

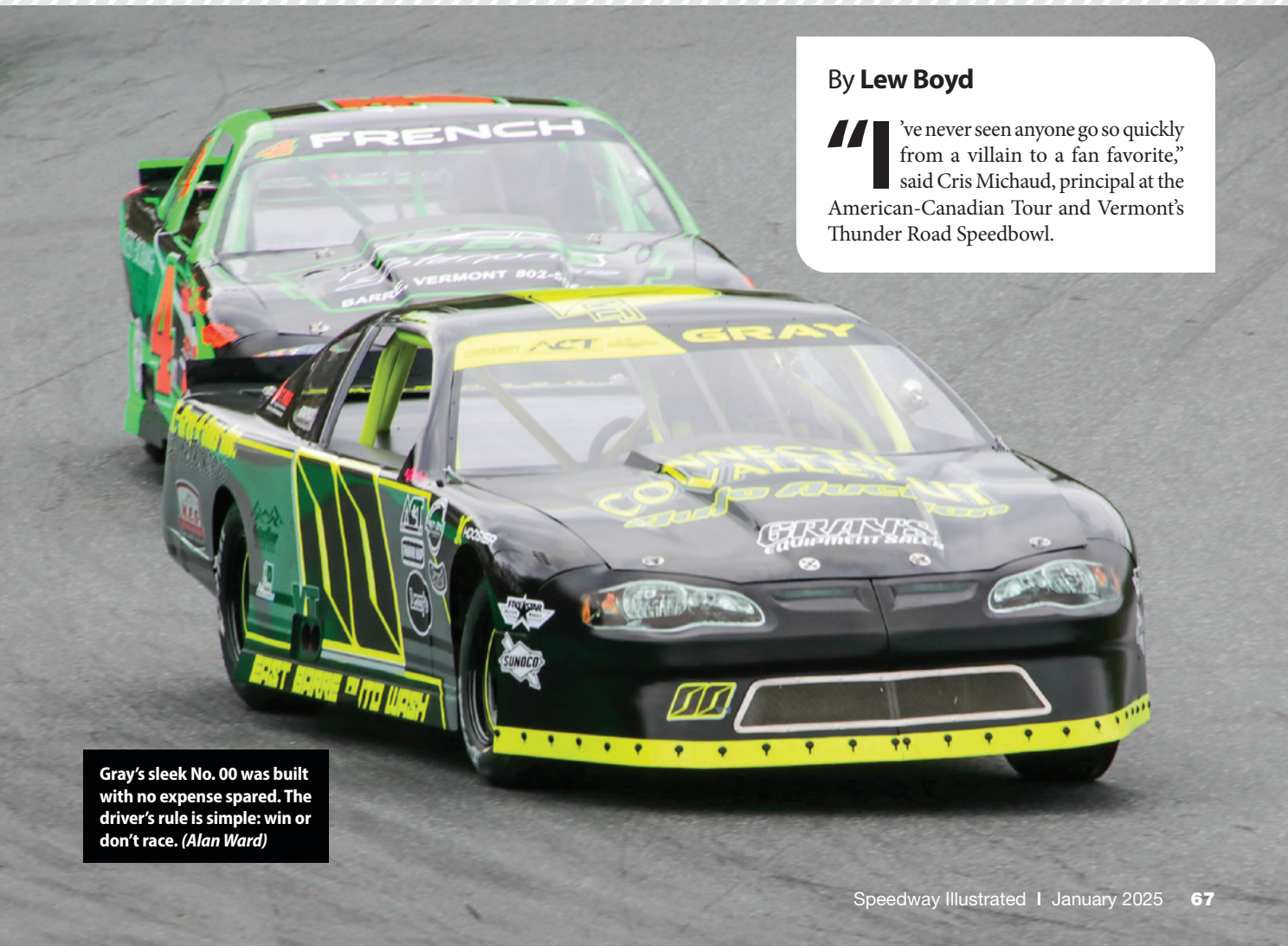


# A DEEPER SHADE of **GRAY**

*The turbulent times of  
Vermont's winningest driver.*

By Lew Boyd

**"I**'ve never seen anyone go so quickly from a villain to a fan favorite," said Cris Michaud, principal at the American-Canadian Tour and Vermont's Thunder Road Speedbowl.



Wearing a black hat both literally and figuratively, Brandon Gray admits his behavior in the past made many enemies. Last season his success helped change public perception. (Alan Ward)

Gray's sleek No. 00 was built with no expense spared. The driver's rule is simple: win or don't race. (Alan Ward)

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With full fields and a strong handicap system, there may be no tougher weekly show to win than Thunder Road (VT) Speedway. (Alan Ward)

Michaud spoke of Brandon Gray, a young, middle-division racer whose 2024 season racked up one of the finest records ever in northern New England. He dominated the competition at Thunder Road Speedbowl and White Mountain and Claremont Motorsports Parks in New Hampshire in both Flying Tiger and Super Street cars. He'd started out at age 12, has raced for 15 years, and these days is perky, well-presented—and confident. But he'll remove his hat, wipe his brow, and admit, "I may still be 27, but I look 45." His life hasn't always been pretty.

By his own admission, Brandon was born with a silver spoon in his mouth. His grandparents were entrepreneurs in Vermont's Green Mountains, demanding in their pursuit of success. "They came from nothing," he claims, "and got it done. We follow their lead. We all work together at CW Gray Auctioneers and various related businesses, but we don't always get along. We expect a lot of each other, and there can be anger, but we always have dinner together. I have a short fuse myself."

That became apparent early on. He was once a basketball wiz, about to sink the ultimate basket—the achievement of 1,000 points during his high school career. He did get to 968, but had managed to be tossed out of 23 games, the equivalent of missing a whole year of play. He'd been repeatedly suggesting an optometrist's phone number to the refs.

For years, racing has been a centering

force in the world of Gray, and his grandparents paid the bills. Brandon's dad, Troy, and his uncle Tim raced, and it seemed inevitable that Brandon and his cousins would follow. Brandon looked up to Troy and once actually came down from the stands to victory lane to ask him for an autograph.

Yet somehow the relationship between the two seemed unsettled. Brandon still wonders why his dad offered him so little help when he began racing. A few years later, when Brandon joined the family company, the two did work together but just couldn't see eye to eye. Troy had remarried and seemed to be at constant war with his new wife. Brandon moved in with his mother, and then in 2013 came shockingly tragic news. Troy had murdered his new wife and then committed suicide. It was devastating for the whole family. Brandon was just 16. It remains on his mind. "If your father died in a car accident, it would be one thing, but this was different."

As he dealt with all the fallout—reporters even chasing him down at school, he buried himself in racing. He found that winning did help his sense of self-worth, but his anger only appeared to amplify.

Even as he moved into full-sized cars, "all I knew is that I had to win. I'd go bonkers on the track, go through you instead of around you, and my uncle Tim would have to come over if someone came after me." Historian and promoter Justin St. Louis recalls seeing Brandon parked in anger on the straightaway after a call he didn't

*After a couple days of assessment, Brandon's grandfather gathered the family, recommitted fully to rebuilding the business and to carry on with racing.*

like, taunting the jeering fans. "I had the right to remain quiet, but not the ability," he admits.

During high school Brandon's warlike antics led to a banishment from Bear Ridge Speedway in Vermont for "forever and a day." And, as a senior, being caught at Thunder Road with an illegal motor only added to his blacklist.

After graduation, Brandon settled enthusiastically into the family business, while continuing with his racing and misadventures. Then, on July 4, 2000, another shoe dropped. A lightning storm in East Thetford, Vermont, completely destroyed the Grays' business. They watched their entire livelihood burn to the ground in two hours.

After a couple days of assessment, Brandon's grandfather gathered the family, recommitted fully to rebuilding the business and to carry on with racing. It was as if they were all re-energized, and the prosperous years would soon be back.

All the while, though, the grandparents' willingness to pay racing expenses came with two regulations. One was that family racers had to win. "It's not really arrogance," Brandon explains. "It's that we spend a lot of money and we work extremely hard at it. The deal is that, if we don't have results and the attitude in the shop isn't good, it all stops. I suppose it would crush some people to know you must be a winner, but not me. I'm so lucky to be able to do what I want to do."

But tension sometimes became obvious. A few years back, Brandon's cousin, Jason Gray (who authored a glorious championship run at Bear Ridge this summer), and Brandon actually came to blows at the tire machine in their racing garage. Jason thought that Brandon wasn't at that moment prepping his own race cars to family standard. Brandon took great offense.



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**ABOVE & BELOW:** The red No. 5 scheme was a throwback to Gray's father's race car. Losing his father in tragic circumstances at just 16 created anger that took years to resolve. (Alan Ward and Karl Fredrickson)



The second regulation was that everyone who raced had to run in different divisions so there could never be competition between family members. As Jason was running a dirt sportsman in New England, Brandon spent a couple years on the dirt over at Malta, New York, in a pro stock. Though he loved the sensation of a broadside, the distance over the mountains became prohibitive.

When back on the local asphalt circuit, Brandon's irritability came with him, but deep in the background, something was softening. There was an incident in the pits at Thunder Road. A competitor's mom came over to the trailer, enraged and blasting Brandon for crazy moves against her son. Brandon's response was less than gracious. He ripped her apart. This confrontation was a little different, though, because Brandon's mom was there, too, listening. And she lit into him. "I was used to being booed," says Brandon. "But now I felt like I'd let my mother down. I felt like shit."

Again at Thunder Road, there was another extended on-track encounter, and the two antagonists ended up in the wall. Brandon was out of his car in a flash, pounding on the other driver until he was separated by officials—and escorted off the property by police. The video of the dramatic altercation became the most viewed in track history. "I looked like a complete idiot. 'You dumb ass,' I told myself. I don't regret what I did, but I regret *where* I did it. Should have just gone to the campground and gently punched him."

Then, a couple of years ago, Brandon had a conversation with Nick Sweet, the respected and stable Late Model champion at Thunder Road. Nick looked him up and down and said, "You're actually a really good driver, and all we gotta do is to build you a really good car—and get you one hot psychiatrist."

By all appearances, Sweet stepped up to both roles himself. Brandon listened and watched as Nick put together a Flying Tiger car for the princely sum of \$50,000, which crept up to \$64,000. What a sweet-handling rocket ship, made even speedier by Nick's constant instruction—and admonitions—to his driver.

The relationship seemed transformative from the get-go. This year Brandon's obsession with the sport deepened, if anything, and he went after it, running three nights a week, augmented by one-off enduros. All the other four nights were devoted to prep in the race garage. He even gave up his social life for the year, feeling there was

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Gray only moves up when he knows he can be competitive. Last year he tried his hand at an ACT late model. (Karl Fredrickson)

no way he could hold up his end of a relationship.

Sweet's supervision had an obvious impact trackside. With new confidence in his Flying Tiger—and in Robbie Streeter's Super Street—Brandon began to think beyond wins to points and championships. The focus switched to precision rather than bent body panels. He now searched for holes rather than making them. "I'm controlling myself, being patient. I don't want to cause things anymore."

He raced to the Flying Tiger champi-

onships at both Thunder Road and White Mountain, where he won all 14 shows. Then in October at the season-ending special at Oxford Plains Speedway in Maine, his win gave him the ACT Flying Tiger Tri-State Series title. Meanwhile, he was fifth in points in Super Streets at Claremont, where he missed several nights due to schedule conflicts. His wins for the season were 34, bringing his career total to 93, according to Justin St. Louis.

Most pleasing to Brandon, though, was his realization that he is beginning to



They are called Flying Tigers, but Gray found himself in the middle of a hornets nest, boxed in behind Cooper French (4) and beside Cam Gadue (23) and Jason Pelkey (64) with Logan Powers (31) closing in behind. (Buzz Fisher)

*It will be interesting to watch how everything unfolds in 2025. For all his talent, Brandon still has some work to do repairing frayed relationships.*

receive applause in victory lane. And he notes, "I used to be Cris Michaud's worst nightmare. Now he will congratulate me after a win."

So what now?

Few question Brandon's competence behind the wheel these days. It's clearly time for him to move up to a top short-track division, one that would not break any family rules.

He did enjoy his earlier stint on the clay and claims he would have loved to run Syracuse. Asked if he would accept a full-time ride with a big-block-dirt-modified team, he offers up a great big grin. But, almost immediately, he recalibrates. Nope. He'd take a pass on going on the road. His family and CW Gray Auctioneers are more important.

Instead, at the Milk Bowl, Thunder Road's final autumn event, he showed up with two cars. One was that Flying Tiger, and he marched it off to the runner-up slot. The other was a sparkling new ACT late model he intends to campaign for Rookie of the Year honors next year. He drove respectfully in the crowded field and finished mid-pack, all fenders still clean.


It will be interesting to watch how everything unfolds in 2025. For all his talent, Brandon still has some work to do repairing frayed relationships. He considers himself "friends" with promoters Butch Elms and April May Preston at Bear Ridge. But, given the nature of their last confrontation, they are not in the same place.

And, entering the top ACT division is a weighty decision for anyone. Cris Michaud warns, "Brandon has become one fine racer, but I hope he will continue to carry through. It will be a challenge." FSW

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**Quote Worthy**

*"I think it's a tossup between Kyle Busch and Martin Truex, Jr."*

Reader Andy Bryant of Bristol, TN in response to our poll of which Busch (now Xfinity) driver is most likely to succeed in the NASCAR Cup Series. Now, 20 years later Truex has 693 starts that have produced 34 wins and a championship while Busch has 63 wins and a pair of championships in 714 starts.  
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