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Through The Esses - Harrison Brix Won His Start And Plans To Start Winning

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As the competitive environment that is the Grand American Rolex Sports Car Series continues to expand, its growth is being fueled by an infusion of new teams and new faces. One of the most promising new faces - but one with an old familiar racing name - is that of Harrison Brix. Brix drives the #77 Feeds the Need Racing/Doran Racing DORAN JE4 Ford Daytona Prototype, along with



seasoned professional Terry Borcheller. This blending of potentially one of the best drivers of the future of sportscar racing, with one of the most talented drivers of today - and recent vintage - could provide exactly the kind of breakthrough car builder Kevin Doran has been looking for.

As the series has grown in sheer numbers of "new" teams (Alex Job, Cyberspeed, Derhaag and Playboy/Uniden, to name a few who were not in the series at its earliest incarnation) and racing venues (Barber Motorsports Park, Lime Rock Park, Miller Motorsports Park, to name three) the overwhelming chassis of choice has proven to be either the Riley or the Crawford. Builders like Doran, Chase, Multimatic, Fabcar and Picchio have not yet demonstrated the kind of consistently positive results that attracts buyers who want a leg up on the competition. Brix and Borcheller could be the pair that brings some much needed positive exposure to the Doran JE4 chassis.

We caught up with Brix just before the Laguna Seca round of the Rolex Series. This 25 year old California native grew up with a racing family. His father ran Brix Racing for a good number of years in the IMSA series that included World Sports Car and GT classes, before it became Professional Sportscar Racing, and then eventually returned to the IMSA name.

But just being the son of a race team owner doesn't automatically qualify you to be a professional racing driver. In fact, in young Harrison's case, his parents would have much preferred he not become a racing driver at all. Being the caring parents they are, they felt it best to have their bright young man further his education sitting in a classroom instead of sitting inside of a four-wheeled desk that moves at over 100 miles an hour. They much preferred he learn about what constitutes success using a pen and paper and not a pair of pedals.

But alas, their son would do what so many other sons and daughters with a passion for something have done since the concept of families was born: they did what they wanted to in spite of their parent's incessant pleading.

Brix had an early taste of the adrenaline rush that is competitive racing. His first experiences behind the wheel of a fast car, combined with all the formative years he spent with his dad's team at the track, cemented his desire to become a talented and sought after professional race car driver.

"I ran karting while in middle school but on a very limited schedule. That was because I was traveling

quite a bit while my parents had their racing team. I was constantly around the race track.

"My dad was a team owner in IMSA, starting in GTU back in 1989, and then he moved up to GTP Lights around 1990. He also ran World Sports Car with Jeremy Dale and the factory GM program for Oldsmobile. They ran two Cutlass cars, and later the Oldsmobile Aurora's driven by Irv Hoerr and Darrin Brassfield.

"It was an impressionable age for me and I think it worked! I kept saying to my parents that I really want to try and drive a race car but they kept saying they really didn't want me to do that. Being parents, they had to tell me that. They said, "We prefer that you didn't race," and I said, "Well I prefer that I did!"

"When they could see I was serious about it they asked me how I planned to pay for it. I said, "Well, I don't know!" Then they said if I really want to do it I have to figure out a way to do it. At that time I was a sophomore in High School. Finding the necessary funding to go racing when you are a sophomore in High School is not the easiest thing to do and I was not successful at it.

"Over time I saved up enough personal money to run one race weekend in Skip Barber, when I graduated from high school. When the weekend was over my parents said, "Well, you are out of money now so you are not going to be able to race." I was hoping they would see that I had made the commitment to do this and that they would help out with my racing, but they stood their ground.

"After a while I think they figured they had me beat on the driving front and actually, I had just about given up and imagined I would soon be known only as Harrison Brix, college student, and not as Harrison Brix, college student and professional racing driver."

Brix really didn't like the sound of that. He also didn't like the reality of his situation anymore than he wanted to believe he and his girlfriend had really broken up and she had gone to Europe without him. He knew he had to take action to bring at least one of his desires to fruition so he bought a plane ticket and was off overseas to see if he could get lucky.

He got real lucky.

"I had a significant other at the time but we split up. She decided to go to Europe. I decided that I was going to try and win her back so I went overseas to try my luck. But that didn't work out as we never did get back together. But while I was at the airport to come home, I saw this contest to win a new Mercedes CL500 automobile. I thought, "Well, somebody's got to win it", so I entered it. Sure enough, a few weeks later I got a call saying I won the car! Lo and behold, I promptly sold it through a European broker and suddenly I had money to go racing again!

"I decided my on track education would come through Skip Barber Racing School, while I continued my formal education at Loyola Marymount University in Los Angeles. I was able to use the money from the sale of the car I won to fund a season in the Western Series.

"Of course, I had to talk with my parents about this. When I got home from Europe and told them I had entered the contest for the car they told me I had "gotten taken". But I assured them the contest looked legitimate. And when I told them I won the car they didn't believe me! They said, "No way." But I told them it was true. I had won!"

Parents don't give up easily. Especially not parents who spent years in a potentially dangerous sport that demands a strong will to win. They saw the opportunities their son's financial windfall presented just a wee bit differently than what Harrison had envisioned.

"When the sale process and money transfer was complete, they suggested I buy a condo. They even

said they would help with the down payment. But I told them they had done everything in their power to keep me out of a race car but this was a once in a lifetime opportunity. I said I was going to at least give this a shot because if I don't I am going to regret it for the rest of my life.

"They finally gave in and said go ahead and give it a try."

As his father had done before him, Brix entered the racing game with the sort of high expectations for success that every winner needs to possess within themselves.

"I had high hopes for myself and I knew I could drive, I just didn't know at what level. I called Skip Barber and said I would be in for the full season. There were a few people there who remembered my coming through the school earlier but they really didn't think much of it. I showed up for my first race - they ran two races a weekend - and I finished second in my first race and won the second!

"My folks just said to themselves, 'Uh oh!'"

Brix went on to have an incredible first season in racing. His performances set the stage for his current drive.

"Out of the 14 races that season, I won 9, had 2 seconds, 2 thirds and a fifth. I was also the champion and rookie of the year. It was just what I was hoping for, and I really wanted to go to the nationals. I was hoping that Skip Barber would help me out a bit with a scholarship or something. But they assumed that because my parents were involved in Motorsports that they would help out or that I would find a sponsor. They weren't forthcoming with assistance. They simply figured we would just go off to the nationals and whatever happens happens."

He went to the nationals and things certainly did happen - things that might have crushed his dreams for good. But he was not about to hang up his driving gloves just yet.

"That time at the nationals I had practically the worst luck you could have. Out of 27 outings - between practice and qualifying and races - I had 23 mechanical on-course failures. Every time I got in the car something broke!

"But guys at the nationals told me that if I could find a way to get out of the series I should go. They said I could drive so I should move on to something more.

"I had met a few people who were looking for young talent. There was a gentleman named John Marcioni who ran JM racing in go-karting. He would send karting scholars to the Skip Barber national series. He was involved with SigalSport Racing at the time and asked me to come to Willow Springs raceway for a test. I went and they immediately starting looking for a way to get me in the car! They said they were going to run a Porsche and I would need to find a sponsor to get into the car. "

What happened next was the indirect result of his father's involvement in the telecommunications industry. When he isn't racing, Harrison Brix works with his father. One evening, over dinner, his ambition to be a paid professional driver was rewarded.

"I'm a program manager for voice-over IP and wireless broadband services through an independent dealer network that our company, American Wireless has. I was at a major consumer electronics show with my dad and we went to dinner with a bunch of higher-ups from Sirius Radio. The CEO said he heard I was into racing. I told him about my success in Skip Barber and said what I need now is to get a sponsor who could help me move up to the next level. He asked me how much I needed and what a sponsor would get in return for their support. I told him about the series and the benefits of being involved. He gave it some thought for a minute and then said, 'I tell you what, I'll sponsor you for five races.'

"My dad's jaw dropped and he said, 'You are going to do what?'"

"The next day I called the team and told them to put the Sirius logo on the car!"

Finally young Brix had found a "Sirius" sponsor. He rewarded their - and SigalSport's - investment in him with a very productive first season.

"I ran five races for Sigal Sport. All were top 5 finishes with a second at Homestead and I won the season closing race at Fontana. This was back when the Rolex series had three classes. "

Doors were starting to open. People who had known his dad from days gone by were still working in the racing paddocks of today. Brix renewed relationships that began when he was a young boy working with his father's team. Several of these relationships started to grow into more meaningful associations.

"The faces in Motorsports don't change for a long time and I found myself coming in contact with many people who either had worked for my dad or knew my dad from his racing days. I started building many relationships at that point with Crawford Race Cars. Max and Jan Crawford knew where my head was at. They knew I wanted to drive a prototype car and they were trying to pair me up with Michael Gue and the Essex team. They brought me out to run a test in Kershaw a few weeks after the Fontana race. The test went very well. Michael Gue offered me an opportunity to run the Rolex 24 with the Dyson's. Fortunately they were running a FORD motor as there is some synergy between FORD and Sirius. I was able to continue my sponsorship relationship with them and get into the prototype.

"I had a very rapid progression to the prototypes. Running with the Dyson team I had a chance to really get to know Chris and Rob Dyson. Chris is a few years older than me but I had never met him in all the times I was at the track with my dad.

"Rob and Chris found they really liked running the DP so they asked me to see if I could continue my Sirius sponsorship so we could run together going forward. I was either driving with Chris or with Rob for half the season. During that time I had continued to build other relationships and one of the people I spent time with was Kevin Doran.

"I knew Kevin from the days we ran in World Sports Car. I had also talked with the folks at Grand Am and they had suggested I talk to Kevin. He understood where I was with my career and that I am young and needed to be paired with a driver who could mentor me and guide me through my first full Rolex season. He came up with the Kodak sponsorship and we found the Amp'd Mobile sponsorship. (Brix explained that "Amp'd mobile is a new wireless carrier that appeals to the 18 -35 male extreme-sports crowd.")

"Kevin put the whole thing together in the end and I have to say I couldn't ask for a better mentor than Terry. Relationships between co-drivers are very important and I think I may have lucked out big time as Terry and I get along really well. He has been very patient with me and he talks to me about potential issues I could have during the race. He is very supportive and has helped me quite a bit. He is definitely one of the best role models I could have."

Mentors aside for a moment, the game of racing requires many elements be combined into a plausible case for potential victory. But - as the saying goes - if you don't have any luck, you won't have any wins. At the most recent round of the Rolex series, the #77 car seemed to be one 7 away from hitting the winning jackpot.

"Our race at Virginia was very frustrating. Terry had a great qualifying race and the main race was starting to look pretty good for us. I don't know what happened, whether I had a mental mistake I made, or if I ran over some debris, but I went off at the Oak tree section and got into the wall. Of

course the cable for reverse malfunctioned and it took three laps to get us back on the track. In this series three laps will do you in. We ended up finishing 19th."

But that was at the last race. Brix hasn't come this far to stop believing now that his future lies in racing. And his infusion of youthful energy and enthusiasm into the Doran team, combined with engineering refinements Kevin Doran's crew have been developing, strongly suggest a podium placing may be just across the next finish line.

"We have some updates to the Doran coming that are going to help us significantly. My goal is to win at least one race this year. Terry and I have come close to the podium already. We had a good run going at Long Beach. With the updates to come we feel we are going to be potential race winners every week. We are sort of on the cusp of making it to the podium. It is that never ending thing in racing where you can see the light at the end of the tunnel. With some of the things Kevin is working on to improve the car I am hoping that we will at least be able to get one win.

"Another big goal for us is to score manufacturer's points for FORD. Kevin has a good relationship with FORD. And when you are competing against Krohn Racing and Finlay Motorsports it is pretty prestigious to say you are the team scoring the most points for your manufacturer."

The Krohn and Finlay teams are but two of many who will work as hard as or harder than anyone else to secure race wins. Brix willingly concedes that the competitiveness in the DP class is unlike anything he has experienced to date.

"The Skip Barber series was very competitive, but compared to the Rolex Series it was a walk in the park! There are 15 cars that can win at every race. If you are 7/10ths of a second off you are 11th or 12th! It is probably one of the most competitive series in the world right now. You have to have two professional drivers, a great team, be well funded and conducting testing on a regular basis. You have to be on the gas at all times."

Getting on the gas is the whole point of this particular career choice and we wondered in what types of vehicles the gas pedals of his future might be located.

"I would obviously love to go to F1 but I'm an American and I am a little too old for that now. So I don't think that is going to happen. But I would like to run in all the highest forms of racing from Champ Car to NASCAR and at Le Mans. Nowadays there are a lot of guys who crossover from one series to another and I want to be one of those guys. I want to be working every week.

"I am sort of setting my sites on trying to get to Le Mans. I expect it will be a two or three year project, just trying to find my way in. Once you can put on your resume that you have Le Mans experience offers come back to you to run there again. It is difficult to get your foot in the door but I am exploring options all over the map. I have offers to run in other series and I am exploring those options as well. I hope that the second half of this year will be busier than the first."

We suspect Harrison Brix will be one busy racer for many years to come.