

It has been said that in order to go faster, sometimes you need to slow down. In 2008, Ted Christopher slowed down.

Going slower is not something that comes easily to Ted Christopher. During a racing career just shy of three decades, he has racked-up nearly 300 feature wins and numerous track championships. He has raced just about everything with four wheels, be it with or without wings, with or without fenders, on asphalt or on dirt. Up and down the east coast and as far away as Florida, TC has won races in every conceivable type of racecar at every conceivable type of racetrack. He has raced between 50 and 100 races per year for the last dozen years.

Despite nine season-long points titles between Stafford and Thompson, a NASCAR New England Region title and two NHMS track crowns, those championships were more a result of hard-charging than deliberate points racing. Each race TC raced to win, letting the points sort themselves out on their own. It was a hit-or-miss approach. “Folks kept asking me why I never won a tour championship.” Christopher says. “I told them I was always too busy trying to address the race at hand.”

Sometimes in racing there are drivers who win races but cannot win championships. Drivers who win championships know that while wins are important, it’s how you approach it when you don’t win that earns you championships. While maybe a driver won five out of ten races that year, they may have crashed themselves out of the other 5. Adding the points for five good and five bad finishes does not equal a championship.

All that changed in 2008. During the season’s NASCAR Whelen Modified Tour campaign, TC grabbed four wins, ten top fives and thirteen top tens. It was a level of consistency that demonstrated a change in his racing philosophy “I focused on the big picture for 2008, trying not to make the same mistakes I made before.”

TC won the Whelen Modified Tour championship for the first time, winning both the championship and the final race of the season at Thompson International Speedway. After more than a dozen years of tour competition, including losing the championship in the final race of 2005, Christopher realized a lifelong dream.

Among all of his many accomplishments, the Modified Tour championship is a big one. “I always have loved driving a modified and always will” says Christopher. “Being a modified racer, this championship is the ultimate. It is what we all strive for at the beginning of the season. We have been running the modified tour for a while now and we have always been close but this year we were able to close it out.”

TC is well-known as an “aggressive” racer, unafraid to do what it takes to get to the front. His style has been more “checkers or wreckers” than calculated racing toward any championship. “I’m a Gemini” says TC. “They say Gemini’s are sometimes quick to react. I’d say that’s a good way of describing my early racing style. Maybe I didn’t think things out all the time.”

Despite his perception as a wild driver, Christopher says he has never strayed from a calculated plan for winning. "Get to the front and stay there" he says. Even though it might not have looked like it to fans, he has always had a code of ethics when it came to racing. "I never flat drove over people" he says. "I may have raced hard with people and they ended up in the wall, but I never drove them there. Sometimes I was the one that ended up in the wall. It was just hard racing. If I raced from 15th to 5th and now I'm stuck behind you because you can't stay in a lane and let the faster car pass you, we're probably going to tangle. I have the three-tap rule. Tap one lets you know I'm there, tap two tells you to pick a lane and tap three means I'm moving you to a lane. Sometimes the 'moving you to a lane' part didn't work out so well."

"Could I have been more patient sometimes?" Christopher asks. "Yeah, probably. But maybe I wouldn't have had as many wins. It's all about the situation you put yourself in. I can get fired up and make wrong moves and that's probably one of my bad sides. But sometimes getting fired up helped me pass more cars and get more wins. I have always been aggressive. That's the way that I drive. Sometimes I went too hard when I should have backed off. When I get mad I drive differently, but you try to learn from your mistakes and I have."

While TC says he wouldn't change much about his career so far, he does regret the way he has sometimes been perceived by fans. "The feeling a lot of people have about me came from my early days in racing when I didn't have the best equipment, did most everything myself and really didn't have anyone to tell me right from wrong" he says. "You get that moniker on yourself and it's hard to get rid of." These days, though, TC has noticed that the boos for him are not so loud. "I don't have to worry about being the baddest guy on the track if Jimmy Blewett's in the race!" he says.

While the championship is a huge accomplishment for TC, it is two other 2008 awards that floored him; the Most Popular Driver titles both on the Whelen Modified Tour and at Stafford Motor Speedway. "Can you believe it?" he asks. "I told them they better do a recount because the results didn't seem like they could be right! Those awards are something I didn't expect. I guess the tide is turning. It only took 20 years for the fans to like me!"

Like the fans, who were not always appreciative of his on-track behavior, there was another group who became Ted Christopher fans in 2008. "I feel appreciative that the drivers who I rubbed wheels with came up to me and said that we deserved the championship" TC says. "That was something."

Over the years TC has driven the modifieds of a "Who's Who" of different car owners. "Throughout my racing career I have been very fortunate to have driven many different types of race cars for many different car owners," Christopher said. "People like Joe Brady, who I won my first Modified tour race with, to Curt Chase, Gary Cretty, Jim Galante, Eddie Whelan and many in between. One common denominator is I always loved driving their modifieds."

For those who worry that getting older will alter TC's racing schedule, he is quick to dispel the fears. "I plan on doing the same thing this year" he says. I will probably race 65-70 races. I've got a TQ midget, the SK modified, I'll be racing every week at Stafford and Thompson, the Modified Tour car, maybe some True Value Modified Racing Series races, some Waterford races, maybe if they have the mod series again at All-Star I'll do that, some Whelen Southern Modified Racing Series races and maybe some late model and pro stock races. If something else comes up, I'll do that too. "

When asked what's next on his "to do" list of accomplishments, he lists several items. "Of course another championship would be great" he says. "I'd like to be up with Mike Stefanik and Richie Evans on the all-time win list, I'd like to win the modified race at Bristol and I still want to win every race that I enter."

It is hard for both race fans and Ted himself to imagine a race season without Ted Christopher racing all over New England and beyond. "I'm 50 years old" Ted says. "I have some aches and pains, yeah, but there are other racers who are in way worse shape than I am and are way younger. I'll race as long as I possibly can. If I can't travel all over to race, I'll always want to race at least at Stafford."

To talk to TC these days is to listen to someone who sees himself at the top of his game. With a long list of accomplishments behind him, he also sees a long list of accomplishments in front of him. He has a new role in our sport as both winning racer and also as a voice of wisdom. Being the guy that other racers come to is a new position for TC. Once the guy that approached other racers for advice, he now sees other racers coming to him for advice. "People like Matt Hirschman and Keith Rocco ask me a lot of questions and are eager to learn" he says. "It's nice for me to be able to help people out."

For a man used to always going fast, life is going great in the slower lane.