

# LATE MODEL DIGEST

September 5, 2025



**Lewis lands another to  
take CARS points lead**

# nuts&bolts: CARS Tour @ Florence Motor Speedway ... from staff, team and series reports



Rackley WAR Racing

**Landen Lewis (29)** passes zMax CARS Late Model Stock Tour title rival Connor Hall at Florence Motor Speedway.

## Results refresher

### Late Model Stock Cars

**Cook Out 125:** 1. Landen Lewis; 2. Connor Hall; 3. Casey Kelley; 4. Cody Kelley; 5. Ryan Glenski; 6. Conner Jones; 7. Carson Loftin; 8. Kade Brown; 9. Matt Cox; 10. Parker Eatmon; 11. Brandon Pierce; 12. Donovan Strauss; 13. Lanie Buice; 14. Landon Huffman; 15. Helio Meza; 16. Ronnie Bassett Jr.; 17. Mini Tyrrell; 18. Dale Earnhardt Jr.; 19. Jacob Heafner; 20. Chase Burrow; 21. Tyler Reif; 22. Ryan Wilson; 23. Matt Waltz; 24. Chad McCumbee; 25. Doug Barnes Jr.; 26. Tyler Matthews.

Lap leaders: Cox 1-13, Kelley 14-31, Lewis 32-49, Hall 50-95, Lewis 96-125 • Cautions: 3 • Fast qualifier (of 27 drivers): Casey Kelley, 17.487 seconds

### Pro Late Models

**Cook Out 100:** 1. Keelan Harvick; 2. Conner Jones; 3. Tyler Reif; 4. Isaac Kitzmiller; 5. Brandon Lopez; 6. Ben Maier; 7. Jade Avedisian; 8. Chase Burgeson; 9. Case James; 10. Dylan Garner; 11. Rodney Dowless; 12. Cody Ware; 13. Dusty Garus.

Lap leaders: Garus 1-4, Jones 5-58, Harvick 59-100 • Cautions: 3 • Fast qualifier: Harvick, 17.446 seconds



Blake Harris/H3 Photography

**Keelan Harvick** enjoys victory lane with Miles Copenhaver, who was the Strange Oval Crew Chief of the Race.

### Dusty delivers early:

A familiar face - or at least one which has quickly become familiar in pavement Late Model circles - was on top of the board in Pro Late Model qualifying for the zMax CARS Pro Late Model Tour event at Florence Motor Speedway. Keelan Harvick reeled off his second pole, then the 13-year-old phenom with Rackley WAR Racing regained the lead with 42 laps left to make the Cook Out 100 his second victory in the series.

Next to him on the front row was someone not as well-known to much of the CARS community. Dusty Garus was second in time trials, but the 51-year-old from Summerville, S.C., has about half as many Pro Late Model starts under his belt as does the younger Harvick.

Garus has been immersed in racing for less than a decade. He's a partner with Jeremy Upchurch in the Upchurch Performance engine shop, but that deal has only been in place for about seven years, when Upchurch relocated from the Charlotte area to the Palmetto State.

"At the time he called me, he was working for Donnie Wilson," Garus said. "He had been with Clements for a couple years in Spartanburg, then Donnie asked him to be on his team. Later he called me and was like, 'Man, I'm ready to have the engine shop back up. I don't want to work on one team any more.' I've known Jeremy for probably 15-20 years."

Their friendship predates Garus' first-ever race in the late-2010s, and that was in a go-kart. A regional truck class was his racing home; among his honors in a pickup was the 2024 Florence track championship. He ran three CARS races in an older Hamke last season, taking eighth at Florence and enduring one DNF.

Now he has a newer Hamke which he acquired from Wilson Motorsports. With it comes some support from the braintrusts on the Oklahoman's short-track empire. That knowledge showed in the afternoon this time, even though he was disappointed by the end of the night.

"We were super-excited," said Garus, sponsored by Ertel Construction and Paragon Site Work. "The rest of the day got rough. Keelan missed a gear on the start, and we ran five or six laps, then it seemed like Conner Jones wanted to lead bad, so I didn't put up any fight. We just kinda stayed out of the way ...



Eternally Captured Motorsport

**Case James** placed ninth in his first race in the zMax CARS Pro Late Model Tour presented by SoundGear.



Redmoon Photography

**Dusty Garus** qualified second for the Cook Out 100 at the 3/8-mile near Florence, S.C.

until the competition caution. On the restart I drove into turn two, and Tyler Reif missed turn two and slid up. I got my nose underneath him, then we went three-wide and I lifted enough to prevent that from happening. That allowed Ben Maier to get under my bumper, and it got my back tires up off the track. Fortunately it's all just body damage. Our next race will be North Wilkesboro (in mid-October). We did that one last year, and I'm feeling a lot better with the program now that we're working with Wilson."

### Case study:

Garus was the only driver who did not finish the Pro race. Among those just happy to not be on the DNF list was Case James, who placed ninth in his CARS debut.

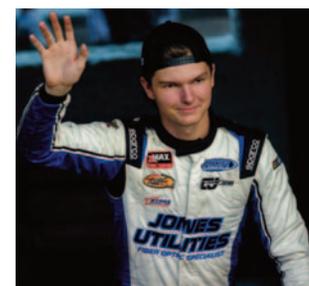
He's the son of 13-year-old son of Texas native Colt James. Colt has lived in the Charlotte area for many years and has won in six different Late Model touring series, although none have come since he became a dad. He followed Case's legends and quarter-midget pursuits until acquiring this car from Jace Hansen.

"With only two test sessions and neither of them in Florence, we knew we had our own David vs. Goliath challenge ahead," he same. "The real win was hitting every goal we set."

### From the back:

Jones came home second to Harvick in the crate-engine straight-rail chassis class. This was his third runner-up finish in nine starts in the CARS Pro circuit, and his first halfway leader bonus from iRacing.

His more impressive run might have come in the Late Model Stock Car headliner. Jones, again driving for Mike Darne Racing, climbed from 24th on the grid to finish sixth. This was his first-ever hard charger award on the LMSC side, posted by Crossroads Harley-Davidson.



Blake Harris/H3 Photography  
**Conner Jones** did double duty for the third time this season.

# closerlook: Spot start at Sayre latest chapter in Mitchell's story ... by Jim Carson

The famed Alabama Gang originated with brothers and NASCAR Hall of Fame members Bobby and Donnie Allison, the ageless Red Farmer, and also Neil Bonnett, who was the only one of the four to be born in the Yellowhammer State. Their racing home base was in Hueytown, Ala.

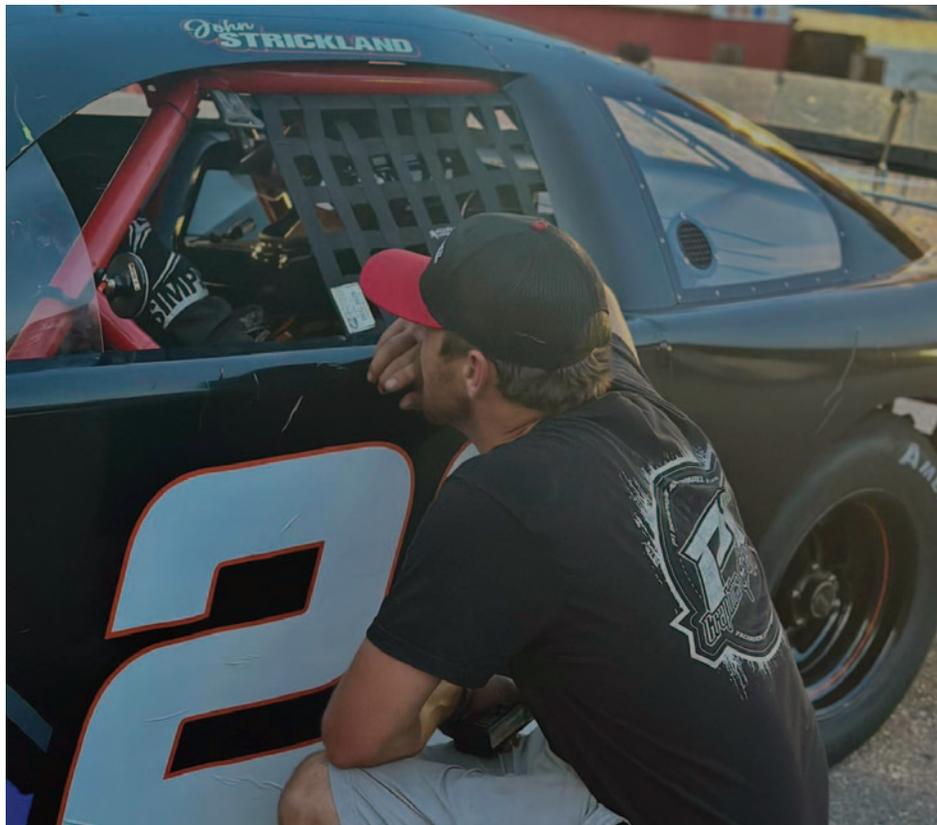
Others from later generations have been in unofficial new iterations of the Gang, such as J.R. Norris and John Wilkinson III and even extending to JohnBoy's daughter Jojo Wilkinson Jones. Regardless of title, they have all called the Birmingham area home, as did racer and chassis builder Frank Grill. Frankie's Grand American Race Cars shop is in Dolomite, Ala., and GARC is proudly carried on by his son Augie Grill.

The Allisons were born in the Miami area and Farmer near Nashville, so maybe it's not much more of a stretch to have an Alabama Gang pledge hailing from north of the border. That's the case with Chris Mitchell, who raced a Late Model for the first time in six years at Sayre Speedway's 2025 King of Dixie season finale.

The car, fielded by John Strickland, wasn't quite up to the level of two-time KoD race winner Jeremy Williams, new track champion Charlie Melvin or multi-time 2025 race winner Gary Nix. But the 48-year-old Mitchell did complete all 50 laps at the quarter-mile, which was the obvious primary goal for someone whose other racing since the pandemic has come in the Crown Vic support class.

"When you haven't driven one in a while, you get reminded very quickly that it's not as easy as it looks," Mitchell said. "The Crown Vics are going slower, and I usually run my Vic with no windshield so that's a lot cooler. Right at the beginning Charlie had a rear end issue ... and they let him go to the pits to work on the car. I don't know how many laps we ran, but then on the first corner it got tight and just got worse. I can drive a loose car, but I can't drive a tight one."

Mitchell won a Vic feature at Mobile International Speedway this year and came close in spot starts at Sayre and also South Alabama Speedway. Strickland is also a part owner in that lower-division effort. A few years ago he was working in Florida and saw an older



**Car owner John Strickland chats with Chris Mitchell before he raced a Late Model for the first time since 2019. Mitchell finished sixth in the King of Dixie show at Sayre Speedway in Dora, Ala.**

team photo

Late Model outside someone's house and made an offer to buy it. It's an older Port City car which has since been updated at GARC. It saw some action last year with Roger Reuse driving it at Montgomery, but the one time Strickland raced it resulted in a crash.

The owner of Dynamic Storm Solutions, which mainly assesses hail damage on passenger vehicles, has a good reputation around the Late Model scene in the Southeast, but that started two decades ago near his hometown of Peterborough, Ontario. Among his victories was the 2011 Autumn Colours Classic headliner at Peterborough Speedway, after getting spun late while leading in the 2010 edition.

He didn't have the desire to race in the States, but some others did, such as Jerry Artuso and Shaun McWhirter. Often Mitchell would be a crew member for those travelers, especially for Quebec driver and GARC customer Martin Latulippe.

"We worked out of my shop in Ontario, and when we came south we

would work from Augie's," Mitchell said. "We ran a number of big races with Martin in his Pro Late Model - Baby Rattler, Bristol, Snowflake to name a few. He had a Super as well and we took it to New Smyrna a lot."

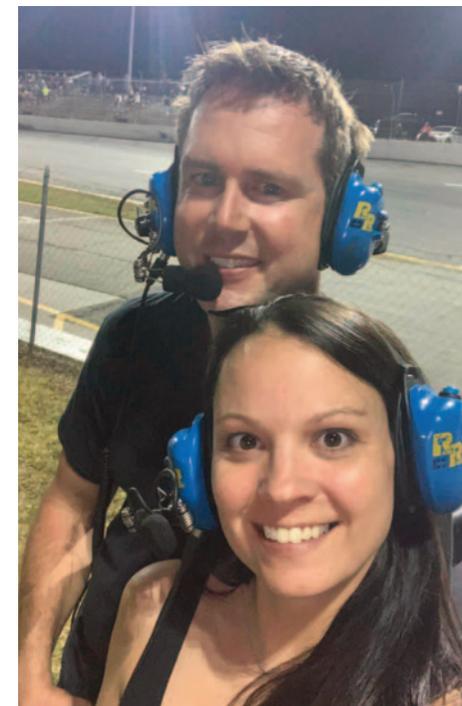
The 2018 Snowflake 100 at Five Flags Speedway wasn't the best day for Latulippe, as he was collected in a multi-car crash before lap 10. That week was a hardship for many involved, because rain and a flooded infield washed out the scheduled Snowflake Saturday activities, and the Allen Turner-sponsored Pro Late Model race was rescheduled for one week later.

There was a lasting moment from that Flake, as that's when Chris met Brooke Stephens, a longtime race fan and Snowball attendee with many friends on crews. They got married a little over a year later, and soon Brooke started doing the financial books for GARC after Frankie's widow Eva retired a few years ago.

"I spent a bunch of time in the South anyway. In Ontario, everything I

love to do has a longer season down here," said Mitchell, who actually became a U.S. citizen this March. "I moved for good March 18, 2020, the day before they closed the borders for Covid. I had sold my house up there and was still trying to get stuff sorted out. They had one border crossing gate open, and the guard was like, 'This better not be for cross-border shopping.' They were gonna let Brooke back in the States no matter what, because she has an American passport. I think the guy just wanted to see me squirm."

With his racing, Mitchell has done some squirming, especially at the Derby. Grill's best result in either a Snowball or Snowflake feature since Covid has been 19th, although he did win last December's Outlaw Stock race. Last year Mitchell did start working with Jett Motorsports on some race weekends and was the crew chief for Derek Thorn's Snowflake entry, and he was on the team when Kaden Honeycutt celebrated with the Tom Dawson Trophy last December.



family photo

**Three years after they were married, Chris and Brooke Mitchell were on the crew for a Grand American Race Cars client during the 2021 World Series of Asphalt Stock Car Racing at New Smyrna Speedway in Samsula, Fla.**

## CRA Sportsman

# closerlook: New high-banks high: Helton steps up from streets ... by Jim Carson

One thing about short-track racing is that the sport usually reels people in, where they want to keep coming back, in the seat or on a race team. That was the case again in the Labor Day event at Winchester Speedway, in the World Stock Car Festival headlined by the Vore's Welding CRA Late Model Sportsman Series.

Heath Helton started in the series for the first time, placing sixth and completing all 50 laps. His ride wasn't the most modern or the fastest in the field, but it did get the juices flowing for Helton to compete in the division again, in addition to his other pursuits in street stocks.

"The Sportsman series is kinda different, since it allows crate engines and builds. I was at a distinct disadvantage since I had a crate, and Glynn's got older stuff. That makes it hard on starts; I got smoked on the start. Basically we were making 400 horsepower and taking off in drive, while behind me there were guys with 700 horsepower and they were all shifting. It's a weird class like that. My street stock makes more power than Glynn's car. Down the straightaway mine's faster, but the corner speed in Late Models is so much more; with the downforce, the tires and the spoilers, you carry more speed and stay

in the gas more. The faster I go, the more I like it."

Here the 40-year-old Helton drove Glynn Neal's entry, a 1997 Lefthander car. This was his third time racing anything at Winchester; he won the CRA-sanctioned street stock show here last October and placed second last Labor Day weekend. Neal was a regular behind the wheel in the series in 2023-24, just missing some top-five finishes.

In this race Helton experienced something never seen in CRA LMS by his car owner, also from near Owensboro, Ky. This #16 ride, sponsored by Tinting Hudson Machine, was seventh in time trials, and the inversion put him on the pole. He didn't stay there too long because of the initial power difference.

"I didn't want to be there," Helton said about the front row of the grid. "I knew I couldn't take off; I was a sitting duck and didn't want to be in their way. Normally I'm on the other end of that, a fast guy who has to start 12th and go through the field fast. It was kinda humbling to be on the opposite side of that. We needed it to go green, so the big motors can wear their tires out. The red flag hurt us a little more, since the tires cooled off on their cars that much more."



Champion Racing Association  
**Heath Helton started on the pole and finished sixth in the Vore's Welding CRA Late Model Sportsman Series race at Winchester Speedway.**

## CARS Tour

# closerlook: Left for 100, not frontside 360: Teen Lovell excited ... by Jim Carson

In her youth and high school years, Mia Lovell spent a lot of time with a helmet on and competing on four wheels. Those are about the only similarities between auto racing and what she specialized in for a dozen years: skateboarding.

The 18-year-old from Phoenix placed fifth in her second-ever race on an oval track: the August 16 Spears CARS Pro Late Model Tour West show at Colorado National Speedway. Before that and a few legends car races, her motorsports background consists of

two-plus seasons on road courses, namely in the Trans Am circuit with Nitro Motorsports and the Toyota GR Cup series with Copeland Motorsports.

She wants her future to have more oval racing in it, so she has teamed up with the Sigma Performance Services team of Las Vegas-area racer and team owner Joe Farre'. This trip to the 3/8-mile oval near Erie, Colo., where the headliners were obviously NASCAR Hall of Famer Kevin Harvick and his son and race winner Keelan Harvick, produced a steady run for Lovell, as she

was between fourth and seventh for the entire distance.

"We felt that getting into Late Models would be a good way to start," she said. "This Colorado race went way better than I expected, although we didn't have a lot of expectations since it's a new discipline for me. I did do my first Late Model start at All American Speedway in another CARS West race, but I only got two laps in before someone spun in front of me, so I don't really count that."

The races count now, including her next scheduled appearance Sept. 13 in the zMax CARS Tour at South Boston Speedway. Helping her progress is longtime Sigma associate Preston Peltier, who spent several years with CNS as his home track. And they both hope for a race which was as clean as the CNS show a few weeks ago.

"The racing was very courteous. There weren't a whole lot of huge wrecks, which I was grateful for," she said. "Racing on ovals is quite different than on road courses. Learning how to do this is really fun. I feel like there's a lot more maneuverability ... I enjoyed the wheel-to-wheel aspect."

Lovell (pronounced love-ull) also enjoying the next chapter of her progression, as she moved to North Carolina

last month and enrolled at Davidson College (where there is at least one skate park between the campus and Mooresville). Racing for a living is her goal - and having Nitro as her TA2 team could be a great in-road for her, as Nick Tucker's operation recently acquired the Venturini Motorsports team in the ARCA Menards Series - but she doesn't want all her eggs in one basket. Neither does her father Mike Lovell, who was into motorcycles and other action sports outlets years ago; he's not the Mike Lovell who raced Late Models around California in the early 2000s).



Sigma Performance Services  
**Teenage skateboard guru Mia Lovell finished fifth in this Pro Late Model August 16 at Colorado National Speedway, with veteran Preston Peltier (far right) as crew chief.**

