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Through The Esses - Darren Law Is Always At Speed

10/25/04 - © Andrew S. Hartwell

“I have a 125 shifter Kart that I drive here at a local track in Phoenix and I love to ride quads up in the mountains.”

That was what Darren Law told us he likes to do to stay in shape between races and race seasons. This 36 year old professional racing driver has spent the entire 2004 season behind the wheel of a GT class Porsche in the American Le Mans Series and a Daytona Prototype class Porsche-Fabcar in the Grand American Rolex Series. He has run a full season in both series and was the second place overall finisher in the American Le Mans Series GT Class.

Law also finished second in the 2002 Grand-Am Rolex Series SRP II Class championship. The year prior to that, he was the GT class champion in the Rolex series, having improved from second place in the 2000 championship. Law knows about speed and how to sustain it. And as most dads can tell you, you need to keep your speed up when you have two young daughters.



“I have two little girls, Megan and Hanna, and it is very busy here at home right now. It gets tough during race season but now that it is slowing down it gets better. My wife, Karrie, is so supportive. I couldn't have a family and go racing without her. She works in real estate and she is out with clients right now so I am taking care of things at home. Her profession works out well for both of us as her hours are flexible. And this season I have been away from home quite a bit. Because I ran in both ALMS and Grand Am I was at the races for 21 weekends. That doesn't even include time spent testing. It was definitely one of – if not the – busiest years I have had since I have been racing professionally.”

Law spent most of the 1990s as an instructor at the Bob Bondurant driving school. Throughout his years there he tried to land a prime ride in sportscar racing, giving several series – including Formula Renault in England – a shot. His breakthrough came when he ran in the North American Super Touring Series. He did well in the series, winning the Detroit Grand Prix in 1996

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and finishing second in the overall championship for the non-factory teams, driving an independent BMW up against the Dodge factory team. This proved to be a career making choice for Law as it was in this series that his 'name' was made visible to the spectating public at large.

"That series was a lot of fun. It was one of the most enjoyable series I raced in. It is unfortunate that it went away but that was a great car. I ran a BMW for both seasons but I never ran a full season so I didn't have a shot at the championship.

"The team was Hartong Motorsports. I was working as an instructor at Bondurant and Bill Hartong was one of my students, he decided that we should jump into that series. So he went off and bought a car and we just ran it whenever we could. It was definitely not as well funded an effort as some of the other teams but we had a bunch of great runs. I even won at Belle Isle in Detroit which was pretty amazing, considering what we were up against. David Donohue and Dominic Dobson were running in factory Dodge cars and there were some Honda sponsored cars running there as well. We were just a couple of small guys that did real well.

"You know, David and I have since talked about those days and when he told me about some of the technology that went into the Chrysler program, and the things that they were doing to that car, it was amazing! They were just a massively funded program. They were very high-tech."

Law went on to land a ride with the G&W Motorsports team in 1998 and stayed with them until the 2003 season and again he showed the ability that would eventually lead to a seat in a Daytona Prototype. He told us how he transitioned from the G&W Picchio to the Brumos Fabcar.

"I was running with G&W Motorsports in 2003 in the Picchio Daytona Prototype. Just about everybody knew the Picchio really wasn't up to par against the competition but we did get some great runs out of that car. Better than many people thought the car could do.

"About mid-season last year, Bob Snodgrass (the owner of Brumos Racing) came up to me and asked what I was doing next year. We kept in touch and since G&W didn't have a DP program lined up at that point, Bob decided to give me a shot at driving the Brumos Porsche-Fabcar for 2004.

"I had no prior experience with Brumos but I can say I love being with them. They have a great program with a huge racing history and I am very proud to be involved with them. I like all the guys on the team and David (Donohue, his co-driver in the #58 car) and I work really well together. We haven't had the best year but that is definitely not due to the team or the people on it."

Brumos Racing fields two Porsche-Fabcars with Hurley Haywood and JC France in the #59 car, painted up in the traditional Brumos colors of white with stripes of blue and red. We wondered if there is any transfer of information between the #59 and Red Bull sponsored deep blue #58 cars and drivers.

"Absolutely! After every session we all debrief together. We go over how we did and how the cars are handling and reacting to adjustments. If we find something works on one car we put it on the other car and vice versa."

The SunTrust, Citgo and CompUSA teams have been setting the pace in Grand Am this season with the Fabcar efforts not quite putting up the numbers needed to place in the top three spots.

Law is not discouraged by what has transpired to date and is in fact eager to implement some improvements that are “on the drawing board” and about ready to be tested for next seasons run at the checkered flag.

“We are doing a lot of stuff for '05 and of course, you never know if it works until you hit the track with it. But that is one of the reasons why I am pretty excited about sticking with the program for next year, and hopefully beyond, because of everything I see that could happen.

“But if you ask me to reveal exactly what we are planning my best response to that question is, ‘I’m just a driver! I don’t know!’ (Laughter) Seriously, they are working on almost everything. And if they come up with the right formula to get things closer, then David and I will take care of the rest!”

In his “other ride”, Law finished second in the overall 2004 ALMS GT championship, tied with teammate Johannes van Overbeek and just 18 points behind Alex Job Racing’s Timo Bernhard. Overbeek and Law put the Flying Lizard’s ShoreTel / eSilicon / Brocade Porsche GT3 RSR on the top step of the podium with a win at Mid-Ohio. But they managed to rack up a number of consistent podium placings throughout the season and that kept them close right up to the end.

“I had a great season with Flying Lizard in the ALMS. For a first season effort with a new team it was unbelievable. They put together a great program. It was well funded and well organized and well thought out before they even started. They will be back in the ALMS next year but, given the coming race scheduling conflicts between ALMS and Grand Am next season, I won’t be able to put in a full season in one of the series.

“There could be as many as three or four direct conflicts between the two series and the teams want us to be there for the entire season, not miss a race here and there. I have already signed up for another season with Brumos and I did so for several reasons. I love the team and I am excited about the improvements to come. I considered the fact that the Grand Am is showing so much successful growth. I have been racing in the GT class for so long now and would very much like to find success in the prototype class. And lastly, the conflicting schedules have put me in the position of having to choose. I think I made the right choice for all the reasons noted.”

Where a person goes is often the result of the choices they make. But sometimes the point at which a person arrives is the one that fate had intended for them. It just works out sometimes that some things were meant to be.

The world of sportscar racing is really a community of like-minded people who enjoy the sport in all its forms and for all of its nuances. Often teams and drivers have worked together and then apart only to find themselves reuniting later on down the road. We can’t call it inbreeding but we can say it is all “relative”, if you will pardon the play on words.

For Darren Law, his partnership with David Donohue was in many respects, his destiny. Once again the relationships that build and grow over time within the racing community can and does bring people together on one team even after they were once competitors with other teams. Law tells us about the precedent events that made his ‘reunion’ with Donohue almost a preordained occurrence.

“Back in the late ‘60s, my father, Peter Law, worked for Roger Penske as a mechanic for Mark Donohue when he raced the McLaren M6B in the Can-Am and USRRC series. My parents did a lot of traveling while the racing was going on and I was born while they were on the road. My parents were from Australia and, with a new baby, obviously Mom had to head back home and

stop traveling with my dad. On the way back home they moved into the Philadelphia area and I wound up living with David for a few months.

“It is such a strange situation that my dad worked for his dad and that we lived together when we were infants and after all these years it comes around that he and I are teammates. It is just such an odd story, you know? When I first brought it up to David he just kind of went, “Yeah. Whatever.” I know he hears a lot of stories about his father and I am sure not everything is real. But then he talked to his mom and she told him it was true!”

We suspect the full story of Darren Law is still many years in the making and we expect more wonderful tales are yet to come. And for those who have just started to write their own stories, Law certainly wouldn't mind sharing some of his experiences. For the next generation of would-be professional drivers, Law doesn't hesitate to offer them this kernel of encouragement.

“There are a number of drivers who have had the benefit of having the money or the connections they needed to go racing. I wasn't one of them as both my family and I had to struggle to cover my expenses as I moved through the years learning and growing as a driver. It took a long time to get to the point where I am now, where I am being paid to drive. To the young guys and gals who are out there right now trying to make it in this sport I tell you to keep going and never give up in pursuit of your dreams.”

And to this we can add, do watch your mirrors youngsters - because the dark blue prototype that you see in them intends to pass you at the next corner.