

Wisconsin

Latest crown special for family man

From the grandstands at Dells Raceway Park, those watching Mike Lichtfeld win another Limited Late Model championship may have thought that this fourth straight track title may be like the others which he has amassed, even back since his pure stock days in 2007. A closer look, both around the Lichtfeld pit area and in any of his victory lane photos, reveals the big difference for the 39-year-old from Pardeeville, Wis.

Just after Thanksgiving in 2024, Mike and his wife Alexa Lichtfeld became parents for the first time. Their daughter Reese made it to most of the race days at the Dells third-mile oval.

"The track has a campground next to it. Wayne Lensing owns it, and we did all the development, site work, sewer lines and water lines," said Lichtfeld, who operates Country Plumber. "It makes it really convenient when it's only 300 yards away from where our pit stall is. We have a golf cart and the whole nine yards. My wife can take Reese to the camper for a nap, and it's ready for hot or cold or whatever the weather may be. She points at the cars on the track. We didn't race Falloween so we were up in the stands, and her eyes were glued on it, pointing, clapping ... it was really cool. Hopefully it's something we can keep doing as a family."

Lichtfeld enjoyed one of his best years, and that's a high bar to set. For the third time in his title streak, he won six features. He hauled trophies back to the campground plenty of times, and he enjoyed a relatively-comfortable points margin over Nick Nolden, who was the runner-up for the third straight year.

A main difference was visible to everyone no matter where they stood or sat. Last year was the first for the Dells with NASCAR Advance Auto Parts Weekly Series sanctioning, with this Late Model class marked for Division I points. Lichtfeld's rewards for the crown included a trip to the NASCAR Regional



Getty Images

Mike Lichtfeld (right) and his father and longtime racer Tom enjoyed the NASCAR Advance Auto Parts Weekly Series awards banquet in Charlotte.



Roy Ophime Photography

Mike Lichtfeld carries the flag around Dells Raceway Park after one of his fast qualifying times. He won six Limited Late Model features en route to his fourth straight track championship.

awards banquet in November in Charlotte. That ceremony honored NAAPWS performers plus those in the ARCA Menards Series, NASCAR Whelen Modified Tour, and the various NASCAR circuits in Canada, Mexico and Europe.

The banquet experience added a special family element to his 2025 campaign.

"That was super-cool. I had an opportunity to attend the banquet with my dad," he said about longtime Wisconsin racer Tom Lichtfeld. "We absolutely had a blast of a time. We saw some of the homes and shops of our old friends. It was time well-spent with my dad. We work together and race together, so it was different to do something like this with him. He's put in so much work racing over the years. They say that Mike Lichtfeld won the championship, but I wouldn't be able to do that without him. You can't even say he's semi-retired; there's no slowing down with him."

The Badger State native that the Lichtfelds probably spent the most time around was Robbie Reiser. Reiser was a short-track ace in the upper Midwest in his late 20s; among his accolades were the 1992-93 Red, White & Blue State Championship titles at Wisconsin International Raceway. After he moved south, Reiser was best known as the crew chief for fellow Badger Matt Kenseth during his runaway 2003 Winston Cup championship season.

"When I went to race at North Wilkesboro for my bachelor party two years ago, Andy Manke owned the car. Robbie Reiser raced for him in the '90s. When the Wilkesboro races got canceled, Robbie said for us to come over and he'd grill burgers, and we'd kill a couple coolers of beer. He also went to Hickory when we

raced there, and Caraway once. When I blew the motor in a Midwest Tour race, he was one of the ones to text me the next morning. When I was three or four years old, he was racing around here in a blue #71 Bob Fish car, and I was the biggest Robbie Reiser fan. With us moving (this winter), we were going through some old boxes, and there was a Triton Trailers hat that he signed all those years ago. I wear his shirt now."

He'll have that shirt on a few times when working on his Lefthander chassis, sponsored by Assembly Products, Carbliss, MKW Properties, SS&E Concrete, Don's Marine, Cimaroli's, the Sand Bar, Brahmstedt Farms, Doug's Northside Auto, Zoellick Log Staining & Home Improvement, Cutting Edge Construction, Wieser Concrete, Dave's Concrete & Bobcat, 99.7 Max-FM, A Cut Above Lawncare, Retirement Specialists, Pfister Light Truck & Automotive, Elite Pest Solutions, Blystone Towing & Repair, Pom Pom Racing, Frog Racing, NG Paving, Ruud Furnaces, Mid-State Supply, Cleaver & Gayle, 2 Doors Down Brewing, Gem City Saloon, Pecaro Motorsports, Bassett, Wilwood, Falbe Auto and TD Graphics.

That preparation is needed, because the Dells has the toughest and largest competition in this Limited class. And if 2026 is anything like 2025, there will be some early- and late-season visits from now-two-time NAAPWS national champion Jacob Goede.

"I'm looking forward to this season," he said. "Some of the guys we're racing against will get in 30-40 features. Last year we had 17, and that included going to LaCrosse for one double-feature night. They count the top 14. We finished sixth in the nation. That was a cool deal and we really enjoyed it."

Michigan

A different title for Leeck and Garvey

When Tony Rosebrugh approached Dan Leeck about driving one of his Outlaw Late Models two years ago, it gave Leeck a chance to compete in a division which he hadn't done since 2018, when his wife Jessica was pregnant with their daughter Laylah. It also presented Leeck's longtime crew chief Mike Garvey to seriously get his hands on an Outlaw car for the first time since the late 1980s - before Leeck was even born.

"It took him back to his Berlin Raceway days when he ran an Outlaw car. He loves it," said Leeck, from Birch Run, Mich. "Before every race he'd come up a day or two early, and we'd go through the car at our shop. I felt like he was excited every time."

Garvey has been in Leeck's corner for more than a decade of Late Model racing, including Jegs CRA All-Stars Tour championship seasons in 2014 and 2019. In recent years Leeck has also competed in a wedge-body-looking thing now called an Outlaw Limited at



Wayne Goodman

Dan Leeck drove Tony Rosebrugh's Outlaw Late Model to the championship in the top class at Owosso Speedway in Ovid, Mich.



family photo

Dan Leeck, who also drove his own car in four races in the then-Jegs CRA All-Stars Tour in 2025, had some fun with his children Laylah and Hudson every time out.

some racetracks.

When Rex Wheeler purchased Owosso Speedway and revamped it in 2023, more focus went on the high-powered Outlaw class which has a legendary history in the Wolverine State. Leeck topped the points in the division at the "Big O" in 2025, winning the season opener and never finishing lower than seventh against large fields.

"The last night was the worst, when we broke a power steering pump (after three laps) and I had to salvage what we had," said Leeck, who operates family business Mr. Asphalt. "We had a really good car that day and weren't able to show it. I was pretty exhausted by the end of that one."

That exhaustion was warranted. Two positions lower in that October finale would have handed the champion's share of the purse to Steve Needles, a multi-time titlist in various Outlaw Late Model organizations, including 2024 at Owosso and three of the first five seasons in the Reveal the Hammer series.

One big change was the boost for the Rosebrugh Racing effort. The family also fields Outlaws for Tony's brother Todd Rosebrugh and Todd's son Chase, and also pavement and dirt-track star Chad Finley. Leeck earned the biggest honor in 2025, after an upgrade from the previous year.

"The 2024 car was a rocket, fast out of the trailer every night, but we fought engine problems all year. It was fast in practice and qualifying, top three or four, but we broke a motor in the first three events," Leeck said. "The car was a great car, but it was older and it had sat for two or three seasons. When he brought it to

us, we had to go through everything. The motor was sent out, and Tony wasn't sure when he was gonna race again, so it sat at the engine builder's for over a year. It was kind of a rush job to find parts after that.

"Finally we went to a different engine builder: Jimmy Michaels at Performance Technology. The last event in 2024, the Bob Finley Memorial where I set fast time and finished second (to Chad Finley), was all the difference in the world. We had good, reliable horsepower, and it was like that all this past season as well."

The five Owosso Outlaw shows and the two at Whittemore Speedway weren't the only outings for Leeck and Garvey. He also ran four shows with his template-bodied car in the Jegs crate-engine tour, which is now sponsored by Turn One Performance. There were some good starts, but not much else.

"In the Masters of the Pros race at Owosso we qualified second, and in my mind we dominated the first half of the race. Then we picked up something in the right rear tire. We pitted and put right-side tires on, and I was driving back up through and then there was the Kevin Harvick incident ... well, there are two sides to every story."

The 2026 plan looks about the same for Leeck, also sponsored by Rosebrugh Farms, TR Timber, Willard's Equipment, Havk Brewing, Green Contracting, Diesel Truck Sales, Brinn, Bassett, M&M Lawncare and RPM Plastics. It won't take long to get his competitive juices flowing: the Finley Memorial and Owosso's first Turn One CRA Pro Late Model Series event are scheduled for back-to-back Saturdays in May.

North Carolina

Last champ in family: Brinkley shines

In 2024, at age 14, Bryson Brinkley ran a couple of races in the Late Model class at Caraway Speedway. He planned to continue to get his feet wet in the top division last spring.

By midseason he was leading the standings at the .455-mile oval near Asheboro, N.C. His father Brad Brinkley elected to keep him in the points hunt, which Bryson successfully bagged in the fall.

It's a family tradition for the Brinkleys at Caraway. Brad scored Late Model Stock Car championships here in 2006 and 2011. A decade later the track's rules had shifted to Limited specs, and one son Blaise Brinkley earned that points crown. Now Bryson has added to the family's trophy history.

"It's pretty cool to be one of the youngest champions at Caraway, at least in Late Models," Bryson said. "We've definitely had a lot of ups and a lot of downs, but it's definitely good experi-



Dustin Bevan

Bryson Brinkley won the Limited Late Model championship in his first full season racing at Caraway Speedway in Sophia, N.C.

ence for the future.

"I've definitely heard a lot of stories about (Brad's racing), but I'm not old enough to remember a lot of it. In Blaise's year we were still trying to figure all the stuff out, because he was only in it a couple of years before that."

The downs he mentioned kept him from winning more than once during the 2025 campaign. He felt like one got away before that, when he was running second and got turned around in a mess involving the leader.

"Other than that, it was pretty

solid," said the young Brinkley, sponsored by Carolina Brokerage, Steel & Pipe Corporation, Mike Bledsole Mechanical and 1128 Investments.

This #24 was a brotherly hand-me-down, as Blaise won his Caraway crown in the same PRW chassis. The Brinkleys, from Sanford, N.C., have another car with Blaise's name over the window. He has another job in the sport, setting up legends, bandoleros and Allison Legacy cars for Delaney Gray about 100 miles to the east.

Bryson hopes to compete at other tracks this year, looking at Wake County Speedway, Southern National Motorsports Park and Florence Motor Speedway. But the family has plans at Caraway as well. Just after turning 50 last year, Brad practiced that extra car.

"It might be a good time for me to run a race again," the elder Brinkley said. "I've still got a little bit of time left."

Orange peel: Ellis has Hill's following



Robbie Yow

Chase Ellis prepares to climb into his Late Model at Orange County Speedway. Ellis took the points crown in his first full season at the 3/8-mile oval in Rougemont, N.C.

The 2025 Late Model champion at Orange County Speedway had never previously competed in a full-sized race car before last season. Fortunately for Chase Ellis, he learned a lot by osmosis during his youth and teenage years that helped prepare him for winning the points title at age 27.

Ellis' grandfather was the late Maurice Hill, who earned four Late Model Stock Car championships at his hometown Orange County oval and one at South Boston Speedway. After Maurice hung up his helmet in the early 2000s, his family rallied around his son Ronald Hill, Ellis' uncle.

"My grandpa is where I got my passion from," said Ellis, from Durham, N.C. "There were a lot of summers when I was a kid, being at the shop with him, back in the day when my dad was his crew chief. Then later, on weekends when my uncle was racing, all the kids and grandkids would pack up and go to the track and hang out in the pits."

As a teenager and then even after meeting his fiancée Taylor, Ellis had only raced go-karts. There were 16 championships at various levels, but most of that racing came at dirt tracks. He dealt with a completely different form of racing getting in the seat of this Hedgecock chassis, acquired from the family of Zachary Dabbs.

"It was definitely a change," he said. "On dirt you

kinda have to finesse a kart. There are some things from go-karts that made the transition to cars a whole lot smoother. The biggest thing was being out there with other full-sized cars; I had to adapt to that."

The switch was gradual; Ellis didn't win his first feature until the next-to-last points race on the calendar. His luck also seemed to improve as the season progressed.

He enjoyed the guidance from his dad Darrell, and one of the elder Hill's former rivals, Greg Hill. The crew chief on the #07 was another former area driver, Josh Oakley.

"It's really cool with Josh and how we teamed up," Ellis said. "When my grandpa raced, Josh was under his wing, just as he was getting into stock car racing. My grandpa would spend a lot of time with Josh growing up. It's kinda cool how Josh now does the same thing with me. He's a very good mentor and a good friend in general."

On race days several other friends and relatives are regularly with the #07, sponsored by Brann's Wrecker Service, Sunrise Contracting, Elliott Farms, Southern Well Drilling, Van Hall Industries, Mincey's Graphics, Hay's Heating & Cooling, Indocil Art, Banks Racing Engines, and a group of business owners at Red Mountain Baptist Church. Ellis hopes to have them tag along to some other facilities this season, and South Boston is the next-closest.

"I definitely want to try out a few new tracks, to learn how to get around different types of tracks," he said.