

“My resources certainly aren't as deep as some of them” says ACT and Thunder Road racer Eric Williams. “I'm definitely not racing on a glamorous scale.” Without a doubt, there is nothing glamorous about the climb of Eric Williams to the top of the Thunder Road Late Model ranks.

Eric Williams began his racing career in 1991. After helping to build a racecar for someone else in 1990, he decided to build one for himself the following year. Running a Flying Tiger at both Airborne (Plattsburgh, NY) and Thunder Road, he grabbed Rookie of the Year titles at both tracks along with top ten point finishes. In 1994, just his third year of racing, he swept the Championship titles at both tracks.

In 1995 Eric moved up to Late Models. He continued to build, own and maintain his own car, as he has throughout his career. Wins followed, but so did challenges.

Eric earned a reputation as a hard charger, unafraid to push as hard as he could on his way to the front. Lacking a better candidate for the title of “Thunder Road Bad Boy,” Eric was given the unfortunate role. Fans had started to boo Eric. It was not a title that he wanted.

“I tried to block out the boos” says his wife Lisa. “Most nights I just laughed, telling myself ‘Wow! A lot of people must really be watching Eric,’ and reminding myself that most of them don't even know Eric. What they don't know is when Eric has a good night, his family, friends and fans are right there with him enjoying the glory. When Eric has a bad night or is struggling in a given year, it's Eric who beats himself up and feels like he did not put on a good show for his fans.”

“My fans have been loyal to me since the beginning and I always try my hardest to do the best I can for them” Eric says. “When I do poorly I feel bad for them. I like them to go home excited. They work hard for their money and win or lose, if they can come to the racetrack, get lost in the night's racing and forget about their problems for a few hours, then I'm happy.”

Entering the 2008 season , Eric had racked-up 3 ACT Tour wins (including Milk Bowl and Labor Day Classic wins at Thunder Road) along with two Governor's Cup trophies and three other wins at Thunder Road. Twice he finished runner-up in the points.

The 2008 season began with a different approach. When Eric unloaded his car for the 2008 opener, something was different. On the back of his car was the phrase “I Keeps It Real Bee-Otch,” an expression meant as a joke that instead turned out to be a motto the team would live by throughout the year.

Gone was the Eric Williams who beat himself up over bad finishes, crashed cars and continually felt discouraged. A new breeze was blowing through the #7 pits. A 7th place finish in the season opener was followed by a 2nd and 3rd in the next two races. Throughout the season Eric never finished outside the top 10 with 10 of 15 races in the top 5. Eric’s driving had kept him as a points-contender all season long and kept the car in one piece. The boos from the crowd turned to cheers.

Coming into the final race of the year, Eric led challenger Phil Scott by 16 points. It was his championship to lose. A spin in the feature, after contact from another competitor, put his season-long championship charge in jeopardy. As if by divine intervention, though, another car had spun just seconds before Eric did, giving Eric his spot back. He went on to beat Phil Scott by a mere 3 points for the title.

Winning the Late Model Championship at Thunder Road is, without a doubt, the highlight of Eric’s career so far. “I would say the competition at Thunder Road is quite possibly the toughest in the country at the short track level” Eric says. “Every week there are 10-12 guys who are fast enough to do well that night. Things just need to work out a certain way for each one. You have to be able to drive way past the comfort level and on the ragged edge at Thunder Road. The secret of racing there is to be able to do that lap after lap for anywhere from 50 to 200 laps. When new guys go there they always think their car is handling poorly, when really the competition is so stiff that they have to step it up two notches just to be competitive. The amount of media coverage is larger at Thunder Road than any other place we go to except for maybe the Oxford 250. There is always a huge crowd to race in front of and it is probably the toughest track I know of to consistently keep your car set up right for.”

When asked what had made the difference in 2008, Eric said “This year I had a car that was as fast as the top five cars. In other years I had always been 3 tenths off. When your car is 3 tenths off, sometimes you have to stick it in holes that aren't

quite as big as you'd like them to be. Having a competitive car gave me the ability to be a little more patient knowing I had the car when I needed it.”

It also helped to have his son Tucker giving a hand at Eric’s races and Eric returning the favor at Tucker’s races. “Tucker and I built his car together” he says. “He had a great year with 5 wins and 9 top-3’s in 10 races in the Strictly Stock Mini division at White Mountain Motorsports Park in NH. He has a ton of natural talent and he handles himself like a seasoned veteran. He's got a very, very bright future in racing. I sometimes had a hard time working on my car this year because I enjoyed working on his car so much.”

Twice in his career, Eric Williams has had to put his family before racing in a big way. “We were in the top three in points when a landslide happened next to my house and we had to take two weeks off to fix everything” he says. “Another time my brother’s health issues forced me to take two weeks off again when we were in the top three in points.” When asked what is most important in his life, Eric Williams is unwavering in his answer. “Family comes first” he says. “Period.” “Racing has been a very big part of our lives” adds Eric’s wife Lisa. “Not our total life, but a big part of it.”

“My wife Lisa has been a great supporter throughout my career. She is my biggest fan” says Eric. Lisa’s role could be called “Head Cheerleader” for the Williams team of Eric and now Tucker. There haven’t been very many races over the years when Lisa wasn’t sitting in middle of the section of red t-shirted fans that support Eric. “If you're the wife in the stands watching each and every week, you’re hoping for a good finish with no trouble” she says. “I’m trying to push and pull him through every turn of every lap of every race. It’s always in the back of my mind how fast things happen and how quickly they could be hurt. I try not to think much about that. I'm too busy being nervous about Eric and Tucker doing well, and that's probably because I know just how hard they work at it.”

When asked if he has plans to retire at any point in the near future, Eric simply says “Nope.” “I like being my own crew chief and driving” he says later on. “I like having Tucker help me on the car and in the pits and I like helping him. I like the people. I don't like buying tires or two day racing events. I like the challenge of

trying to race on a budget against the high dollar teams and I appreciate the ACT rules package that allows me to do that. It is challenging to find people that are willing to come to the race shop during the week and really dedicate themselves to it. Also, having to drive the race hauler myself to and from the races at tracks that are far away is hard to do. We are hoping next year to have both Tucker and myself racing weekly at Thunder Road. Unless I get offered a ride for the ACT Tour, I will probably just run a few select Tour events. I am happy with my racing career and look forward to it continuing.”

“We can’t quit now” Eric’s wife Lisa says. “With Eric and now Tucker, it’s in our blood.”