

**F**ireball! Fireball!", a young toddler exclaimed as the partially hidden nose of the Ohio Valley's most colorful race car driver emerged from behind the pit catch fence. Everyone knows Dave "Fireball" Pinkerton. He plays the Fireball persona to the hilt and serves as a role model for race fans, both young and old alike.

Dave Pinkerton is flashy and flamboyant, yet down to earth. The driver of the well-manicured #8 Ellis Chassis modified is also a working man and is well liked in all aspects of his life. His hard-nosed driving style however, may be what makes him a fan favorite.

In 1991, Dave Pinkerton had never even seen a dirt race track. At that time he was racing four-wheelers and in his own words, "I didn't even know what a late model or a sprint or a modified was." But that was soon to change.

Late in 1991 he moved to Blain Highway, less than a mile down the road from the famed K-C Raceway, a longtime hotbed of stock car and open wheel racing since its construction in 1953.

"I asked a friend what was going on up the road Saturday nights, and he invited me to the races. I had never been to a race, so I thought I'd check it out. After that first night I thought, 'I can see me doing this. I bought my first car, and went racing."

Pinkerton's first car was a bare bones, stock motored, green Pontiac Trans-Am. In 1997 he bought a better car and raced for three years in the street stock division. And that's where the Fireball mystic became a household name.

Then K-C Speedway announcer, Roy Salt dubbed Pinkerton as "Fireball" because of his bright pink #28 paint scheme. A blown engine and a burst of flames later solidified the nickname. "He (Roy) just started calling me that and it stuck. I like it, the kids like it, and it made racing fun for me."

And everyone does indeed know "Fireball". "One night I was a little embarrassed. I was parked behind Steve Kinser and they let kids in the pits for autographs. A rush of kids came our way, and most of them came to me...walked right by Steve...and got my autograph yelling Fireball! It was neat in a way, but Steve sorta had this puzzled look on his face" Dave said with a chuckle.

Racing in the street stock division with limited success on a shoe-string budget, Pinkerton was at a crossroads in his racing career in 1999. He wasn't a big time winner, but he had the reputation for driving hard, and he always put on a show. But making a living trumped his racing goals and he put the pink #28 up for sale.

"Eight years ago, I lived in a 12 x 54 mobile home on Blain Highway and had absolutely no money in my pocket or in the bank. I sold the stock car, lock-stock, and barrel for \$5,000 and went out and bought an old van for \$3,000. I slapped some stickers on it and started my own business, working out of the van and my

# THE LIFE & TIMES OF DAVE "FIREBALL" PINKERTON

## BY SCOTT WOLFE



Fireball can be seen in race action throughout the central Ohio region, racing two and three wide. He is pictured above along side his Ellis Chassis machine as he prepares for race action like that pictured to the left and below.



Photos by Richard Smith

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A pensive Fireball Pinkerton awaits upcoming race action like the kind pictured to the left and below.

trailer. The next year I moved the business to Main Street in Chillicothe, Ohio and later expanded and purchased some commercial property right next to us. Now we have 8,000 square feet of work and office space."

"It's hard to imagine really. I may be the only guy in racing that sold his race car and started a business. I am living a dream."

Last year, Pinkerton's company did over 3.5 million dollars in business. Advance Services in Chillicothe, Ohio is not only known in Ross County, but is a respected name in the commercial heating and cooling business throughout South-Central Ohio. Pinkerton now has 38 regular employees.

After a few years of intense 60-100 hour work weeks, it was time to go racing again. In 2002, Pinkerton purchased a new Ellis Chassis made in Indianapolis, IN. He still races that chassis by choice, having two available cars and a trio of FAST Racing Engines (383, 427, and 406), built in Groveport, Ohio.

Fireball still isn't a big winner on the track, but he is a winner in life and a winner in the eyes of racing

fans. His personality is enthusiastic, and he is fun to be around. He likes people and enjoys kids. He is a sponsors' dream driver, and he plays the part well. He takes his car to his sponsors' businesses, signs autographs, and participates in car shows and church functions. He notes, "A lot of the church people come down and watch!"

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**— Fireball Pinkerton**

"Also, every Sunday I have to give a report in Sunday School. And there is a story behind this," chuckled Fireball. "When I first met my wife I thought she was just "it." I was pretty much into racing, and thought (laughing) that if she was the "one," she better like racing. So, I figured I better give her a trial run. At the time I didn't go to church. Our

first date was at K-C Raceway on a Sunday night. Part of the deal was (since I made her miss Sunday night church) that if she went to the races, then I would go to church the next week. That was the Labor Day weekend and two weeks later on September 17, I was "saved" in Christ."

"She liked the races and I became a Christian. The next year we were married and from day one she has been my biggest supporter."

Coincidence, fate or the guidance of a higher power; whatever the reason. Things just seemed to fall into place in all aspects of his life. And the wins in his modified are most certainly going to come.

None-the-less, Fireball enjoys where he is in his racing career. He is competitive and having fun. There is never a dull moment when Fireball straps into his race car.

Fireball's crew has made a huge difference in his success over the course of the 2007 racing season. Bootie Grow, Chuck Kellough, and Jake Kellough who helped 2007 K-C champ Aaron Higgins are now aboard with the #8 Fireball team.

Said Fireball, "All I have to do is show up and race. In the past

I had to help work on the car at the track and in the shop and it was a struggle. With the crew I have now, I can spend time with my family and just show up on race day. I think this has made me a better driver. I am sharper mentally."

Fireball jokes, "A good night is a night of good, clean racing and I am able to still drive it up on the trailer. The competition is a rush, and the fans and the relationships you build are something you will always have."

Over the past seven years, Fireball has finished in the top five in points at the competitive K-C Raceway where he can be found almost every Saturday night. The team races locally and on occasion at Rocky Top Speedway in Coal Grove, Ohio and at Brushcreek Motorsports Park in Peebles, however, sometimes Friday racing is hard to make because of the business.

He particularly is honored to have finished second to 10-time K-C champion Bob Crace, Jr. "Bob has been a guy with a great reputation that I really look up to. He has helped me a lot, and with us both running Ellis Chassis, he has been a valuable resource. Finishing second

to Bob is like winning anywhere else. His record speaks for itself."

Fireball considers any good, close race as memorable and considers one of his greatest moments in racing, his first feature win as also bittersweet. "I had passed Aaron Higgins with about three laps to go at Brushcreek, but the track was dusty and the scorers must have had a hard time seeing. I took the checkered flag and was on my cool down lap, but a car that had pulled out of the race was coming out of the infield and hit me. We locked wheels and I couldn't get loose. In the meantime, they called for Aaron (Higgins) to come back on the track to victory lane. There was so much confusion, they didn't know that I had won. The Higgins' were good about it though and offered me the winning money, but I still didn't get my picture taken."

Like always, Fireball took it all in good stride. "Because of me being active at church, I try to set a good example. I try to be a good witness and always offer a few plugs to fellow drivers--"see ya at Sunday school in the morning."

"We also help with Racers for

Christ though K-C announcer Bruce Hines. (Bruce is also an ordained minister) I am always conscious of my emotions and careful not to use bad language."

Fireball speaks highly of his sponsors: Neil Coleman Insurance, Advanced Services, Waverly Plaza and Lube, The Carrier Corporation, The Trane Company, and Columbus Temperature and Control, DKM Construction, Ingle-Barr, AMA Sign Co., KSK Logging, Bob Grooms, and Chrissinger Co.

Fireball is in awe of the technological advances that have been made in racing since he first began. He feels the need to catch up with chassis set-ups and the education of the sport. He says one of his greatest investments was attending the Race-wise Chassis seminar and proclaims, "It has helped me tremendously."

Fireball's future goals are to win a K-C championship and more features, and the thought of driving a late model has crossed his mind. But for now he is content in just being Fireball.

And when kids in the stands shout Fireball! Fireball! Dave Pinkerton is the happiest guy on earth. **DM**

Photos by Richard Smith

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