

# BUTCH LAMBERT

## *CURTAIN CLOSES ON THE BIG SHOW – KIND OF*

JMS Pro Photo/Job Secka



### BY DOUG KENNEDY

**T**wo thousand thirteen will go down as bittersweet for 40-year-old Late Model driver Butch Lambert. With 20 seasons of racing under his belt, Lambert decided at season's end that this would be his last.

"I have a seven-year-old now (Madison) and she's getting more involved in sports, gymnastics, cheerleading, basketball, just about everything," said Lambert. "I would like to see all that stuff. I'm not retiring from driving; I'm just retiring from car owning. If somebody wants me to drive for them, I would be more than happy to do that."

Lambert will do just that when racing resumes in 2014. He's agreed to drive a B-Modified for Mike Hendrickson when at Sharon Speedway for the 2014 season. It's not a Late Model, but it is a car that he has driven in the past.

"It's only going to be one day

a week," said his wife, Robyn, of her husband's future racing plans. "He'll just go there and drive it, not like before and that will be a lot different."

Lambert says that he had pondered getting out of owning and maintaining his own car for a few years, but it has been his wife who pushed him to continue. "She sometimes wanted me to go racing more than I did," he said. "But finally, she wanted to sell the car, too."

Lambert got his first itch for racing when he was around 16 years of age. Enduros were his race car of choice back in 1991, but a fairly serious accident forced him to take time off from racing for a few years. It wasn't until 1993, that he got back into racing in the Pure Stock Division at Lernerville Speedway. Lambert and a friend of his, Adam Donaldson, built a Street Stock together that Butch ran for a couple of seasons.

"It was pretty much a bone stock deal and we really didn't know what we were doing," said Lambert. "It was a big learning curve."

Lambert built a second car in 1997 and ran that for another three seasons. Unfortunately, there were no feature wins in any of those years.

It wasn't until 2000, when Butch, Robyn, her dad, Bob Kennedy, and her cousin, Chuck Kennedy, himself a very accomplished racer, got together and built a Street Stock that Lambert finally found his stride. He scored his first feature win that season at Challenger Raceway in Jacksonville, Pennsylvania, in the season opener and six more wins were soon to follow. And then eight more feature wins followed in 2001, along with the Pure Stock championship at Lernerville Speedway in Sarver, Pennsylvania.

Buying a SS Chassis in 2005,

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Lambert won seven features and a second Lernerville championship. "We got pretty good with that car," he said. A third championship followed in 2006, which prompted Lambert to begin travelling on a limited basis.

The 2006 season turned out to be extra special for Lambert. Besides winning a third championship, his daughter was born at the beginning of the season.

Beyond his Street Stock, Lambert also started driving an E-Mod for Chuck Neely that year. For four seasons he pulled double duty, running both the Street Stock and E-Mod at Lernerville, Tri-City (Pennsylvania) and other assorted tracks.

Plans for 2008 were for Lambert and team to get rid of the Street Stock and devote their time to the E-Mod, but the FASTRAK Series arrived into the area and their plans changed.

"We ended up finding a car (2002 Rocket) and were just going to get our feet wet," said Lambert. "We did fairly well the first night out and started racing every week.

We went to Eldora and did all the FASTRAK stuff at the end of the year. We did a lot more than we anticipated, but we were having fun." Lambert even won the FASTRAK Northeast Tour portion of the Fall Classic at McKean County Raceway in East Smethport, Pennsylvania.

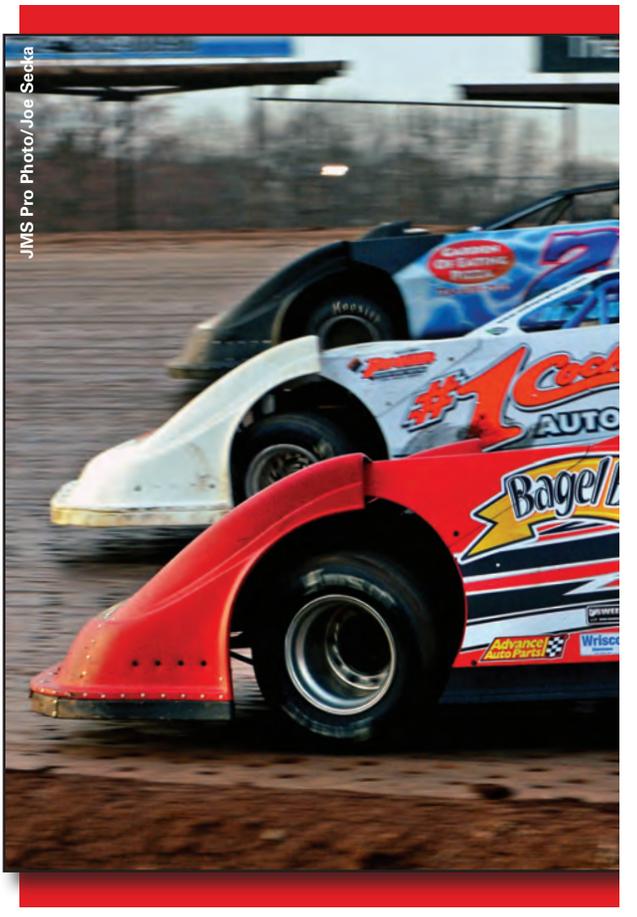
Leaving the E-Mod to commit to running the Late Model was okay with Lambert.

"Those cars (E-Mods) are kind of tough to drive," he said. "There's so much horsepower with the small tires and it's hard to hook them up. The guys that were serious were kicking our butt every week."

Committing to run the entire Northeast Tour with FASTRAK, Lambert ended up doing quite a significant amount of travelling. One of those trips took him to Charlotte, which turned out to be one of his fondest memories.

"With a packed house and the Outlaw Sprints there, it is something I will never forget," said Lambert. With a limited entry race of 50 cars, Butch ended up 11th in the feature.

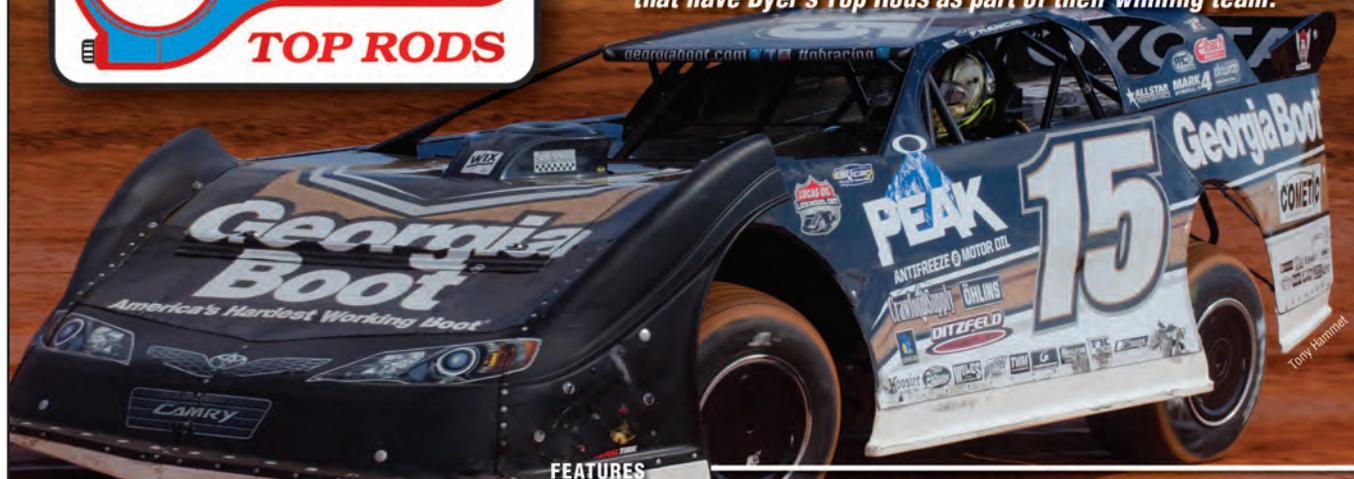
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Butch Lambert's #27 goes three-wide at Lemerville Speedway last season.

with the boys down South," he said. The field included current NASCAR driver, Austin Dillon, who won the race that night.

From 2008 through 2012, Lambert competed in the FASTRAK Northeast Series, with his best finish coming in 2010 when he finished third in points. A Steel City Stampede win at Lemerville Speedway followed in 2011. That victory was Lambert's 34th career win, one that was perhaps his final feature victory.

"It wasn't a real exciting race," said Lambert. "I started up front and pretty much stayed up there all night. It's hard to pass when the track gets slick. We ended up drawing the pole that night, so it helped us out."

"We've been close more than enough, but we couldn't really seal the deal with the Late Model," said the driver of the red #27. "It's a competitive division, that's for sure." Lambert says that there are 12 to 15 guys who are capable of winning each and every night and says that coming from the back to the front is not something you

Howie Ballis



Above photo: Butch Lambert with his #27 machine pit side at Expo Speedway in 2010.  
Below photo: Lambert goes three-wide in 2011 action.



Tommy Michaels



Butch Lambert in action at the Lernerville Speedway Steele City Stampede in 2012 (above photo) and three-wide during last season's running (below photo).



Howie Ballis

Howie Ballis

can do anymore.

As for this past season in the RUSH Series, Lambert said, "We were not as competitive as we had been. We were off more than on, and just couldn't get the car figured out. We should have gone back to our base set-up and something that we knew worked, but you don't know until you try it."

That said, Lambert ended up a very respectable third in points behind Mike Pegher, Jr. and Ryan Montgomery.

A resident of Valencia, Pennsylvania, a community just north of Pittsburgh, Lambert recalls his most forgettable racing moment that came in June of 1998, when a tire that he was mounting exploded, shattering his forearm. Missing the rest of the season, Lambert remembers waking up in the hospital and hearing talk about maybe not having an arm the next morning.

"That really scared me," he said. The night of the mishap, Chuck Kennedy drove the car for him and that same tire went flat on him during the race.

Professionally, Lambert recently started driving a truck for a private company after driving for a PL (Logistics Provider) company for the last 13 years.

"I got offered this job that gives me a little more home time," he said. "I took it and now I can get my daughter off the bus in the afternoon."

Lambert's real first name is Robert, but he also goes by the nickname of Big Show. Robyn actually nicknamed him that when he bought his first Late Model.

"We would go to all the big shows," he said. "I guess we thought we were big-time. I don't know how she made it stick, but it did and that's what everyone calls me. I like it and don't have a problem with it."

Lernerville, a track a mere 15 minutes from his house, has always been his home track, but they don't run Late Models. So when he stopped running his Street Stock, he knew he was going to miss the track.

"We knew we weren't going to be racing there every week," said

JMS Pro Photo/ Joe Secka

Butch Lambert chats pit side at Sharon Speedway last season.



Lambert after he joined the traveling FASTRAK tour.

Lambert considers himself to be a pretty laid back person. "I treat people the way I want to be treated," he said. "My guys got on me sometimes for not being as aggressive as I should have been, but I was footing the bill. Sometimes I get into more of a predicament doing that because being a nice guy ends up getting you in trouble."

Besides racing, Lambert loves to hunt and drive his quad. Until getting the offer to race the B-Mod, he was pondering what it was going to be like when the 2014 season rolled around and there would be no racing. Now he doesn't have to worry about that issue.

"I've been doing it for so long that I really don't know what it's going to be like," he said before securing the ride. "I don't really think that it's hit me yet. We're going away, but we're not going that far away."

Two things are for sure, he won't have to worry what it feels like not to be racing and indeed he didn't go that far away at all. 

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