

Schrader one of many ready to tame the high banks

Written by George Browning
Wednesday, 16 April 2014 00:00 -

The Federated Auto Parts 200 presented by Crunch’N Nutter at Salem Speedway Fueled by the Hoosier Lottery will mark the season-opener for the historic half-mile portion of the hallowed grounds in southern Indiana. But for seasoned veteran Ken Schrader, it’ll be race number 22 on the year, and the buds on the trees haven’t even opened yet. That’s more than the ARCA Racing Series presented by Menards will do in a full season.

And oh yeah, Schrader turns 59 on May 29. Schrader is already the oldest ARCA winner in series history after his victory on the DuQuoin State Fairgrounds dirt mile last September. So what’s Schrader’s take on it?

“Well, that just means that I wanna be an older winner this year,” Schrader said.

He’ll get his first opportunity at Salem Sunday, April 27 when the 95th ARCA race on the legendary, high-banked oval rolls off.

In the meantime, Schrader’s doing what he loves - heading down the road with his Federated Auto Parts dirt modified in tow. His target this weekend - the Lucas Oil Speedway dirt track in Wheatland, Missouri, sort of a homecoming for Schrader, who hails from Fenton, Missouri. The headline on the track’s website reads, in part, “Plus NASCAR Star Ken Schrader Both Nights!”

Schrader most certainly is a NASCAR star, but he’s got some serious ARCA star power too. In 64 career starts since 1981, he’s earned 17 wins, 17 poles, 43 top-fives, 51 top-10s and has led a grand total of 2,348 laps.

Schrader’s continual race-pace is nothing short of amazing. Case in point: he had 95 races on his calendar in 2013, 18 of which were rained out. He’s on track to do about the same this year. This is, of course, an amazing story in itself, but in reality, not so much for Schrader, who’s been doing it this way for decades.

“What can I say? We love doing what we do. We won the modified race last Sunday at Terre

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Haute. That was a big deal, and a heck of a lot of fun. Terre Haute's like Salem; they both deserve the respect they get."

Schrader has already won three times with his dirt modified this year - the other two victories coming at Magnolia Motor Speedway in Columbus, Mississippi and at Hohenwald Speedway near Columbia, Tennessee.

With Salem still about two weeks out, he'll have competed in as many as six more modified races in the meantime. Sounds like he'll have the rust pretty-well knocked off in time for the Salem ARCA race. And it's a good thing too because he hasn't won an ARCA race at Salem since 1999.

"It's hard to win anywhere in ARCA, but the added challenge at Salem - it's a lot like Darlington. You have to race the competitors and the racetrack. Either one will screw you up in a heartbeat."

Ah yes, the racetrack. It drives like Darlington but reminds you of Bristol. Difference is...it's rougher than a corn cob with big patches in place all the way around. The aged pavement definitely keeps the teeth chattering.

"There's going to come a time, out of necessity, when they'll have to repave it, but every year I talk with the owners, I always tell 'em to put it off...not yet. Repaving it would make it faster for sure, but it'll also make it a single lane track as all repaving does. It'd take a few good years till the pavement gets racer friendly again."

The line at Salem is unique - right through the middle in turns one and two, and right against the cement wall in three and four.

"Keeping your concentration there is not a big deal if you've been running Darlington for 30 years, but for the first-timers, it's a big deal."

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And because one spends much of his or her time at Salem racing the track, one must wonder where the best place to pass is. Schrader had an answer for that too.

“Pit road is the best place to pass at Salem. Come in second and come out first.

“The Winchester’s and Salem’s are a perfect fit for these ARCA cars. It’s such a good show, but then again, ARCA puts on a great show no matter where it goes. From Daytona to the mile dirt, it’s all good.

“But I remember the first time I went to Salem, I thought it was such a big deal, and I still do. When you consider the history of the place and all the guys that have won there over the years, it’s just incredible. Every driver wants to be on that list.

“It’s just so neat to see all the people come out to see those ARCA races at Salem, all the support from the campers that come out and make a weekend of it. I’m just really excited to be a small part of it.”

The Federated Auto Parts ARCA 200 presented by Crunch ‘N Nutter is spread out over the weekend with ARCA practice and pole qualifying scheduled for Saturday, April 26th. The starting grid for the Crunch ‘N Nutter 50 for the Lucas Oil Great American Stocks will also be determined on Saturday. A pre-race concert and First Harrison Bank on-track autograph session kicks-off the activities on Sunday, April 27th, with the first race set to roll off at 1 p.m. (EDT).