

05 THE CHAMPIONS

Seven names. That is the entire list. Two of them qualified 30th and 32nd. One got in on a fan vote. One had never sat in a Pro Mod car before the winter he won it.



SEVEN NAMES.

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In a sport that has been handing out trophies for the better part of seventy years, only seven drivers have ever won the Drag Illustrated World Series of Pro Mod. There is no points chase to back into here, no season-long body of work that quietly forgives a bad weekend. There is one race. There is sudden death every round. You survive it or you load up and go home.

NOBODY HAS EVER WON IT TWICE.

Two of them qualified 30th and 32nd out of 32. One got in on a fan vote. One had never sat in a Pro Mod car before the winter he won it. That is not an accident, and it is not luck. It is a format built specifically to make those things possible.

These are the seven.



2017

MIKE BOWMAN

CHAMPION, DRAG ILLUSTRATED WORLD SERIES OF PRO MOD

HOMETOWN	Los Angeles, California
CAR	Turbocharged 1969 Chevrolet Chevelle
VENUE	Bandimere Speedway, Morrison, Colorado
PURSE	\$100,000, winner take all
QUALIFIED	Fan vote entrant, 16-car invitational

RESULTS

- R1
- def. Derek Menholt
- R2
- def. Michael Biehle
- SF
- def. Shane Molinari
- F
- def. Steven Whiteley
- RT
- .024 reaction time, final round

He was not supposed to be there at all.

The inaugural World Series of Pro Mod invited fourteen drivers directly. A fifteenth spot went to a fan vote. The sixteenth was decided on Friday night in the Aeromotive Wild Card Shootout. Mike Bowman, a Southern California racer who worked for Coburn Equipment and had not raced at Bandimere since 1995, got in on the fan vote. He asked his boss for a few days off. Ray Coburn's answer went straight into the record: "Heck yeah! It's a hundred thousand dollars; you better go get you some of that!"

The scoreboards stayed dark all week and the time slips were cut in half, and then, for the final round, we turned the clocks back on. That was the reveal. Two Pro Mods, heads up, for \$100,000 on Thunder Mountain, with the whole drag racing world watching.

Neither car ran a number worth framing. Both drivers, tuning for a car they had not been able to measure all week, overpowered the racing surface within a few hundred feet of the starting line. **Bowman recovered first.**

It was a round of drag racing heard round the world. A legend was born, and so was a tradition.

“I figured we were going to be door-to-door and it would be settled at the Christmas tree. I was like, ‘I can’t let him beat me again on the tree.’ I was digging hard.”

MIKE BOWMAN - 2017 CHAMPION



2017 | MIKE BOWMAN AND THE CHEVELLE AT BANDIMERE SPEEDWAY

2018

CARL STEVENS JR.

CHAMPION, DRAG ILLUSTRATED WORLD SERIES OF PRO MOD

CAR	Turbocharged 1969 Chevrolet Camaro, owned by Jim Bell
VENUE	Bandimere Speedway, Morrison, Colorado
PURSE	\$100,000, winner take all
WINNING PASS	5.856 at 246.26 mph

RESULTS

- R1
- def. Marc Caruso
- R2
- def. Erica Enders
- QF
- def. Mike Bowman by .007
- SF
- def. Michael Biehle
- F
- def. Danny Rowe - 5.856 at 246.26, track record

The second one belonged to a tuner.

Carl Stevens Jr. arrived as one of the few people in the field who could genuinely claim to understand what the altitude was doing to his engine, and he spent the weekend proving it in the only way the format allowed: by getting quicker on every single pass. Nobody could see it happening. The scoreboards were dark again.

He beat Marc Caruso. He beat Erica Enders. In the quarterfinal he beat defending champion Mike Bowman by seven thousandths of a second, which in a race with no time slips meant neither driver knew how close it had been until somebody told them. He beat Michael Biehle to reach the final against Danny Rowe.

Then he did the thing that made him a champion instead of a finalist. With \$100,000 on the line and a car that had improved on every run of the weekend, the conventional move was to leave the tune-up alone. His crew told him exactly that. Stevens went into the data instead, decided there was more in it, and turned it up.

He ran **5.856 at 246.26 miles per hour** - the quickest Pro Modified pass in the history of Bandimere Speedway, and it still is. In the winner's circle, a champagne cork caught him in the nose. That is how he knew it was real.

“This thing was on a mission.”

CARL STEVENS JR. - 2018 CHAMPION



2018 | CARL STEVENS JR. AND THE CHAMPIONSHIP BELT, BANDIMERE SPEEDWAY

2019

SCOTT OKSAS

CHAMPION, DRAG ILLUSTRATED WORLD SERIES OF PRO MOD

HOMETOWN	Southern California
CAR	Twin-turbocharged 1967 Ford Mustang, RJ Race Cars
TUNER	Jeff Pierce
VENUE	Bandimere Speedway, Morrison, Colorado
PURSE	\$100,000, winner take all

RESULTS

- R1

def. Stevie "Fast" Jackson
- R2

def. Rick Snavelly - 5.863 at 247.57
- SF

def. Rick Hord - 5.872 at 247.79
- F

def. Doug Winters - 5.882 at 247.38
- RT

.053 to .053, final round

Scott Oksas died in March 2022. He is missed by everyone in this sport who knew him, and his name stays on this list forever.

Scott Oksas told people he was coming to win it. Then the draw handed him Stevie "Fast" Jackson in the first round.

Jackson was the NHRA Pro Mod points leader. He had driven a couple of thousand miles to be there. He was, by any reasonable measure, the last car in the field anybody wanted to see on the other side of a chip draw, and Oksas has never pretended otherwise. "That guy is a world-class racer and that was the most scared I've ever been in my car."

Jackson went .020 red. The run he threw away was a 5.932 at a corrected altitude of 9,000 feet, the quickest blower pass in the history of Bandimere Speedway. He knew he had fouled and drove it out anyway because he wanted to see what it would run.

Oksas never looked back. In the final against Doug Winters both drivers left on identical .053 reaction times, Winters' roots-blown Chevelle pulled ahead early, and Oksas drove around him. The celebration was, by universal agreement, the loudest in the history of the event. He was heard screaming over the sound of his own engine in the shutdown area.

"I install water heaters, that's what I do. I don't race cars for a living."

SCOTT OKSAS - 2019 CHAMPION



2023

SPENCER HYDE

CHAMPION, DRAG ILLUSTRATED WORLD SERIES OF PRO MOD

HOMETOWN	Stratford, Ontario, Canada
CAR	Supercharged 1969 Camaro, "Jack & The Green Stock"
TUNER	Mark Savage
VENUE	Bradenton Motorsports Park, Florida
PURSE	\$100,000
QUALIFIED	No. 32 of 32

RESULTS

Q	No. 32 of 32, into the field by .001
R1	def. Tommy Gray
R2	def. Eric Latino
R3	def. Marcus Birt
SF	def. Jason Harris
F	def. Kurt Steding - 3.643 at 205.51 to 3.652 at 207.15
Note	Lowest qualifying position ever to win

The race came back after three years away, and it came back bigger. Sixteen invited cars became a 32-car field. The quarter mile became the eighth. The ladder was thrown out entirely and replaced with a chip draw.

Then the last car to make the show won the whole thing.

Spencer Hyde qualified 32nd out of 32, squeezing in by a thousandth of a second after a week that had gone badly in almost every way a week can go. Converter problems. Engine problems. And then, after the final qualifying session, his team found a broken frame rail. They fixed it overnight.

At the chip draw, Hyde came out first pair on Sunday morning. Mark Savage took that as a sign. "I told Spencer, 'I don't know if you believe in this stuff, but we've got some good juju going for us right now.'"

Hyde did not have the quickest car in a single round of eliminations except the last one. What he had was a car that was there every time, and a driver who did the rest on the starting line. "Our goal all week was just to be there and make it a drag race," Savage said. They fell his way four consecutive times.

"After second round, that's when I knew. There's days where you can't do any wrong. Brandon Switzer came up to me and said, 'You know you're going to win this, right?'"

SPENCER HYDE - 2023 CHAMPION



2024

DEREK WARD

CHAMPION, DRAG ILLUSTRATED WORLD SERIES OF PRO MOD

HOMETOWN	Frederick, Maryland
CAR	Screw-blown 1968 Pontiac Firebird
TUNER	Jon Salemi, Resolution Racing Services
VENUE	Bradenton Motorsports Park, Florida
PURSE	\$100,000
QUALIFIED	No. 15 of 32

RESULTS

Q	No. 15
R1	def. Tommy Franklin - 3.70 to 3.71
R2	def. Dustin Nesloney - 3.684 at 205.98
R3	def. Marcus Butner on a holeshot
R4	def. Stevie "Fast" Jackson
F	def. Jim Halsey - 3.625 at 208.17

Ten days before the race, Derek Ward broke a chassis in a private test session.

Rather than leave the operation in Florida and fly home as planned, he drove the truck and trailer back to Maryland, took the car apart, pushed snow all night, then got up at four in the morning on a Sunday and drove to G-Force Race Cars near Buffalo. Jim Salemi put a new four-link bracket in it and back-halved one side of the car. Ward picked it up the following Saturday, got home Sunday, put the car together and left that evening for Florida.

Then he hurt the engine in pre-race testing. Then he chased a phantom oil pressure problem through two qualifying sessions before discovering the sensors were bad, bought a mechanical gauge and bolted it to the blower.

And then, staged and ready for the \$100,000 final round, his car would not fire. It was the starter. Wes Buck, race director Gavin Carter and Jim Halsey all agreed to allow the car back to the pits. Anybody who could get a hand on the Firebird pushed it back through the staging lanes to Melanie Salemi's pit area. **Halsey and his entire team waited.**

“I'm getting ready to get out of the car. Everybody was like, ‘No, stay in it! We're going.’ I was like, ‘You know my trailer's parked waaay down there past the finish line, right?’”

DEREK WARD - 2024 CHAMPION



2025

STEVE KING

CHAMPION, DRAG ILLUSTRATED WORLD SERIES OF PRO MOD

HOMETOWN	Strasburg, Virginia
CAR	Screw-blown 2015 Chevrolet Corvette, "Savage"
TEAM OWNER	Gene Pilot
TUNER	Jon Salemi
VENUE	Bradenton Motorsports Park, Florida
PURSE	\$150,000
QUALIFIED	No. 30 of 32

RESULTS

Q	No. 30
R1	def. Cameron Hensley - 3.649 to 3.650
R2	def. Jeff Rudolf - 3.681 at 203.98
QF	def. Erica Enders - 3.654 at 203.34
SF	def. Jason Harris - 3.638 at 203.80
F	def. Stevie "Fast" Jackson - 3.629 at 204.82 to 3.653
Margin	.001 - closest final in race history

Steve King qualified 30th and then walked through the hardest four rounds anybody has ever run at this race.

He beat Cameron Hensley in round one by a thousandth on a slightly better light. He beat his friend Jeff Rudolf in round two with the slowest pass of his day, which tells you everything about how consistent the car was. Then the transmission started fighting them, tracked down to a bad regulator, and the team swapped engines after the second round looking for anything extra.

In the quarterfinal he drew six-time NHRA Pro Stock world champion Erica Enders. Enders cut a .007 light to King's .023 and it was not enough. In the semifinal he drew Jason Harris, the back-to-back PDRA Pro Boost world champion. That left two-time NHRA Pro Mod world champion Stevie "Fast" Jackson in the final.

Jackson left first, .029 to King's .052. King ran 3.629 at 204.82. Jackson ran 3.653 at 203.55. **The margin was one thousandth of a second - the closest final round in the history of the World Series of Pro Mod.**

“I went through the finish line and I’m like, ‘Who won? Who won?’ Then I hear the guys on the radio start hollering and it’s like, ‘We just did it. We really did it.’”

STEVE KING - 2025 CHAMPION



2025 | STEVE KING, BRADENTON MOTORSPORTS PARK. PHOTO: LUKE NIEUWHOF

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2026

AARON STANFIELD

CHAMPION, DRAG ILLUSTRATED WORLD SERIES OF PRO MOD

HOMETOWN	Bossier City, Louisiana
CAR	Harts Charger-boosted 1969 Camaro, Scott Tidwell Racing
TUNER	Chris Terry
VENUE	Bradenton Motorsports Park, Florida
PURSE	\$150,000
QUALIFIED	No. 8 of 32

RESULTS

Q	No. 8, after sitting 61st on Thursday
R1	def. Sidnei Frigo - 3.879 at 200.98
R2	def. Greg Blevins Jr. - 3.651
R3	def. Tommy D'Aprile - 4.033 at 193.65
SF	single - 3.614 at 210.37
F	def. Peter Norton - 3.576 at 210.83 to 3.585
Margin	.003

Aaron Stanfield had never sat in a Pro Mod car until the winter he won the biggest one.

A fourteen-time NHRA Pro Stock winner from a racing family, Stanfield watched Erica Enders run the World Series of Pro Mod the year before and decided he wanted in. He missed the field at the Snowbird Outlaw Nationals. He missed it again at the U.S. Street Nationals by three thousandths of a second, in what became the first all-3.50-second 32-car field in the history of Pro Modified.

Then Justin Bond became unavailable, Scott Tidwell and Richard Freeman agreed to put Stanfield in the silver Harts Charger Camaro, and qualifying got off to a rocky start again. After Thursday he sat 61st. He ended up eighth.

He pedaled the car in round one and won. In the third round both he and Tommy D'Aprile lost traction and Stanfield gathered his up faster, which he credits to having had to pedal it two rounds earlier. In the final Peter Norton left first by six thousandths. **Three thousandths of a second decided it.**

Richard Freeman put it plainly: "He didn't drive that car until he got here Wednesday. He's just that good."

“From winning an NHRA event in Pro Stock to winning the Pro Mod race, I don't think I've ever received that kind of acknowledgement from my peers.”

AARON STANFIELD - 2026 CHAMPION



2026 | AARON STANFIELD WITH THE TRAVELING TROPHY. PHOTO: LUKE NIEUWHOF

WIN THIS RACE AND YOU GO ON THE COVER

Seven champions. Seven covers. Every driver who has ever won the World Series of Pro Mod has appeared on the cover of Drag Illustrated.

That is not a coincidence and it is not a favor granted after the fact. It is part of what you win. The race is promoted by the magazine, which means the champion is not hoping somebody writes about him. The story, the cover shoot and the special issue are already built before the car rolls through the gate.

It is also the reason the archive behind this book exists at all. Every champion feature in the pages you have just read was reported and photographed by Drag Illustrated on the day it happened.

THE PLATFORM BEHIND THE RACE

Drag Illustrated has been the independent voice of drag racing since 2005. A partner in this event is buying association with the race and with the media company that built it.

4.2M+	Annual visitors to DragIllustrated.com
855K+	Social media followers
23.9M+	Annual social reach
11.2M+	Annual video views
150K+	Crew Chief Daily email subscribers
67,500+	Magazine readership, 71% active racers



2017
MIKE BOWMAN
DI 125



2018
CARL STEVENS JR.
DI 137



2019
SCOTT OKSAS
DI 149



2023
SPENCER HYDE
DI 182



2024
DEREK WARD
DI 188



2025
STEVE KING
DI 194



2026
AARON STANFIELD
DI 200