

Travis Adams knew at the end of the 2008 season that 2009 would be a different racing year for his 03ME late model team. It wasn't until March, however, that he would find out how different things would really be.

After four late model championships and twenty-six late model feature wins at Maine's Oxford Plains Speedway, Travis Adams started the offseason wondering what do to next. Already at the top of the Maine Late Model mountain, it was an enviable position for the popular driver to be in.

After a career in go karts that yielded over a hundred wins, Travis moved to the OPS Late Models in 2001. He finished that year with a win and won at least one and as many as seven races in every year since.

There is no question that Adams knows the fast way around the legendary Maine racetrack. Despite the statistics, though, it hasn't been an easy climb for Adams. "Every year the competition finds more speed over the winter months" he says. "It makes these championships harder and harder to come by. Four or five years ago you could get a championship by finishing in the top ten every week. To win the last couple of championships, I had to constantly run in the top five. One DNF could have easily taken it away."

"In 2007 we had a dominant car" Adams says "but a lot of other teams weren't quite up to their game. In 2008 a lot more teams stepped up. That made us have to do more research and change the car to get it better. The car was technically faster than it was in 2007 even though it didn't win as many races. In 2007 I could win races with slower times. That didn't happen in 2008."

Despite this typically humble assessment, Travis's 2008 record still showed two wins in eighteen starts. Fifteen times he finished in the top ten. Five times he was in the top three. With the exception of an early exit in the Oxford 250, it was another great year for the 03ME team.

The team's success, though, is not the result of a multi-car operation nor does it come from a never-ending checkbook. What makes Travis's accomplishments even more impressive is that he reaches them on a shoestring budget that mostly comes out of his own wallet. "In this economy we have lost most of our sponsors" Adams says. As the sole owner of his car he knows first-hand the challenges that

face many weekend racing warriors. "The cost is becoming more of a burden to me personally, and that is tough when you work a 40 hour week with a family to support at home."

A plan formed in the off-season to race only part-time in 2009. There would be no run for a fifth late model championship at Oxford. Adams would choose the races he entered based on the ones that paid the most.

In early March, however, Travis's father Donnie died of a heart attack while sleeping. He was only 56 years old. The loss of Travis's father put the whole racing operation into question.

In the weeks that followed the loss, Travis pondered getting out of racing altogether. Considering how involved his father was, it is understandable why he would want to get out of the sport.

"My parents had been at every race I had ever been in and supported me in many ways, including financially" Adams said. "My father and I did most of the work away from the track like banging out dents or getting the car set-up and scaled for the next week's race. I don't have a mechanic on the payroll but I did have my father. Dad turned all the wrenches on the race car. He owned his own repair business so when there were no customer vehicles in the shop he worked on the car."

Besides the on-track success, Travis has become known over the years for the color of his car and his unique race car hauler. Both of those things also came from Travis's Dad.

"The bus was owned by my father" Travis says. "Dad modified the bus to be able to fit the car and easily load it. He has also added many different features to it to make things easier to get to at the track. The bus fits our racing budget and has always been dependable. We don't see any need to have anything different."

A converted school bus painted the same bright green and pink as the racecar, the hauler is a fan favorite. "People know we are coming when they see the bus because you definitely can't miss it!" Adams says. "The kids adore it. It gives them something to look for and say, 'Hey, it's that green bus, let's go to the races.'"

And then there is the car, painted a unique scheme of green and pink that makes it instantly-recognizable. "We were always diehard Dale Earnhardt Sr. fans" says Travis. "My go-kart was always black, silver and red. When we started racing multiple classes of go karts, we added another car and painted it lime green. It was a color Arctic Cat first released on a sled in 1996. I bought the prototype and my father said it was the most putrid color he'd ever seen. Travis's father added the pink, saying 'He who buys the paint, picks the color.' He bought the paint and he picked the pink."

Within a few weeks of his father's passing, however, Travis had decided to continue with his racing plans. "It seems strange, but because of my father's passing, I'm actually going to be racing more than I wanted to if he was alive," Adams told the website GreenWhiteChecker.info. "I only wanted to run about five 'big' races at Oxford," Adams said. "But (after my father's death), people came forth -- crew members and sponsors, people saying that if I wanted to do it they would be behind me. It opened up some avenues for me with money and other things."

Adams will race in 2009 with an ACT-legal car, entering the Oxford 250 as well as select weekly races at Oxford, all 3 ACT races at Oxford, and the Center of Speed 300 race at Wiscasset (Maine). A qualifying race for the ACT at NHMS Invitational, Adams hopes that if he has not already qualified for the ACT at NHMS race he can qualify through the Wiscasset race. Having an ACT-legal car also gives him the option of entering ACT races wherever and whenever he wants.

While 2009 is a year of changes and uncertainty, Adams certainly has fond memories of his racing accomplishments to look back on. While proud of his wins and track titles, it is his October 2007 ACT victory at Oxford that tops his list. "That was a big accomplishment for me" he says. "My father had been wanting me to win an ACT race for quite some time. We had been third in an ACT race before, but other than that we had horrible luck and mechanical problems. It was awesome to race against the region's greatest touring teams who were experienced in racing 100 to 200 lap races" Travis adds. "To be able to go from a weekly 40 lap race to get the right setup to go the duration of a long race shows that I can compete with the best in New England. The win was one of the goals that I had set for myself and it was great to prove to myself that I could do it."

Another goal has so far gone unmet for Adams. "I would still really like to win the Oxford 250" Travis says "or at least complete the entire race." The win would be an accomplishment for both Travis and his father, even though his father will not

be there in person to enjoy it if he wins. Already a legendary competitor at the track, winning the Oxford 250 would give Adams national recognition as well.

For all the lime green-shirted fans at Oxford Plains Speedway, it will be sad not to see Adams racing weekly for yet another championship. While the absence of the 03ME car will guarantee other competitors a shot at more race wins and the title, it will also mark the end of a nearly decade-long era. Still, the fact that Adams is racing at all is a testament to the dedication of the team that Travis's father was so instrumental in building.

While the loss of Travis's father leaves a giant hole in the team, it has also inspired the remaining family and crew to approach 2009 with a new attitude and focus. Even though the familiar green and pink bus will not pull into the Oxford pits weekly, whenever it does roll through the gates at that track or anywhere else, its presence still signals the threat of yet another Travis Adams win.