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## Andy Brumbaugh Looks To Broker A Career In Racing

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Andy Brumbaugh is a name we have read on a handful of entry lists the last few years. And, frankly, that was all we knew about him; that his name was on entry lists for sportscar races. We assumed he was either a young man with money who bought that line on the entry, or he was perhaps a superstar talent who had migrated over to sportscar racing from another motorsports discipline which we were not followers of. Or, we figured he might be someone who was looking to turn talent into opportunity and commute that into success. Could he perhaps be yet another struggling talent trying to break into the ranks of the paid professional sportscar driver?



We came to learn Andy Brumbaugh is among the latter group. He has worked to position himself for success in each of his prior racing experiences. And for the most part, he has succeeded. This season, running with Meyer Motorsports driving the #16 RamTECH Mazda RX-8 in the ST Class of the Grand-Am KONI Challenge Series, he is hoping to find his name recorded frequently on both entry lists and at or near the top of the list of race results.

Brumbaugh began his career, like so many other 20-somethings in racing today, in karting. He started at the age of eight, having grown up around his father's SCCA racing activities. He spent so much time at the track as a child that he actually thought people who did not have a race car in their garage were not normal.

We talked with Brumbaugh this week and asked him to educate us about his rise from racing in seats that were barely an inch or two above street level, to fast times spent in a front line

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sportscar series like KONI Challenge. In our conversation we came to learn that, as a real estate broker in his spare time, he can close a deal on a house sale. But all things considered, he would much rather close a deal to drive with a top notch team full time in the Grand-Am Rolex Series,

“I am a real estate broker, but I would rather not be one. I’d rather be racing professionally full time. But it helps pay the bills that racing doesn’t pay and we all have to find ways to make ends meet, I can’t tell my mortgage company that I didn’t have a race so I can’t pay my mortgage this month!

“I started in karts at the age of 8. I had been going to race tracks since I was six weeks old. My dad raced in karts and then in SCCA club racing. Going to the track was just normal for us. I remember when I was five years old I thought everyone did that. When we would go over someone’s house I would ask them why they didn’t have a race car in their garage. I thought they were supposed to! I didn’t realize that I was the one who was different.

“We lived in Phoenix, Arizona and I did most of my karting out west. We raced in Southern California, Las Vegas, and Phoenix. I had a great time and did really well but I knew karts were just my start and that I would eventually want to move into racing cars.”

A father can tell when his son has a talent and the ambition to utilize it to the fullest. This was true of Brumbaugh’s dad, a man who knew the racing game well enough to know you had to be prepared if you wanted to be in the show.

“My dad had an idea of what was coming and he knew the work it would take to go from karts to cars. All the while that I was asking him to get the latest and greatest karting equipment for me, he was pulling back on the reigns and putting that money aside to help me later on. He knew that while karting gave me tons of experience, having the best equipment there wouldn’t necessarily help me when I made the transition to cars. In hindsight I can see that it was a good thing that he did that because it would have been so easy to spend all the money he had in karting and then never have the chance to get into a car.”

Brumbaugh was one of the biggest kids in the karting game back then. But he leveraged his talents against the advantage the smaller karters had and in the end was able to achieve real success.

“In karts, I was big for my age. I’m 24 years old and six feet tall, but I was practically full grown at age 14. I was up against kids who weighed a whole lot less than me. I simply shot up sooner than they did. The only growing I do know, however, is out! But I did manage to win some karting championships and a lot of wins along the way.

“When I transitioned from karts to cars the dream was to go to Indy cars or Formula One, just like all the other guys racing karts. My dad had a Crossle Formula Ford he raced in SCCA and I ran my first car race in that car. Dad had held onto the car knowing that one day I would be asking him to let me race it.”

Brumbaugh got off to a great start in auto racing but it would be a few years before he would recognize that sustaining a good beginning would be more difficult than running a 24 hour race without co-drivers. You might start out fast, but without some help along the way you are not going to get to where you wanted to be.

"We did fairly well that first year in SCCA racing. I ran in the ARRC (American Road Race of Champions) races and I won the race at the Nationals, setting a track record. That was exciting. But I knew we would next have to go on to another level so I started talking with several Formula Ford teams about running in the Canadian Formula Ford Pro Series for 2001. We ran with a pro team that knew the cars and tracks. We did well here too as we won the championship and the rookie of the year award. We had the most wins and tied for the most poles. That was probably the best year of my life so far because I didn't know any better. I was too young to understand how hard it really is to make it in racing.

"I learned a lot that year. It was satisfying to know that I had moved up to another level and was able to be competitive. For 2002 we looked to try another series so we went into the US Formula Ford Series. We ran with another pro team, AIM Autosport. Mark Wilkins was on the team too and he races with AIM today in a Daytona Prototype. Ian Willis was our engineer that year and he is still with the AIM team in Grand-Am. We did well, finishing in the top ten. But most of all we logged thousands of miles in testing and learned so much about setting up a car.

"I've learned that, as you move up in racing you find you are competing with people who know more and more about the nuances and the technical side of racing. Being fast isn't enough because you have to know how to set up the car and learn to develop as a driver. My experience with AIM taught me a lot about my race craft. I learned about keeping your emotions in check during a race weekend and knowing when to push and when to back off. It was an awesome experience for me."

Showing promise at speed, Brumbaugh entered into a new opportunity that, while not bringing him the originally expected result still turned out to lead to a fantastic chance to work for auto racing's greatest manufacturer, Porsche.

"2002 was also the first year for the Red Bull Driver Search program. I participated but I didn't make the final cut when they announced the drivers. I chalked that up to an off-weekend at Mid-Ohio. It wasn't the cars fault or anybody's fault, it just wasn't meant to be. But the owner of the marketing company that set up the Red Bull program, Maria Jannace, called me and said she had something for me that might be a good opportunity. That opportunity was a test drive with the Porsche Junior Team. It ended up being a shoot out between myself and Pat Long. Well, obviously Pat got the ride and he is still a Porsche factory driver, but that was my first experience with driving a sportscar. It was an incredible opportunity for me. I got to tour the factory and motorsports facility and run on their brand new test track. I had a ball!

"I also learned that driving a sportscar was so different from the open wheel cars I had been racing. Getting to the limits in a Formula car was so much easier than in a sportscar. The Porsche had more power and more weight and different handling characteristics. It was a challenge but I did well enough that the Porsche guys were very respectful to me."

Undaunted by having missed the shot with Porsche, Brumbaugh hit the bricks in search of his next challenge. This time, he decided to go open wheel racing one more time, but with a different team.

"For 2003 I wasn't sure what direction to go in so we went back to Formula 2000 with CAPE Motorsports. The cars were really good. Performance-wise my finishes were definitely better than the year before. It was a good year. And at the end of the year I got to do the Red Bull Driver Search Shoot Out. I made the finals for the shoot out but again I was not one of the drivers chosen for the team. But that was the time when I decided that what I really wanted to do was race sportscars."

With no money or substantial sponsorship left to fund another arrive and drive program, Brumbaugh had his first real taste of having to make his own breaks and finding the means to get up to speed.

“I had to learn how to find a ride on my own, which was a totally different experience. Again, hindsight told me my dad was smart for putting money aside for later on, but by the end of 2003, the well was dry and the sponsors we had weren’t able to continue either. The money was gone. I soon learned how difficult it is to find a ride and I quickly came to recognize how incredibly difficult it really is to become a paid professional race car driver.

“When 2004 came along I was able to land a one-time ride with BGB Motorsports in Grand Am Cup. I was able to scrounge up enough money from different places to rent a seat. That was my first actual race in a sportscar and I had a good time. My co-driver was Michael McDowell who I grew up racing karts against in Phoenix. Of course he is running in NASCAR now but it was neat to be his teammate that one time since we had spent so much time racing against each other.

“We ran at Mount Tremblant and finished in the top ten. That was really exciting but, once again I was out of money. I met Chuck Goldsborough that weekend. He ran the Team Lexus operation. We talked over the weekend and then he wound up sitting behind me on the flight home so we talked some more then. When we got to the airport we ended up going to the same sports bar to watch a race on TV while we waited for our flights. We just kept running into each other. I kept asking him to give me a shot and he finally agreed to put me in one of his Lexus cars for the rest of that season.

“That was the biggest break that I have had. It was great to be a pro driver because I did not have any money to do anything. And I got to work with great people like Andy Lally and Ian James who are well known and respected people in sportscar racing. I was finally starting to realize my dream of being a professional driver. And I was learning so much from these talented guys. It was an awesome year with several top five finishes. I knew that it was now time to build on that awesome start.

“At the end of 2004, Team Lexus decided to leave Grand-Am and go race in the American Le Mans Series in a GT2 car. I was talking to Chuck about it but it turned out they ended up taking 2005 off to build the new cars. That kind of put me back to square one. I had to go back to searching for a ride again.

“I didn’t do a lot of racing in 2005. I was able to do a race in the Rolex Series and another in the KONI Challenge. I only did a couple of races that year. I spent the whole year going to as many races as I could, talking to as many teams as I could telling them what I could do and asking if they would let me race their car. There are so many drivers out there like me who are doing the same thing. And I am totally dependant on myself. There is no one writing checks for me. I have to find a way to get a ride.

“In 2006 I got a call from a team called ROAR Racing. They were a new team about to go racing in KONI Challenge in Mazda RX-8’s. They had a driver that needed a fast co-driver and someone who could be a coach. So they brought me in and that was my first experience with a brand new team. It was really cool because I had found a ride – which I was thrilled about – and I got to work with a new team that was starting from scratch. When I raced with Lexus, those cars were already sorted and very competitive. ROAR Racing was my chance to help a brand new team get started and be competitive. It was a challenge. We didn’t run all the races but we

went from struggling at the beginning of the season to a top ten finish at the end. It was really exciting to be a part of the team as it grew. There were a lot of people who made it happen that year and I was really excited to be a part of that.

“For 2007 I stayed with ROAR and we ran about half the season. My co-driver was new to Grand-Am so he needed someone to coach him along and teach him how to get up to speed and how Grand-Am racing worked. We were leading at Laguna Seca and at Mid-Ohio. The team just continued to get better. We had some unfortunate things happen that prevented us from winning, but at least we knew we had reached the point where we were competitive.”

Once again a season would end and with it the opportunity to remain seated in a season long ride. Brumbaugh was back on the hunt for his next opportunity.

“My co-driver last year wanted to focus on other forms of motorsports so I began a search for a new team and new opportunity. I began a correspondence with someone via a message board. He wanted to step up from club racing to pro racing and I just started talking to him about the KONI Challenge. We ended up hitting it off and he decided to run with me this season for the whole year. His name is Sam Stuard and we just hit it off with both of us wanting to do well in sportscar racing.

“We are racing with Meyer Motorsports this season, in Mazda RX-8’s. And once again I have the opportunity to run with a team that is starting from scratch. Hopefully I can help them avoid some of the mistakes we have made in the past.

“We are getting there. The cars handle really well. The crew guys are all top notch. Everyone knows their role and we have a dedicated crew chief for each car. We have smart people in all of the positions and we all get along well.”

Being where he is right now, and having always tried to move up a level in racing each season, we wondered where Brumbaugh would like to be in the near future.

“A friend of mine, named Chris Mitchum, is running a Rolex team this year. He invited me to run with his team in the Sahlen’s Six Hours of the Glen. It was great to be back in the Rolex Series unfortunately we had a mechanical failure about 30 minutes into the race. We had some good strategy and got into the top ten before we had our mechanical failure. The experience was great and it really whet my appetite to get into the Rolex Series full time.

“The DP’s are the show but the GT class is really competitive this year and they are averaging 25 cars per race. You have Porsche’s and Mazda’s and Pontiacs so there is a lot of diversity. I would like to do well in GT. I certainly wouldn’t turn down an offer to run in a DP but anything in the Rolex Series is my goal. It is competitive and challenging and the cars are more technically advanced than the cars in the KONI Challenge.

“The main focus this year is running with Meyer Motorsports and helping my co-driver. His sponsor is RamTech and we are looking for ways to give them good value for their investment. We would like to prove to them that sportscar racing is a good place to grow their business, so we can do more things together in the future. So far we have been able to get them to work with us, now we have to deliver.

“I want people to know that I just want to race. I don’t have money to invest so I have to show them value in different ways. I have learned that the whole is definitely greater than the sum of its parts. I am just one of those parts so if I can help the team move forward and work together

as a team then that is my role. I need to help them with the knowledge I have and help guide them so we can get to the front of the pack.

“I also know that I am one of the luckiest guys around to be with a team like this. I am humbled to be able to follow my dream. I put my all into it and I hope for the best. Sometimes I wear my heart on my sleeve but that is just because I am passionate about it.”

Brumbaugh may still be found showing homes in South Carolina to prospective buyers, and he might even help them work out the details of financing their purchase, but his heart isn't in driving a car to a home. He wants to be driving one that will bring him to the podium.