

The Rock Allegany County Speedway

Written by **Courtney Kamauf** Photography by **Lance C. Bell**



Car #7 owned and driven by Dave Troutman.

FOR THOSE WHO WONDER HOW WATCHING CARS GO AROUND IN CIRCLES CAN BE EXCITING, YOU NEED ONLY ATTEND AN EVENT AT THE ROCK TO UNDERSTAND.

The roar of the engines (buzzing of the 4-cylinders aside), combined with the vibrations of the cars zooming past, coupled with the dust flying up into the night sky as fans scream for their favorite drivers racing side by side, creates an atmosphere that is pure electric.

Nestled in the heart of the scenic Allegany County Fairgrounds, with the majestic face of Knobley Mountain as its backdrop, is The Rock Allegany County Speedway—a 5/8 mile oval stock-car racing track. Unlike tracks seen on the NASCAR circuit, which are paved, The Rock is comprised of clay. This past April, 2,500 additional tons of clay were leveled, rolled, and packed into the track, resulting in one of the fastest tracks in the area. While some label stock-car racing as a boring, backwoods, hillbilly sport, the intricacies that go into racing are actually quite fascinating.

For those who have never been to a race, here are the basics. Drivers compete in a total of 28 races from April through November. Each week, drivers compete in five to six lap “heat” races, the finishing order of which determines the starting order for the main events, called features. Features, depending on the class of car, are 12 to 25 lap races, the winner of which takes home the trophy and the glory. Drivers receive points based upon their finishing order in the feature. Points pay to win 175, and decrease 5 points for each position thereafter. The driver who accumulates the most points in each division for the entire year is named the track champion in their respective division.

In a typical racing season, The Rock hosts six different classes of race cars. The fastest, and most well-known cars, are those in the Super Late Model division. With upwards of an eight hundred horsepower engine, and their sleek aerodynamic winged design, these monster machines careen around the dusty oval at over 130 miles per hour. But this speed and power comes at a price. In order to be competitive in this division, new parts and equipment are a must. The days of piecing together old equipment and still being able to run up front are a thing of the past. A new motor alone will cost a Super Late driver in the neighborhood of \$30,000. Factor in a new car, at approximately \$20,000, and spare parts, for roughly \$10,000, and these drivers can easily have \$60,000 in their race cars.



Another breathtakingly fast class at The Rock is the Limited Late Model division. These cars look very similar to those in the Super Late division, but are equipped with slightly less power. Limited Late cars have approximately 500-600 horsepower engines, and travel at speeds approaching 115 miles per hour. While the engine capacity is slightly less, the costs of operating a Limited Late Model team are still staggering. A new car can cost up to \$20,000, with a new motor costing an additional \$15,000.

Fan favorites at The Rock include the Street Stock and Hobby Stock divisions. These cars depart from the sleek appearance of those in the Super and Limited Late divisions, in which bodies are mandated to be American manufactured stock car bodies. Instead, the criteria for Street and Hobby Stocks are that the cars must be domestic from 1965 to present. This results in a more box-shaped car, like something that can be seen on the highway. Street Stock cars have 300-400 horsepower engines, while Hobby Stocks have approximately 300 horsepower. For the entire car, drivers invest \$15,000-\$20,000 for Street Stocks and \$10,000 for Hobby Stocks.

If you come to The Rock and think that you are being attacked by a swarm of bumble bees, do not be alarmed. What you are hearing is the sound of the 4 and 8-cylinder Junk Cars coming around the track. The most plentiful cars in attendance at the track each week, these cars are meant to be a more affordable class for racers. With only a few safety modifications, these cars are essentially stock from

top to bottom. The engine is stock, with approximately 100-150 horsepower. Even with this small engine, these cars experience speeds of 75-85 miles per hour. Making the necessary safety modifications, and improving upon the cars within the rules, 4-cylinder drivers can put approximately \$1,500 into their race cars.

With all classes, there are many other expenses that have to be considered above and beyond the purchase price of the car itself. While some drivers are local, others travel from 30 minutes up to several hours to get to the track. With the rising cost of gasoline, this is becoming a burgeoning expense. While most drivers tow their cars on a trailer attached to their pick-up truck, drivers in the Super and Limited Late divisions often invest in large haulers, similar to those seen at a NASCAR event. Once drivers arrive at the track, entrance to the pits is \$20 per person. In addition, racing fuel costs approximately \$50 each week. With all the side by side, fast paced, hard hitting action on the race track, accidents are inevitable. After purchasing a brand new car, it is not uncommon that cars flip over, slam into the wall, and are all but destroyed. Even a minor accident can require hundreds of dollars of repairs.

So, given the cost structure and grueling nature of the sport, everyone who has the time and money to race must be a retired millionaire, right? To the contrary, most of the drivers that come to The Rock are typical blue collar workers. While there is the occasional wealthy driver, the vast majority of these men and women are living from paycheck to paycheck, putting every last available dime and piece of their time into their race cars. Racing is in their blood, and even though in some of the classes the money that they win for participating is less than what they paid to get into the track, they continue to come back every week, because it is what they love to do.

Perhaps the most interesting facet of racing at The Rock is the diversity of drivers that attend. If your vision of the driver who has won the most races, and is currently leading the points, in the fast paced Limited Late Model division is of a 30-40 something year old man, then think again. While this type of driver is commonplace at The Rock, this coveted position is held by Randy Burkholder— an 18 year old high school student from Chambersburg, PA. In the 4-cylinder class, several of the drivers are not even old enough to have a driver's license. In addition to these young men, The Rock is also home to several female drivers. Shelly Beegle is a regular in the Hobby Stock series, as is another young driver, 17 year old Alicia LeGros. Racing at The Rock is also a family affair. In the 4-cylinder division, for example, Bob Imes races his son Jason and grandson Jay every week. In addition, Randy Burkholder's father, Darryl, competes in the Super Late division.

While most of the drivers on a typical racing night come from the surrounding areas in Maryland, Pennsylvania, and West Virginia, on nights of major events, drivers arrive from across the entire United States. One of the biggest events held at The Rock is the Big Kahuna, held from October 4th through the 6th. Unlike other races, which are solely sanctioned by the track itself, this event is a MACS (Mid-Atlantic Championship Series) sanctioned event for the Super Late Model division. MACS is a national sanctioning body, in the same vein as NASCAR, that travels to different tracks and holds events throughout the racing season. The Big Kahuna is the last of the fourteen MACS races on the schedule for 2007. This year, the series has traveled to ten different speedways in Ohio, Pennsylvania, Virginia, and Maryland. The total purse, or amount of money given out to the drivers who compete, in MACS sanctioned events is much greater than the purse on a



typical night at The Rock. A typical payout to win a Super Late race at The Rock is \$1,200, and the total purse is, depending on the number of competitors, approximately \$8,000. For a MACS race, however, the pay to win increases to \$5,000 and the total purse is a whopping \$35,000. This series also has its own points system, independent of any individual track. So, a driver could conceivably be eligible for the track championship at his local track, as well as the MACS title, by attending all the races.

So, for a great time on a Saturday night, look no further than your local dirt track at The Rock Allegany County Speedway.

For more information on racing at The Rock Allegany County Speedway, visit www.therockspeedway.com or call Oval Track Promotions at (410) 857-3821, or the Fairgrounds at (301) 729-1200.



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