

This year, 2006, will be our 21st year in operation. During this time I have seen thousands of different drivers. They have come from a wide range of backgrounds and they have had various reasons for being at the school. Some attended just for the sheer excitement of blasting down the quarter mile but most of our graduates have gone on to race, many of whom have made it a career.

Each year we see a number of new hopefuls. Young drivers full of enthusiasm and vigor with dreams of one day driving for a team like Force, Prudhomme, Schumacher, Kalitta or others. It is a great dream and a worthwhile goal however I often find myself in discussions with these “rising stars” trying to answer their questions about “How do I make it in this sport?”

I tend to be honest to a fault and tell them that it is difficult to make it. It takes a tremendous amount of talent, skill, determination, networking and an endless promotion of yourself. None of this however is necessary if you happen to have an extra \$20 million dollars laying around to run your own team... but for the rest of us on the planet... well we’ re just going to have to work a bit harder.

I usually end up by telling them that if they pursue it with enough passion and don't quit and have a little luck they just might make it. After all just a couple of years ago Hillary Will sat in my classroom learning the skills of driving an Alcohol Dragster and just a little over a year ago Steve Torrence got his TAD license at our school and his rookie season turned out not too bad. Ya think?

But one name always comes to my mind when I think about drivers that made it. And made it the hard way.

It was in the 1980s and a young man came to our school to be a Funny Car driver. Everyone of course has high hopes when they show up however once they actually get in the Funny Car the world seems a lot different. But not to this driver. He looked at home and he loved it. In fact both my wife and I liked this young man enough that we offered that he stay with us at our home. This seemed to work okay for me until one night I discovered he'd eaten all of my ice cream. Some things you just shouldn't do.

A few weeks later he called me and said he'd quit his job and was going to be a Funny Car driver. Up until that time I thought this young man was pretty smart... now I was not so sure.

He said he wanted to hang out at the school and maybe he would meet someone that owned a car and didn't want to or couldn't drive it. And when such a person showed up he would see what he could do to talk himself into the drivers seat.

So it went on until one day we had a student that came through our class and, to say the least, had a difficult time driving our Funny Car. The problem was this driver had his own Funny Car and couldn't really drive it either. Our friend, the wanna be Funny Car driver promptly took this guy to lunch and, well you guessed it; he talked himself into a ride.

He drove this car for a season on some very poor southern race tracks and did as good as he could with the equipment he was provided. Then a number of months later the very similar situation happened, except this time the student driver owned a better car. Yep. My friend took him to lunch too!

Begin ride number two.

He kept this up and in a few years had gotten a deal put together in a Nitro Funny Car. Through some strange twist of fate my friend ended up owning this Nitro Funny Car and through a lot of hard work and salesmanship he had acquired sponsorship for it.

Now he didn't win any races but he did make "Decade of Thrills" I think more than once with some spectacular fires and crashes. But he never gave up. Following years of effort, total determination, a lot of skill, help from his friends and some luck he finally made it.

I'm still surprised that Whit Bazemore ate all my ice cream that night at my house over 20 years ago. With all that's happened in his life I don't know if he even remembers it.

But here is something I'd like all the new young drivers to think about. Stories like Whit's are far more common than overnight successes. And I imagine that almost any new driver would agree to go through the physical, financial and emotional hardships Whit went through to get to drive for a world class funny car team. But how many of you would be willing to go through years of that with no guarantee whatsoever that there would be success at the end. We see determination and character in

someone who's willing to start the journey without being sure of where they'll end up.

If you'd like to start with us, we'd love to help...please give us a call.