



Daniel Herrington – A Genuine Prospect Working Hard To Succeed

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There are many young men and women who regularly prowl racing paddocks on any given weekend looking to land a ride with a team. For some, the hunt will end well while many will come away empty handed. It takes a potent combination of driving talent, professional demeanor, strong interpersonal skills and winning personality to get car doors to open. If you have a few of the right attributes, but not all of them, your chances aren't going to be as good as those who command all these qualities.

Then again, if you have the money, you can open your own doors. Then the question becomes, can you demonstrate your talent well enough to eventually be weaned off spending the family fortune and instead be paid to drive? If not, you will soon find all that is left of the fortune is the receipts for the expenses you paid.



Amongst the many hunters there are indeed some genuine prospects that do possess the right mix of characteristics to carry them up the ladder of professional racing. A professional racing coach, like veteran racer and author Ross Bentley, can pick these people out of the crowd. And when they find a natural talent with what it takes to go far in racing, they will do what they can to help them get up to speed.

Daniel Herrington is one of those young people that Ross Bentley believes is 'the whole package'.

"Daniel's very fast, and he makes it look easy. He's one of the best I've seen at reading and communicating what the car is doing to his team - he's very good at his role in tuning the car. I've always thought that he's the perfect "All American" driver - just the way he comes off when you meet and talk with him - which makes him very marketable. Plus, he understands the business side of the sport. Most important, he works harder at becoming a professional than just about every other driver. He deserves every opportunity he gets in racing - and more."

ash "Through The Esses" - Copyright Andrew S. Hartwell

That was enough of an endorsement for us to want to spend some time getting to know Daniel Herrington. We recently talked with him and came away impressed with his passion for constantly improving his ability in a race car, and for his tenacity and his optimistic demeanor. He is just 21 but he exhibits the kind of mental maturity while outside the cockpit that can only translate into a serious commitment to go fast while inside it.

Unlike many other professional racers in waiting, Herrington did not start out in karts. In fact, his first taste of high speed driving came six months after he became a licensed driver. He attended a driving school in his 16th year and immediately became intrigued with the prospect of going faster and faster, all while driving someone else's car and getting paid for it in the bargain.

In the following paragraphs, Herrington tells us his story of the journey he is on to become a respected professional racing driver. With the moral support of people who know talent when they see it, we suspect his time to shine is near.

"When I was 16 I got my driver's license. I honestly didn't know much about racing at all. I saw it on TV but I really didn't think about it much. I found the Justin Bell Driving School on the internet somewhere and I convinced my dad that for his birthday we should go down and try that together. I only had my street license for about six months at the time. I never ran in karts and the school was really my first experience going fast in a car.

"We got to drive Camaro's and Corvettes for three days and both of us were hooked right away. I met some great instructors there in Guy Cosmo and Shane Lewis. I have stayed in touch with them ever since and they are always giving me encouragement.

"From that experience my dad and I bought an E30 BMW and started doing some club races with NASA (National Auto Sport Association). My first race was at VIR, just after my 17th birthday, and just one year after I starting driving a street car at all. All went well in the first race and we did a few more after that too. We had a fair amount of success but it was kind of hard to judge how well we ran because there weren't a lot of cars there.

"We decided it would be good to try moving up the ladder so we signed on for the Skip Barber Eastern Regional Series. The series raced in Virginia, Watkins Glen, and Mid-Ohio. I didn't run in all the races but I did win the doubleheaders at Watkins Glen and Mid-Ohio and went on to win the Eastern Regional Championship. Again I was encouraged by instructors who said I showed some promise.

"With that encouragement I looked into the Formula BMW series next. To be honest though, I think I got in over my head at that point. I was up against kids who had been racing karts for years. I did two races that first year and then came back for a full season the next year, thanks to my dad who made a commitment to help me out. He took out a loan to help me and we are still paying that off!

"We learned a lot that second year in Formula BMW and we ended up qualifying near the front many times. It was a great learning year for me in my first professional series."

Before he went back to Formula BMW, Herrington attended Ross Bentley's Speed-Secrets Camp at Button Willow Raceway. It would be a pivotal time for him as he came to meet Bentley, a man who would go on to coach Herrington time and again. And it wasn't long before Bentley would come to recognize a high level of potential and commitment in this young driver from North Carolina.

“I had heard so many good things about Ross from so many people that I had to attend the camp and see if he could help me develop my skills.”

At the end of 2006, Herrington was given an opportunity to pilot a closed-cockpit sports car and, despite a thunderous rain storm that made driving at speed an extremely difficult and risky proposition, he managed to put himself right out in front of the eyes of many.

“At the end of 2006, I ran in a Grand-Am Cup race with Karl Thompson and Compass 360, in the BMW Z3 Coupe. VIR is my home track and so I felt I had a comfort level there even though it was my first time in the car. They put me in the car after about 50 minutes, and it was raining most of the time. When I got in the car we were dead last.

“It was funny but, Andy Lally was in that race and he is a real benchmark for speed and skill. I remember he was driving one of the Cobalt’s. At some point in the race I found I had come up right behind him and was in position to pass him. I said to myself, ‘What am I doing here? That’s Andy Lally!’ That kind of shook me up a bit and took me off my game...but not enough to keep me from passing him!

“I actually love racing in the rain. It is one of my favorite things. I know some drivers are intimidated by it, but I find it is very relaxing. I feel like I get into a rhythm and I like trying to see what kind of grip the car has and not worrying about the setup, just driving to what the car can take.

“Ross was with me that race, talking to me on the radio. Every so often he would remind me about staying smooth and focused and not worrying about what the other cars were doing. In the end I managed to pass everyone and finish first! I give Ross a ton of credit for my whole career. It is wonderful to work with someone who knows how you like to work. He always knows the right thing to say to keep me in the zone. He is fantastic.

“After the race I got a lot of congratulations from former instructors like Shane and Guy. They were happy for me and they kept telling me I should continue on in my career. That was my first professional win in motorsports and it really helped me a lot going into the 2007 season.”

Herrington returned to open wheel racing with a plan to run a full season. However, luck would not be on his side and he was soon forced off track.

“During the winter I talked with Ian Willis at AIM Autosports. He had a Formula Mazda team and he had noticed how I had done in Formula BMW. He was also at VIR when I won that Cup race. Ross introduced me to him and after talking for a while I was invited to do a test with him in November. I tested a Star Mazda and was quick right away. At the end of the test I remember we both said we have to figure out how we can race together in 2007. We did a second test and we were able to secure a sponsor in the Bluetooth Special Interest Group. They couldn’t fund a full year but we were able to get them on board for the first few races. That gave Ian hope that we could find someone to sponsor us for the rest of the year.”

Herrington did all he could to make the right kind of impression in the Star Mazda series.

“The first race was at Sebring and we finished second. We went to Houston and won. At Mid-Ohio we were fast but had a fuel relay problem in qualifying and had to start at the back of the pack. But we managed to finish in the top ten. Then we went to the Milwaukee Mile, which was my first time on an oval. Many of the other drivers had oval experience but we still managed to qualify 7th. I knew we had a good race car and we worked our way up to the front, finishing

second, right on the gearbox of the winner. It was fun to be in a rhythm there and Ross told me that Milwaukee was one of his favorite tracks to race on back when he was in Indy cars. I have to say I share his feelings because I had a blast there!”

Another kind of blast would greet young Herrington shortly after crossing the border into Canada.

“When we got to Montreal we were leading the championship. We started on pole but got hit on the first lap and the car was totaled. That was the beginning of the end for us. We only made two more races that year and at Portland, we got hit on the first lap again! I was getting frustrated with that so I started looking for new opportunities in Grand-Am and open wheel.”

This put Herrington back on the prowl for another opportunity. This time, he found a door slightly ajar in the IRL.

“I did some Indy Pro Series races this past summer. We finished third at Watkins Glen and we were happy with our speed. But now we are, once again, back in the hunt for a quality ride.”

And his search for opportunities continues today, despite his having clearly demonstrated his ability at VIR and in the open wheel scene.

“Besides not being able to bring sponsorship money to a team, another problem is they want to know what experience you have in Grand-Am. I have this feeling in my gut that I can do this, and Ross has reinforced that with me many times. The problem remains getting in the door. “

And you can't 'have' the experience unless you can get the opportunities. Herrington almost had one prime opportunity, but fate snatched it from him.

“This past fall, Jeff Beyer bought a Crawford-Ford DP that had been raced by Finlay Motorsports. He invited me to come and test with his team. He put some great people together and I was starting to getting excited about doing some races in Grand-Am this year. My co-driver was to be Jared Beyer, Jeff's son. He did not have a lot of experience so we were working with him to improve his lap times, and it was terrific to see his steady improvement. But then the program fell apart before we got into a single race.”

Herrington credits his father for passing on a strong work ethic, and a talent for coming up with creative ways to tackle a problem.

“My dad is a doctor and one of the hardest workers I know. If he isn't working he is thinking about working or coming up with new ideas. He has been very supportive of me and he understands this is a real passion of mine and seeing that others have recognized that I do well at it he wants to continue to help me in any way possible.”

Help is always welcome. And having a positive outlook hasn't hurt Herrington either. It is, in fact, one of the attributes we noted at the beginning of this column. This young man understands the game and he intends to keep on hunting.

“In the end I am just one more racing driver looking for a ride. I would like people to know that I feel I really have the talent to succeed in racing. I have seen some people take a golden opportunity and simply squander it away. I know that I don't break equipment and I know when to push and when to back off. I'm still in school for engineering (North Carolina State in Raleigh) so I have the technical skills to help with the set up of the car. And I think I work well with

sponsors and the media. I see so much room for improvement in race teams, the series and myself that I am chomping at the bit to make those changes happen.”

One of Herrington’s goals is to land an opportunity in Grand-Am.

“I’ve been to a lot of Grand-Am races and I would really like to get a chance in a DP, as Colin Braun did. He was coached by Ross around the same time and he has done really well for himself.”

Ross compared Braun and Herrington in a most complimentary way when he told us:

“Daniel is, I feel, another Colin Braun. Just like Colin is a complete driver, so is Daniel - fast, technical, smart, marketable, and is willing to work harder at it than anyone else. He is also a delight to coach. He listens, he's able to do what you tell him, and he's constantly striving to get better. Am I a fan of Daniel's? You bet. Just like Colin. I am especially a fan of his commitment to making it - the guy never stops working at it.”

We suggest our readers keep an eye out for Daniel Herrington. We suspect this hunter is destined to bag some big game this season.