

# Kenny Brightbill Ride-Hunting; Race For Free At New Egypt Speedway!



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**Dirt Mod Report**

Kenny Brightbill isn't ready to call it a career.

The legendary Sinking Spring, Pa., driver, who spent the past two seasons as a regular at Delaware International Speedway in the big-block Modified division, confirmed to Area Auto Racing News on Monday that he is pursuing opportunities for the 2012 season. The 63-year-old said he is open to a number of opportunities with one stipulation: "I want to be competitive."

Brightbill's two-year run driving for local car owners Keith and Denise Coulbourne in the Coulbourne Farms No. 55 Modified at Delaware ended abruptly prior to the October Delaware State Dirt Track Championships at the half-mile First State oval.

The combination had enjoyed a successful 2010 season at Delaware International, securing the track championship (Brightbill's first ever at the Route 13 facility) off the strength of five feature victories.

The team couldn't duplicate the title-winning effort in '11. Marred by DNFs (many drive-shaft related), Brightbill won just a single feature - a 'twin 20' event on June 4 - and slipped to sixth in the standings. The Coulbournes opted to sell off equipment prior to the championship weekend to conclude the year. The news came late to Brightbill, who attended the event as a spectator.

Brightbill approaches the off-season as a "free agent" in Modified racing.

"I don't want to stop (racing)," Brightbill bottom-lined. "I still feel I can go as good as anybody with the right equipment."

Brightbill's resurgence at Delaware in '10 proved he is plenty capable behind the wheel.

"I had a good year down there (in '10) and took home some money," Brightbill said of his championship year. "This year, it all caught up with us. I've been in this business long enough to understand the ups and downs. Sometimes you get lucky, sometimes you don't."

"They (the Coulbournes) had some other interests this year."

Brightbill has spent the better part of 40 years as a leading driver. He has totaled more than 430 feature wins, including the Super DIRT Week 200 at Syracuse, the famed Daniel Boone 200 at the Reading (Pa.) Fairgrounds and 200-lap events at Flemington (N.J.), Fonda (N.Y.) and Orange County (N.Y.).

On the tough Pennsylvania small-block Modified circuit, he tallied victories in the Freedom 76 at Grandview (Pa.), Coalcracker 100 at Big Diamond (Pa.) and the Lebanon Valley 100 at Penn National (Pa.).

Few have matched - or will ever duplicate - Brightbill's credentials.

It is understandable he doesn't want to finish out his career as a back-marker.

"If I can run for someone, I'd do it every weekend," Brightbill said. "I need someone with some bucks that wants to go racing. I'm not going to ride around in the back for \$300. That's they way it goes. I'm not going to try and do it on a shoestring. With a good deal, I'd run two nights a week."

Brightbill has virtually race-ready equipment in his Berks County race shop. However, he isn't ready to invest money he's saved for decades to race at this point in his life.

"I guess I think about this (racing) a little different, but I've made money all my life," Brightbill said. "It's too much work to be fun. I've got my own stuff, but I'd need some sponsorship money to do it. I'm not going to lose money doing this."

Brightbill paused, and added: "I'm not that foolish."

Brightbill said pit crew help is increasingly difficult to obtain, due in part to the pit fees charged by speedways hosting dirt Modifieds.

"For me to get guys together anymore is a problem," Brightbill said. "No one wants to help anymore. Some of these tracks are a rip-off at the back gate. What gets me is you can go to Lincoln (Pa.) Speedway and for \$20, anyone can go into the pits. They are packed."

"I can deal with \$25 for a member and \$30 for a non-member. This \$30 deal for a member and \$35 for a non-member - that extra \$5 - is way out of hand. They (the tracks) don't know how bad they are hurting the racer."

As the winter progresses, Brightbill hopes to firm up plans for '12.



**KENNY BRIGHTBILL is not ready to hang up his suit just yet. He is currently looking for a ride for the 2012 season. Brightbill picked up a Big-Block Modified win this year at Delaware Int'l Speedway. (Photo by Big Mo)**

He admits to being intrigued by the \$50,000-to-win Freedom 76 at Grandview to celebrate the track's 50th anniversary in September 2012 and would consider select starts at the Hill to ready for that event during the season.

"No matter what, I'll be doing something next year."

However, he is hoping to be in a Modified more regularly.

"As long as it's a competitive car," Brightbill said, "I'm interested."

He may celebrate his 64th birthday in a month but he is far from retired.

"I'll be 64 in January but I've tried to stay in shape - you've got to, or it catches up with you," Brightbill said. "I definitely enjoy racing now as much as I ever did. I'm hoping we can get something together."

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**RACE FOR FREE AT NEW EGYPT?:** It's been the complaint of short-track pit areas across the country for years. Why are the racers paying to put on a show?

Next season, they won't have to - if they make New Egypt (N.J.) Speedway their Saturday night destination in 2012.

Late last week, New Egypt co-owner Fred Vahlsing and general manager Danny Serrano confirmed that drivers in all divisions would be admitted to the pit area free to compete at the Garden State half-mile oval in '12. A bold move? Yes, but an action New Egypt management feels benefits those competing at the track: from the headline big-block Modifieds to the full-fender divisions and all classes in between.

"Basically, Fred (Vahlsing) and I have been talking a lot during the last month about how we can make things at New Egypt more affordable," general manager Serrano said.

"We opted to work in the spec head (358) engines into our Modified class (an announcement Area Auto Racing News covered extensively) and people have had different reactions. Our goal right now is to build toward the future of racing at New Egypt. I've said it before. You don't know what the future is at a lot of tracks right now. At New Egypt, we are thinking five years down the road."

Word reached competitors last week regarding the free admission for '12.

"There is no hidden agenda here," Serrano said, referencing criticism and comments the decision received on message boards. "It is something we want to try for 2012. We feel every little bit helps. We want to make New Egypt a little cheaper on the racers."

"This is for everyone - not just the high-profile Modified drivers. Even if you race at our track five or six times during the year, it will benefit you."

Serrano stressed the program will benefit drivers in all divisions,

including big-block Modifieds, Sportsman, Crate-1 Sportsman, Outlaw Stocks, FASTRAK Late Models, TSRS Sprints (who will compete at NES on 13 occasions next season) or Enduros.

Per Serrano, the free pass option is available for all drivers with one criteria: a \$100 pit license must be purchased for insurance purposes. The free pit pass will go in effect as soon as the pit pass is purchased. The pass will only be valid on evenings when the specified driver is entered to compete. If that particular driver's division is not on the program, the pass is not valid (i.e. off nights for bi-weekly divisions).

"I've talked to certain drivers about it," Serrano said. "And they appreciate it."

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**FRIESEN TO THE TOP:** Last weekend during the annual Turkey Derby Classic at N.J.'s Wall Stadium, Stewart Friesen swept the dirt Modified twin-bill on Friday and Saturday evenings. The Niagara-on-the-Lake, Ont., native guided the Blewett family's No. 1 to Victory Lane at the high-banked, paved oval promoted by Cliff and Diane Krause.

The victories at Wall brought added significance for Friesen.

Taking the checkered first for the 21st and 22nd times this season, the 28-year-old's November journey pressed him ahead of fellow 20-something superstar Matt Sheppard on the Northeast win list for dirt Modifieds maintained in the Trenton, N.J., AARN office. Sheppard, done for the season following the postponed Hagerstown (Md.) Speedway 'Octoberfest 350' had tallied a total of 21 victories during the '11 campaign.

Now, Friesen leads the final dirt Modified category with 22 triumphs. He will be recognized for his accomplishment during Motorsports 2012 presented by Small Engine Fuel Jan. 20-22 at the Greater Philadelphia Expo Center in Oaks, Pa.

The full-time racer said his '11 season on paper was just as strong - or surpassed - his super '10.

"We had a lot more top-fives this year," said Friesen, who maintains detailed records of his performance. "I've got calendars back to 2007. It's neat to look back and see how we've done over the years."

Friesen, who drove for the Blewetts at New Egypt's 'Friends of Mike' event in July prior to the Turkey Derby, said the door is open for him to enter select events for the Howell, N.J., operation again in '12 should their schedules allow.

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**ODDS and ENDS:** Sammy Piazza, the teenage Modified racer from Lawrenceville, N.J., who raced at Big Diamond (Pa.) Speedway as a small-block rookie in 2011, is on the ballot for the John Blewett III Young Guns Award to be handed out Jan. 7 during the Eastern Motorsport Press Association Convention at the Crowne Plaza in King of Prussia, Pa.

Piazza was named Rookie of the Year in the 358-Modified ranks at Big Diamond at the speedway's November Awards Banquet. He also recorded the Coalcracker 50 Sportsman victory at the Coal Region track in September after finishing second one year earlier.

Now 17 years old, Piazza joins the New Egypt big-block Modified ranks in 2012, while competing at Big Diamond on Fridays.

Other young drivers on the EMPA John Blewett III Young Gun ballot, representing various forms of racing, are Justin Bonsignore (NASCAR Whelen Modified Tour), Steve Dreveck (ARDC Midget), Logan Schuchart (410 and 358 Sprint Cars) and Dylan Yoder (Late Models). The winner will be recognized at the convention....

The date for the \$10,000-to-win 'Clash at the Can' at Penn Can (Pa.) Speedway is tentatively set for Tuesday, June 12. The 60-lap event for big-block/small-block Modifieds will carry a Race of Champions Dirt Modified Tour sanction as a combination event (RoC is expected to divide into North and South regions for '12). The third edition of the 'Clash at the Can' will offer \$300 to take the green for a 60-lap event.

Past 'Clash at the Can' event winners include Duane Howard ('10) and Billy Decker ('11)....

Look for Delaware International Speedway Modified first-time champion Matt Jester to debut a new Clearview Farms No. 62 Bicknell in January at Motorsports 2012 presented by Small Engine Fuel at the Greater Philadelphia Expo Center in Oaks, Pa., Jan. 20-22. The 26-year-old was an eight-time feature winner en route to his breakthrough Modified crown at Charlie Cathell's southern Delaware track in '11. Jester will be recognized for his title Jan. 7, 2012 at the Delaware International Awards Banquet to be held at Dover Downs Hotel & Casino in Dover, Del....

Eastern Rigging of Rigging, Pa., will back the efforts of Sportsman racer Jared Umbenhauer of Richland, Pa., in '12. Umbenhauer, who may enter 358-Modified events in '12, fell just shy of the Big Diamond Sportsman title after he was collected in a Championship Night feature crash....

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