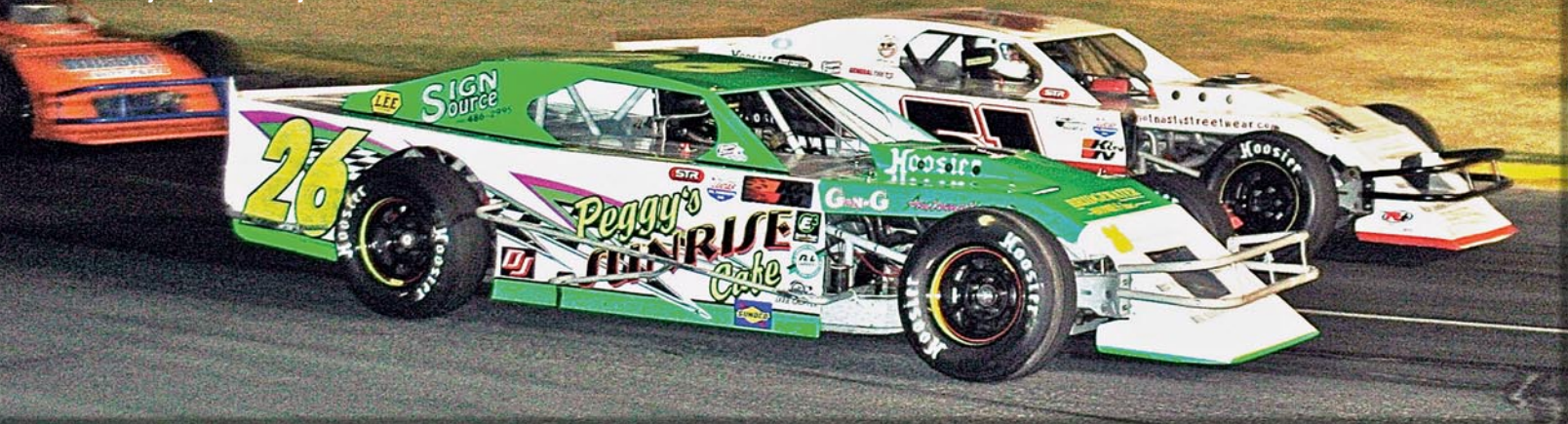


# Arizona's Future NASCAR Stars

Story and photos by HR Driver



The colorful green and yellow No. 26 driven by Chris Gershman of Lake Havasu City AZ (above and below, staging behind No. 22 Phipps from California and No. 11 Cole from Texas) is sponsored by the Gershman family's restaurant, Peggy's Sunrise Cafe in Lake Havasu City. Chris finished third at the Blythe race and third overall in the Lucas SuperClean Modified Series. Chris' father and uncle, David and Larry, also race Modifieds. The Las Vegas-based car at bottom shows how low the Modified race cars are compared to NASCAR Sprint Cup cars and how the chassis is offset or weight-biased to the left for optimal handling on the tight bull-ring ovals of the Series.



Andrew Phipps of Simi Valley CA ( blue and white No. 22 above and in the pack, center left) was the top finisher at the Lucas SuperClean Modified Stock Car Race in Blythe and finished first in the Series.

**I**f you believe that stock car racing is still dominated by good ol' boys from the South, you just might be a red-neck. Or maybe you are just living in the past. In fact, many of today's hottest stock car drivers come from the West.

Want some examples? Jimmy Johnson, winner of the last three consecutive NASCAR Sprint Cup Championships, and Jeff Gordon are both from California. J.J.Yelley is from Phoenix. Kyle and Kurt Busch are from Las Vegas. Kasey Kayne and Greg Biffle are from Washington. As of this writing, five of these drivers are in the Top 12 and in "The Chase" for the 2009 NASCAR Sprint Cup Championship.

Some of the newest spawning grounds for stock car racers are right here in the Southwest. Arizona's future professional NASCAR stars are racing on paved oval tracks at Tucson, Lake Havasu City, Blythe, Las Vegas and San Bernardino.

Perhaps we should explain that the Lucas SuperClean Modified Series is not so named because the cars race on asphalt rather than dirt. Lucas Oil's car care line is trademarked "SuperClean": hence the Series' tag. Whatever the case, if you want to see serious racing at bargain prices (\$10- \$29 a ticket) and watch from dirt-free bleachers, this is place to be.

## Modified stock cars

Modified stock cars are lighter and quicker on short tracks than the NASCAR Sprint Cup cars you see on television. The Modifieds are what the Sprint Cup guys cut their teeth on and what they would prefer to race on a tight oval track if they had a choice. However, Sprint Cup drivers must race full-fendered race cars which resemble street machines.

The Lucas SuperClean Modified cars are much lighter than the Sprint Cup cars. Nine hundred pounds lighter, to be exact. Their 410 cubic inch V8 engines are also larger. As for horsepower, how does 500 to 700 horses sound? Well, it sounds pretty wicked when you have two dozen of these screaming machines racing on a quarter mile circle track.

On longer tracks like Las Vegas, 700 horsepower V8 engines are used to take advantage of the long straightaways. However, detuned 500 horsepower engines are used for short tracks like Lake Havasu City. Why? The excess power will simply spin the Hoosier tires and slow the cars down on the short tracks. Modifieds are all about nimbleness and putting the power to the pavement.

## Meet the teams

Do not expect to see Jack Roush or Roger Penske's teams at these races. The teams which run the Lucas SuperClean Modified

Series race for fun, not for big bucks. Rather than having Home Depot or DuPont livery on their race cars, these teams advertise regional sponsors like Wicked HP Engines, Sunrise Diner or Stoney's Rockin' Country night club.

Race series organizers Bill Rozhon, Greg Scheidecker and Lucas Oil recognize that most of the teams run on tight budgets; hence they spread their purses down the field and provide tow money for the teams. In this way, the organizers are assured that the teams will return to run the entire series.

Likewise, do not expect to see any famous Sprint Cup drivers at these races. Sprint Cup drivers earn millions per year racing NASCAR. Why would they risk their bodies or their egos racing against regional drivers who might beat them? While many top NASCAR drivers once raced Modifieds on circle tracks, they have moved on.

So, are there any talented Arizona or Southwest drivers like Kurt Busch, J.J. Yelley or Jimmy Johnson in the Lucas SuperClean Modified Series? Will any of these drivers become the next superstars of NASCAR?

Absolutely, there are some very talented stock car drivers in the Lucas SuperClean Series. However, whether they have the right combination of tenacity, track support, finances, competitive machinery and luck to succeed is another story.

Unfortunately, racing is as much a business as it is a sport. It takes money to race, whether it comes from the team or their sponsors. An excellent driver can occasionally pilot an average race car to

a win. A superb race car can carry an average driver to a first place. However, it takes a very good race car, a superb team and a talented race driver to win an entire racing series.

## Drivers to watch

Entering the final race of the season, let's first look at the drivers who were in contention to win the Lucas SuperClean Modified Series. Points leader Andrew Phipps of Simi Valley CA, Texan James Cole and Arizonan Chris Gershman all had a mathematical chance of winning the series going into the season finale at the California-Arizona border town of Blythe.

As for the drivers who were not in contention but finished strong toward the end of season, they merit watching in 2010. Jim Mardis, Tim Morse and Doug Hamm all posted strong finishes after having lulls during the season. Fourteen-year-old Austin Barnes is another late-season charger. No, this is not a misprint, Austin is just 14 years old.

The series newcomer to watch in 2010 is Spencer Sharp who hails from Ahwatukee AZ. He took over a ride in the sixth race of the series and finished strong in the first of his two outings. This former Arizona SCCA Rookie of the Year and Saguardo Oval Track Series Champion could be a serious contender in 2010.

Two other talented Arizona drivers with potential to win next year's Lucas SuperClean Series include Bill Johanneck of

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We'll be keeping an eye on 14-year-old Austin Barnes (top). Early in the Blythe finale, Series runnerup James Cole is shown leading in orange No. 11 (center). Cole traveled from Texas to run in the Lucas SuperClean races. Blythe race winner and Lucas SuperClean Series Champion Andrew Phipps basks in the winner's circle with his father Dave and series promotor Greg Scheidecker. Phipps lost last year's championship when a ten dollar part failed in the final race of the season.

would belong to either Phipps or Cole as they swapped positions repeatedly during the 75 lap race. However, due to a number of yellow flags, Chris Gershman worked his way through the pack to challenge the leaders.

During the latter stages of the race, it was Andrew Phipps who finally took command. After each yellow flag restart, Phipps stretched his lead over Cole and Gershman. With his race car set up with a slight oversteer, he was able to hang the tail out and rotate his machine more quickly in the turns. This allowed Phipps to accelerate sooner out of the corners and run faster down the straightaways.

Late in the race, Gershman had worked himself up to a position where he could have been able to overtake Cole for second place in championship points. However, Austin Barnes' machine struck Gershman in the left rear, and that ended Gershman's hopes. Ultimately, the top three drivers would finish the series in the same positions they entered the Blythe finale: Phipps in first, Cole in second and Gershman in third.

A racing series for the whole family, the Lucas SuperClean Modified Series allows you on the track before the race to meet the drivers, get their autographs and see the Modified race cars up close. If you want to find out more about the Lucas SuperClean Series or Arizona's future stock car racing stars, contact Bill Rozhon at [rozhon55@aol.com](mailto:rozhon55@aol.com) or Greg Scheidecker at [i10speedway.com](http://i10speedway.com). It is a great way to spend a Saturday night and to see Arizona's future stock car racing stars. ■

At 14, **HR Driver** mastered his skills on unpaved back roads at night, then took up go kart racing, driving 40 miles to the nearest track. At 18, he organized drag racing, progressing to off-road racing and then road racing. In 25 years, HR has run everything from showroom stock to 200+ MPH GT cars. HR Driver lives in Arizona, where he notes, "for car guys, Arizona is heaven. You have the Scottsdale classic car auctions, NASCAR races, IRL races, bunches of race tracks, and you can drive your open roadster 300 days a year."

Phoenix and David Gershman Jr. of Lake Havasu City. Both are also skilled, experienced competitors. Randy Forbis of Parker and Randy Ussery of Salome are two more Arizona hot shoes who are steadily getting faster with each race.

**Finale: crowning the 2009 champ**

There is something electric about the final race of the season, especially when it will decide the series champion. Practice and qualifying sessions are critical, since track position is essential for winning the race. Adrenaline and testos-

terone are running high.

During practice, each driver relates the details of his car's handling to the crew chief. Alignment, spring rates and shock absorber adjustments must be perfect if a driver is going to be able to pass competitors on a tight track like Blythe.

However, the hardest part for the drivers is waiting and wondering how the race will play out. With the top three drivers within twelve points of each other, the Blythe race will ultimately decide the champion. Will it be Phipps, Cole or Gershman?

From the start, it looked as if the race

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