

Lifetime and a day is a very long time, but that's how long Dean Gallison was banned from Thunder Road. Today, however, Dean finds himself heir apparent to succeed the King of New England short track and touring series promoters, Thomas Michael Curley.

Dean Gallison's history with "The Nation's Site of Excitement" goes back to the beginning. He helped build the stands with his family nearly 50 years ago and has been involved with the track as a fan, crew member, racer, official and, currently, Director of Competition for both Thunder Road and the ACT Tour.

Dean's father, "Gentleman Jim" Gallison was an early supporter of and competitor at the Barre, VT track. His boys, Dean and "Tuna" were often in attendance to watch their father race. "I remember standing at the gate on a Thursday night before anyone else had got there" Dean says. "Tom would arrive and ask who wanted free admission that night. We didn't have much money, so he would let us in and we would pick rocks off of the roads in the pits."

Dean's brother was the first to follow their father and become a racer in the early 80's. Dean soon joined the ranks in a lesser division. "My brother and I both raced different divisions until he had health problems and had to step out of the car. One night Tom got mad at the division I was in and threw us out for a week, so I got in my brother Tuna's Tiger. It was '91 when I moved into late models. My brother was the crew chief. We did all of our own work and were fairly successful."

But then came the trouble. "It was '94" Dean recounts "when I was thrown out for life and a day. My brother and I, since we built our own stuff, well some of that stuff was a bit over the line. Some of it was way over the line. Tuna had made an air-deflecting part for the carburetor that we had run in a few races. We ran second that night but my brother and I got called to the trailer. It was our first time ever getting called to the trailer. Tom came in, sat down with us and had us read out of the rulebook the section about air-deflecting devices. Then he asked us what we had on our car. We had to tell him and Tom told us it was illegal. I made the mistake of then bringing up some other racers who had illegal parts and were not getting caught. It just blew up from there. Tom doesn't like it when you are called on the carpet and start talking about other people. At that moment it's just about you and what you did. Anyway, Tom and I we were shouting and already standing and my brother got upset and stood up too. My brother went toward Tom and to this day I don't know if it was his asthma inhaler or a can of mace, but Tom reaches into his pocket and starts pulling out this thing and...it was a bad deal from there. He kicked my brother and I both out for lifetime and a day."

Dean returned the next year as a racer, having called the office and spoken to Tina (who would later become his wife) and encouraged her to plead to Tom on his behalf. His case was that he had a racecar and nowhere to race. Tom agreed to let him back although it was clear he would be on a short leash.

It was a short-lived return. “We were done at the end of ‘95 when we destroyed the car.” Dean says. “I kept going to the races as a fan in the stands, though. One time I was at Airborne in Plattsburgh, NY, which Tom owned and ran at the time. He asked me if I was going to race again. I told him no and he asked me to be his tech guy at Airborne. I started doing that. I wasn’t sure why Tom had asked me to be his tech guy, but I figured out later on that Tom thought cheaters made the best tech guys, so that’s probably why he asked me.”

What followed were two full seasons as a tech official at Airborne before Dean was asked to add Thunder Road tech duties as well. He agreed to the additional responsibilities and began working for Tom on Thursday nights at Thunder Road and Saturday nights at Airborne.

Things changed again in 2004. “When Tom fell and broke his hip it was a real eye-opener for him. For the first time he seemed to realize he would not be around forever.” Dean says. “He had plans to move me up but we weren’t sure to what. I went down a few times to spend the afternoon with him when he was bed-ridden with his hip. We started talking about me as Director of Competition. I started going to meetings with him and becoming more involved with the things that he does away from the track.”

The deepening relationship proved to be beneficial for both parties. “I spend a lot of time with Tom.” Dean says. “I enjoy working with Tom. We get along when things are good and bad. We have our discussions and sometimes we agree and sometimes we don’t. If it’s bullshit I tell him and he listens. He respects me for not being a bobblehead.”

Together, Tom and Dean are implementing what they see as universal rules for late models in New England. “Several years ago Tom and I went down to Portsmouth, NH for this meeting.” Dean says. “We walk into this room and there at this big conference table is every track owner and every tech guy from every track in New England. I swear it was like a scene out of *The Godfather*. We sat down and started talking about universal late model rules in our region. Some got it right away and some didn’t, but we planted the seed. Making the Oxford 250 a late model race was Tom’s thing. That was his baby. But we started this thing [universal late models] together on page one, so we both know where we want it to go.”

Indeed, although it has taken several years to come to fruition, the trend toward a standardized New England late model is becoming reality. It is already happening that ACT can show up at a track, blend in the track’s own late model drivers and then have those drivers threaten for a win. In ACT’s 2007 finale race, winner Travis Adams was a regular at Oxford Plains Speedway.

The biggest challenge Dean faces is straddling the line between the business side of racing and the friendship side. He seems to have the right attitude for balancing those two competing interests. “When I am at a race everyone gets treated the same.” He says. “Disqualifying people is all in how you handle it. I don’t get my jollies out of doing it.

I've been disqualified. I know exactly how it feels. We are 100% thorough and we explain it all to them before they leave. I don't have two sets of rulebooks. Those internet message boards used to eat me up. It used to get to me. It doesn't bother me anymore. I know the rules and I don't change them. I am friends with all the racers, but business is business when it comes to the rulebook. Tom has beaten it in to me that sometimes you are making decisions for the business and sometimes for the racers. We can't have racers without the business and vice versa. You are always trying to keep both happy if you can."

At every level, Tom Curley is still very much in charge, although he has become better at delegating over the years. "All big decisions still go through Tom." Dean says. "Tom trusts me to make the calls. I have the power to disqualify people and hand down penalties, but I make sure Tom knows what is going on so he doesn't get blindsided. He really doesn't like getting blindsided. He gives me the reins quite a bit but is still there to pull them back if he needs to."

Working for Tom Curley is no easy task. The man is a giant in New England racing. "Tom demands perfection." Dean says. "You have to be willing to meet those demands. He hates being embarrassed and so do I." There is some hollering these days, but not as much as there used to be. "He's not hollering at you, he's hollering at the situation" Dean says from experience. "It's all about the show and taking care of the fans in the stands and the racers on the track, in that order."

The learning process for Dean is ongoing. "There's so much behind the scenes that I am still trying to learn." Dean says. "Mostly the sponsorship and what he has in place at the office. Tina knows the business end more than I do. Stuff like promotion and what goes on during the week."

It is here that Dean is quick to deflect any praise for his hard work. "It has always been a team thing with Tina. We don't do anything without running it by the other person first. I wouldn't be where I am today and doing what I love without her."

Tina Boutin and Dean Gallison met when he was a racer and she worked for Tom. Now married, their personal and professional lives have grown together. In 2004 they shared The Bubby Wilder Dedication award. In 2006 when Dean received The Don MacTavish Award for "significant contributions to stock car racing in the region" it was Tina who was at his side. In the 2007 season they worked at 43 races together and functioned as a team to support each other in their Thunder Road and ACT roles.

What does Tom Curley think of Dean Gallison? "Dean has done a great job taking the issues of the Tech penalties etc. out of my hands after 28 years." Tom says. "He has learned a lot over the past 8 years about the 'hidden issues' that make a successful race track. Although his style in the pits is certainly a lot 'calmer' than mine, it has brought positive results. When Bubby Wilder retired (or semi retired as he keeps coming back on occasion), I really was concerned about that aspect of the operation. Dean has taken on an important role, he is young enough to have some years left. We are working on finding

the second half which is the business, vision, race directing aspect of the ACT operation. Thunder Road continues to be a good example of a successful short track, but much of that is due to the creative juices of Squier, the girls that have been around a long time doing all the administration and the group of some 40 people who make each department of Thunder Road run smoothly each week. With both Ken and I certainly in the Fall if not Winter of our careers it is our hope that things can continue as is at T-Road and Dean certainly plays a major role in that thinking at this time. As a post script, this was the first year in about 15 years that I enjoyed the "Tour" more than the Thursday night experience. I guess it is a clear signal that change is necessary and coming."

Despite the presence of a general plan for succession, there are no formal plans. At least, according to Dean, no formal plans that are known to anyone but Tom Curley. "Does he have a plan for everything?" Dean speculates. "I don't know. Only he knows. However, if he were gone, we do have ourselves positioned to run things if we need to. It's not just me, it's all of us that would make it happen. We have been working on making it easier for Tom for some time. We have built the staff to do this. We have all the right people in all the right places. Tom will never walk away and no one wants him to. It's always been about his passion, his excitement. All of us get caught up in that. There will never be another Tom Curley, but if he is gone we will carry things on the way he taught us to. He has always talked about making it to the 50<sup>th</sup> [anniversary] in 2009. After that, only Tom and God know what's going to happen next."