

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.

Gallison'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," Gallison recalls. "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."

Gallison's brother was the first to follow their father and become a racer in the early 1980s. Gallison 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," he recalls. "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," Gallison 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" Gallison continues. "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” Gallison remembers. “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."

Gallison returned the next year as a racer, after calling the office and speaking to Tina Boutin. He asked her to plead to Curley on his behalf. His case was that he had a racecar and nowhere to race. Curley 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," Gallison says. "I kept going to the races as a fan in the stands, though. One time I was at Airborne, 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 Gallison was asked to add Thunder Road tech duties as well. He agreed to the additional responsibilities and began working for Curley 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," says Gallison. "For the first time he seemed to realize he would not be around forever. He had plans to move me up but we weren't sure to what. I went down and spent the afternoon with him a few times when he was bed-ridden with his hip. We started talking about me as Director of Competition. We were going into the universal late model rules then and things were going to get big for ACT. 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," Gallison says. "I enjoy working with him. 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 bulls**t I tell him and he listens. He respects me for not being a bobblehead."

The biggest challenge Gallison 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-percent 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," Gallison admits. 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 still is very much in charge, although he has become better at delegating over the years. "All big decisions still go through Tom," Gallison 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.

"There's so much behind the scenes that I am still trying to learn" Gallison 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 Gallison is quick to deflect any praise for his hard work.

"It has always been a team thing with Tina" he says. "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 Curley. The relationship has blossomed from there. Gallison and Boutin married. Now, their personal and professional lives have grown together.

In 2004 Tina and Dean shared the Bubby Wilder Dedication award. In 2006 when Gallison received The Don MacTavish Award for "significant contributions to stock car racing in the region" it was Tina who was at his side. This past summer they worked at 43 races together and functioned as a team to support each other in their Thunder Road and ACT roles.

Despite the presence of a general idea for succession, there are no formal plans. At least, according to Gallison, no formal plans that are known to anyone but Tom Curley. "Does he have a plan for everything?" Gallison 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. 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 50th [anniversary] in 2009. After that, only Tom and God know what's going to happen next."