking what we learned this year to it."

It'll take some more sponsorship for her to follow this year's CARS West slate, with seven races including three in Washington. Without a bigger budget, she'll compete more at CNS, but that will also present elevated goals.



Sal Sigala Jr.

Holly Clark poses before a Spears CARS Tour West race at Kern Raceway in Bakersfield, Calif. Clark ran most of that Super Late Model schedule and was also the rookie of the year at Colorado National Speedway.

Washington

Northwest rookie guided by champion

There are plenty of unknowns about Kyle Lang's racing career and future. The 18-year-old from Snohomish, Wash., just completed his rookie campaign in Pro Late Models at Evergreen Speedway, peaking with a fifth-place finish. He's planning to run it back in 2026 and improve his results, but there are few sure things in racing.

Among the factors that are known with the driver of the #33 is one which is asked frequently: he is not related to nine-time track champion Naima Lang. But Kyle and his father Clint Lang, a former support-division racer, are friends with the area fixture identified with #00 and #18.

Another Evergreen champ has been

more instrumental in showing Kyle his learning curve. Wyatt Gardner, who topped the 2024 track points, has taken the teen backed by marketing agency CAGnite, Weedon Insurance, Alusia Candles, DeYoung Inc., Brandy Hood Promotions, Phillips Law Firm and Third Gen Race Cars under his wing.

"He knew us in legends cars," the younger Lang said. "When we made the switch, he helped us out a little bit, and we got the car good by the end of the year ... or better than it was. I did legends for like four years ... they're twitchy. It's definitely a big change; we didn't know what we were doing in Late Models just yet, and it's been tough adjusting."

Gardner, who won the 2025 Tri-State Pro Late Model Challenge points crown, came along at a great time for the Langs. They acquired an older Hamke chassis, most recently driven by

Hannah Lindquist until she went back to open-wheel racing after a year or two. Last winter they put a Clattenburg front clip on the #33.

"I was a good crew chief until we got to bump stops," Clint Lang said. "Now I'm lost, but trying to figure it out."

Kyle competed at several tracks around the West Coast in the scaled-down cars, but just two in the headline class. He was happy with his 12th-place finish on Fall Classic weekend at Tri-City Raceway, but that was his only time on a racing surface larger than 3/8-mile. The Pro cars had one 2025 date at Evergreen's 5/8-mile layout, but Lang's car was being repaired after a wreck in the previous race and he didn't get to try that one.

"Tri-City was fun; it was pretty cool to be at a bigger track and carry more speed," he said.



Elevate Racing Media

Kyle Lang was the rookie of the year at Evergreen Speedway in Monroe, Wash.