



Brent Kaeding

by Bobby Gerould

When the topic of great California sprint car drivers arises - the name Brent Kaeding is sure to follow. As a winner of approximately 375 feature events in his 30-year driving career, "B.K." holds records from Santa Maria to Chico and most points in between. His 13 Northern Auto Racing Club (NARC), 13 Golden State Challenge (GSC), and four Trophy Cup championships are only a part of his winning resume. He also owns driving titles at Calistoga Speedway (Calistoga, Calif.), Kings Speedway (Hanford,

Calif.), and Ocean Speedway (Watsonville, Calif.). He won the NARC California Speedweek title - a record five times.

Brent was born September 5, 1957. His mother Dixie, before her passing in late 2007, said of Brent, "Dirt seemed to gravitate towards him."

Brent's introduction to racing started as a fan, watching his father Howard campaign super-modifieds at California tracks. Howard won three California State Super Modified championships during Brent's youth.

Brent was a cub scout that roamed the grandstands like other kids who 'grew up at the track'. He admired his Dad and A.J. Foyt as his racing heroes. According to Dixie, Brent showed early championship form in the art of obtaining grass stains.

Before he hit the racetrack, Brent tore up the streets of the San Jose area in a four-speed Camaro that he purchased against the advice of his Dad. Howard wanted Brent to get a Camaro with an automatic transmission. Howard recalls, "We had to replace the clutch and transmission after two weeks."

The first on-track feature win for the mischievous youngster came in 1978 at Santa Maria Speedway where he was named the track's Rookie of the Year.

A relationship that Kaeding had no idea would blossom into what it has become started in April 1981 when B.K. won in NARC competition for the first time at Silver Dollar Speedway in Chico, Calif. The north state track became a second home to Kaeding and his followers who lived and raced by the slogan, "Win or lose, we drink booze!" Mostly they won.

Brent's June 2007 win at Chico was his 86th career feature win at the track. By far, B.K. ranks number one on the all-time win list at Silver Dollar Speedway. Kaeding also is tops in career wins for both NARC, and the Golden State Challenge. He heads the career sprint car win list at California tracks: Thunderbowl Raceway in Tulare, Ocean Speedway in Watsonville, Antioch Speedway, and Kings Speedway in Hanford.

B.K., in competition-mode, is a man that will not back down. Standing well over six feet tall, Kaeding's physical presence alone is enough to make any driver think twice about rough driving during a battle. If he feels another driver needs a "lesson," B.K. will not hesitate to be the teacher.

Kaeding has led protests, and raised hell with the best of them. Following an event he will freely speak his mind during interviews over the track's public address system. Sometimes he'll be emotional and grateful; other times he'll have choice words regarding the track surface or another racer.

The intimidating exterior of B.K. has certainly led many to misunderstand him. At heart, Brent Kaeding is a hard-working man with a soft spot for those down on their luck.

Mike Andreetta, longtime Kaeding friend and fellow racer summed it up most appropriately, "What Brent is really the best for is taking care of each of his friends, or anyone he cares for. Whether you can't make your car payment,

you've got a new child coming, whatever, Brent worries about it, ponders over it. That's what makes him a special person to me."

If a fellow racer is on fire, Kaeding is there too. Duplicating previous acts of heroism, Brent was largely responsible for saving World of Outlaws (WoO) champion Donny Schatz when Schatz's car exploded at Chico's Gold Cup in 2006.

Jimmy Sills, a fellow Hall of Fame inductee from Northern California recalled a favorite story about B.K. "Recently me and Ronnie Day were together and we were talking about Brent and how Brent, one time, him and Ronnie got in a tangle and Brent's car was disabled, and he went over to have a talk with Ronnie and tell him what he felt about his driving. And while he was talking to him, Brent reached down and pulled a couple of plug wires off."

Sills continued, "It kinda ruined Ronnie's night, but we both agreed that, ya know, Brent would do something like that but if you were in your car on fire, knocked out, Brent would be the first guy there to go through the fire and undo your belts to help you out of the car."

His status as a driver to watch took a huge leap forward in 1982 when he captured the NARC driving championship for the first time in his career at the age of 25. It quickly became apparent that a moisture rich surface with a few ruts was a recipe for Brent Kaeding coming to the front. Blessed with tremendous racing instincts, Kaeding became known for making exciting outside passes of his competitors.

In mid summer 1984, Kaeding went on the first of many "hot streaks" in his career. In a seven-race span from July to August, B.K. won five features at four different California tracks (Hanford, Santa Maria, Antioch, and Baylands).

The following season Kaeding started strongly and never slowed. In the opening 38 sprint car races of the 1985 season, Kaeding NEVER finished outside the top-five in a feature event! He won twenty A-Main events during that stretch, including six NARC sanctioned features in a row. He eclipsed Gary Patterson's ten-year-old single-lap track record at Calistoga, and then Kaeding closed his first truly GREAT racing year with a surprise win in the Turkey Night Grand Prix for midgets at legendary Ascot Park in Gardena, CA.

Kaeding earned his first 'out-of-state' victory in 1987 when he drove Ray & Jay Williams #11x to glory on his Dirt Cup preliminary night at Skagit Speedway in Alger, Wash. B.K. went on to win three Dirt Cup titles at the track, all coming in the nineties (1991, '96, and '99). The 1999 Dirt Cup win was worth \$20,000.

During his career - B.K. also captured checkered flags in Arizona, Nevada, Oklahoma, Oregon, Texas, and Wisconsin. Internationally, Kaeding won in Brisbane, Queensland, Australia, in 1997, 2001, '03 and again in '04. He claimed a feature win in Newcastle, New South Wales, Australia, in 2000. New Zealand has also been graced with B.K.'s racing prowess.

When Kaeding teamed with Bob Miller in 1988 the local competition was in deep trouble. Kaeding closed '88 with 25 feature victories, and a championship in NARC, GSC, and at Calistoga Speedway.

Few wins were as sweet as the March 4, 1989 triumph at San Jose Speedway. The win at the track closest to the Kaeding household in Campbell, Calif. came in front of family, friends, and fans united in the excitement of seeing a local beat the Outlaws. He finished '89 with a career best 28 wins.

In a 63-day span in 1990, Kaeding had nothing but top three finishes in a dozen feature events. His third place run at the Hulman Hundred Silver Crown event came in one of 31 USAC Champ Car starts in his career.

Offering definitive proof of Kaeding's ability to man-handle a sprint car was his 1991 Mini Gold Cup win at Chico against World of Outlaws competition. In front of sponsor and good friend J.W. Hunt, Kaeding won the race on a track described by some as the roughest Northern California dirt surface raced on in modern history.

Miller retired at the end of '93. Together, Kaeding and Miller won five Golden State championships in six seasons.

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Al Peterson came along in 1997 as the primary sponsor and car owner of Brent's racing endeavors. In their first year together, they kept Kaeding's NARC championship streak alive, making it five-in-a-row. The team also won the NARC California Speedweek title but it was a win against the World of Outlaws that was the sweetest. Kaeding's 1997 Santa Maria Speedway triumph saw him finish ahead of fellow Hall inductees Sammy Swindell (second), and Steve Kinser (fourth).

From 1998 through 2000, Kaeding stretched his NARC championship streak to eight-in-a-row, claiming two more Trophy Cups along the way. Although he has since hung up his title as car owner, Peterson remains with B.K. today as a sponsor.

A central figure in Northern and Central California sprint car racing, Kaeding not only has earned respect on the track but off of it as well. His family-owned Campbell, Calif., shop is the Western U.S. hub for all things sprint car-related.

As owner and operator of Kaeding Performance, Brent has touched the racing lives of hundreds, if not thousands, of racers looking to improve their results. Whether Kevin Pylant, Randi Turner, Jason Statler or countless others, Kaeding has pointed budding young racers in the right direction. Kaeding was a groundbreaker in merchandising as well. Among the first drivers in California to have multiple styles of his own t-shirts and hats, Kaeding always had the longest lines at his trailer after the races.

As leader of his own racing team, Kaeding's #69 is always immaculately prepared. His pit crew help through the years has been a vital part of Kaeding's success. Crew chief Billy Albini has been with Kaeding for 21 years. Their bond is beyond that of driver and mechanic.

"He was just a punk kid when we started racing," said Albini. "Now he's 50 but for some who don't know, when I was sick with cancer a few years ago, I was really worried about my business and Brent told me, 'Hey don't worry about your business or any financial things at your work, just get better'. For that I love him."

Other mainstays of Kaeding's road crew, known as The Hogs, are Matt Britt, Chuck Cypert, Chris "Cajun" Good, Bill Foland, Tim Hodge, Bruce Homer, the late 'Leapin' Larry Maxwell, Rich Paulson, Paul Reno, and Ron Wesphal. At the shop, Kaeding is quick to credit his brother Joel (president), and Brian Matherly (general manager) for their years of hard work. Myles McEntee and Kelly Telfer have also been instrumental supporters. Kaeding's success can be partially attributed to untold hours on the phone, and in the shop, maintaining relationships with industry leaders such as Ron Shaver (Shaver Specialties), John Bickford & Pattie Henry (MPD) and Chuck Merrill (Maxim Chassis).

Brent Kaeding continues to race today. He lives in Campbell, Calif., with his fiancée Jodi. Brent's two boys, Tim and Brandon "Bud," from his previous marriage to Jo Anne, are both successful racers. Tim is a two-time Silver Dollar Speedway champion and 2002 "King of California," and Bud is the two-time USAC Silver Crown champion who won the San Jose Speedway track championship as a rookie.

Brent's daughter Reyna lives in Washington. She is mother to Brent's grandson who is named after him. Brent's sisters Kim and Sandy recently helped organize a surprise 50th birthday bash for him that was attended by hundreds of well-wishers.

The latest B.K. racing winning streak came just last spring during a dozen races from the end of March through the end of May. Kaeding won seven of those events and never finished worse than fourth. He closed 2007 with 16 feature wins and championships in the Golden State Challenge and at Calistoga Speedway and Ocean Speedway.

Asked to describe how he achieved all he had, Kaeding said simply, "A lot of my success is a tribute to my Dad and what he taught me. ... You make your own luck, you work hard, and you persevere, you're gonna be up front."