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Shawn Pilla Seeking First Feature Win...By Dave Dragovich

Fans who attend the races at Motordrome Speedway every Friday evening have seen Shawn Pilla develop into a bonafide Super Late Model contender this season. Although the Connellsville native hasn't yet won a feature event, he's gotten within striking distance several times, and is having a banner year. He currently ranks fourth in the Super Late Model standings, his best showing since he started racing five years ago. His Labor Day weekend started off well as he garnered his fifth top five and twelfth top ten finish of the year. Pilla's strong finishes in 2007 have sent a clear signal to fans and competitors alike that he's ready to take the next step and celebrate a feature win in victory lane.

Pilla would rank even higher in the point standings if a couple of crashes hadn't slowed his progress. "We've had two crashes that set us back," he said. "That hurt us in the points because it took at least two weeks to get the car dialed back in."

Two-time Jennerstown Speedway Late Model champion Neil Brown, of Acme, is racing Pilla's backup car on a part-time basis, and has won three features at Motordrome this season. Shawn said, "We wanted to bring another car to the track in case something happened to the one I was driving. That way we could stay in the point race. We wanted Neil to drive it. We've been friends for a long time. He's a real good driver."

Unlike many race car drivers who start their careers in novice classes such as go-karts, American Flyers, Chargers, or Street Stocks, Pilla had no racing experience whatsoever when he first arrived at Motordrome Speedway. "I jumped right into a Late Model," he said. He and his father, Frank Pilla, purchased the race car from lumberman and farmer Chuck Keslar, from the

village of White, in Fayette County. Keslar was a veteran race car driver who had lots of success in the Port City chassis.

“When we bought the car, we didn’t know who was going to be the driver,” said Shawn. “After a while, I decided that I would try driving it. It was a little tough at the beginning. It took a little while to get used to the race car, the handling, and the technique of how to set the car up.”

Pilla caught on quickly at Motordrome, and never embarrassed himself. He raced at his own pace, and his annual improvement became very evident. He was soon finishing in or near the top ten on a regular basis.

Shawn has won six heat races at Motordrome in 2007, and has achieved some second place finishes. However, that first career feature win continues to elude him. “Motordrome is a good local track,” he stated. “But it’s very hard to master. I’ve seen a lot of race tracks, and this is one of the hardest to drive. Turns one and two are totally different from turn three and four. It’s really hard to get your car set up to run well. Turn one is a big sweep, and turn three is short, tight, and narrow.”

“Competition is tough,” he said. “Week in and week out this particular year, my toughest competitors are Bobby Henry, Tommy Beck, and Garry Wilttrout. They’re very good drivers.”

Chassis setup and know-how is critical on the asphalt. A good pit crew is essential. The people who monitor the setups and perform work on Shawn’s No. 5 are Paul Koffler, Rich Pavolick, Frank Pilla, Ron Harper, and Bob Hatfield. The team’s sponsors include Gnagey Gas & Oil, JG Food Marts, Carry All Products, Brooks Automotive, Three Rivers Scrap, Hunter Truck Sales, and Doane Pet Food.

To what does Shawn Pilla attribute his vast improvement this season? “I’d say just a lot of help from a lot of friends with the setups that brought us a long way,” he commented. “A good car makes you look good.”

Pilla is the President of Carry-All Products, Inc., a Connellsville-Mt. Pleasant based firm that deals in trucking, pallet manufacturing, and glass recycling. His position with the company requires long working hours. Shawn and his wife Vickie have been married for fifteen years. The couple has three children, Andrea, Lauren, and Anna. Shawn really enjoys spending time with his family. He says, "During the winters and off-season, especially the weekends, I like to spend time with my wife and girls. We try to do a lot of things together. On Friday nights, we always like to go out and get pizza, and spend Saturdays and Sundays doing things together as a family. Someday, we'd like to go over to Europe and see other countries." Shawn also enjoys listening to country music, and cheers for Dale Earnhardt, Jr. in NASCAR Nextel Cup races. He liked to golf a couple of times a week before he got involved in racing.

He also sponsors American Flyer defending champion Dan Jordan, a homebuilder from Connellsville. "He's helped me a lot," stated Jordan. "If it weren't for Shawn Pilla and Carry All Products, I wouldn't be racing."

Shawn acknowledges that he's had a pretty good racing season. He said, "I've had many second place finishes and won a lot of heat races. My main goal I wanted to accomplish this year was to win a feature. But I haven't been able to get that one feature win. It's very difficult. I'm still trying."

How long Pilla will remain in the sport of stock car racing is uncertain. "I'm thinking every day of retiring from racing within the next year or so," he confided. "At my age, 41, with my girls, my wife, not being involved in the racing, it's pretty hard. It's tough taking the whole summer, every Friday night, to come down to race without the family."

Shawn Pilla has been knocking on victory lane's door all season long. Hopefully, that door will open wide very soon.