

08 UNDERSTANDING PRO MOD

The only professional class in drag racing that was invented by the racers rather than the sanctioning body. It has no single founder and no agreed starting date.

WHERE PRO MOD CAME FROM

Pro Modified is the only professional class in drag racing that was invented by the racers rather than the sanctioning body. Ask ten people when it began and you will get at least three defensible answers.

1981	Jack Weller fields a blown 1959 Corvette called Proud American, driven by former nitro Funny Car pilot R.C. Sherman. Historian Bret Kepner points to this as the beginning.
Fall 1983	Charles Carpenter bolts nitrous oxide to his all-steel 1955 Chevy and runs an 8.3. The same car had run 10.50 two years earlier.
March 1987	Bill Kuhlmann runs 202 miles an hour in a door car at the IHRA Winternationals in Darlington, and the argument is effectively over.

The class was really born in the staging lanes of eighth-mile tracks in the Carolinas. Promoters were booking mountain motor Pro Stockers as the draw, the local door cars kept outrunning them, and promoters started paying those door cars to leave bracket racing and match race instead. That became the Quick Eight. When IHRA owner Billy Meyer asked Kuhlmann how he proposed to race a class with no rules, Kuhlmann gave the answer that is still the class motto.

“You run whatcha brung and hope ya brung enough.”
BILL KUHLMANN

The name was decided late one night during the 1989 IHRA Fall Nationals at Bristol; Pro Stalgia, Pro Nostalgia and Pro Outlaw were all considered and discarded. The first cars to carry the designation ran at Atco Dragway, New Jersey in October 1989 as a 16-car exhibition. Bill Kuhlmann won it. Pro Modified became an official IHRA professional eliminator at Darlington in March 1990, won by Ed Hoover, a diesel repair shop owner from Columbia, South Carolina.

Pro Mod was born and raised in the IHRA. It did not stay there. The class spread to ADRL, the PDRA and eventually NHRA, and the modern landscape now includes 39 Pro Mod races a year across five sanctioning bodies with rules that do not match each other.

THE POWER ADDERS

Pro Modified permits several fundamentally different ways of forcing air into an engine. That diversity is the single biggest reason the class is compelling, and the single biggest reason its rules are argued about constantly. Every combination is given a different minimum weight in an attempt to keep them even.

SCREW BLOWER

A positive-displacement supercharger mounted on top of the engine, driven off the crankshaft, compressing air internally between two meshing rotors. Hard torque early, which is why screw cars tend to be strong off the line and to mid-track. This is the visual most people picture when they picture a Pro Mod. Regulated by an overdrive limit - currently 92 percent, meaning the blower may spin no more than 1.92 times crank speed.

ROOTS BLOWER

Also positive displacement and top-mounted, but more an air mover than a true internal compressor. Less thermally efficient than a screw, and usually given a lighter minimum weight to compensate.

NITROUS OXIDE

Chemical rather than mechanical. Injects an oxidizer to allow more fuel to be burned. Typically paired with very large displacement naturally aspirated engines.

CENTRIFUGAL

An impeller-driven compressor, also crank-driven, but boost builds with engine speed rather than arriving all at once. Thermally efficient and very strong through the back half of the run. Flat hood, no blower visible. Regulated by the physical size of the head unit rather than by an overdrive limit.

TWIN TURBOCHARGERS

Compressors driven by exhaust gas rather than mechanically off the crank. Capable of enormous power, and the combination that won this race most often in its quarter-mile era - Bowman, Stevens and Oksas all ran turbochargers.

THE ARGUMENT

The most persistent debate in modern Pro Modified is whether screw blowers and centrifugals are fairly matched. Screw cars are capped by a hard overdrive limit; centrifugals are limited by head unit size but have no overdrive cap. Expect racers to raise it unprompted.

2027 RULES

Weight breaks and the overdrive limit will be published in winter 2026.

GLOSSARY

CHIP DRAW

The method used at the World Series of Pro Mod to determine eliminations pairings. After qualifying sets the 32-car field, names are drawn at random. Qualifying position confers no advantage.

EIGHTH-MILE

660 feet. The distance run at this event. Most Pro Mod racing outside NHRA is contested over the eighth-mile.

ET (ELAPSED TIME)

Time from leaving the starting line to crossing the finish line. The winner is the car that gets there first, which is not always the car with the quicker ET.

REACTION TIME

The delay between the green light and the car leaving. A .000 is perfect. A negative number is a red light, a foul and a loss. This is the driver's contribution, not the car's.

HOLESHOT

Winning with a slower elapsed time by leaving quicker. One of the most admired things a driver can do.

SIXTY-FOOT

Time to cover the first sixty feet. The best single indicator of how well a car is leaving. Elite Pro Mods are now running under .890.

TIRE SHAKE

A violent vertical oscillation of the rear tires when they lose and regain grip rapidly. Extremely hard on the car and the driver, and usually ends the run.

PEDALING

Lifting off the throttle to regain traction and then getting back on it. A driver who can pedal a Pro Mod and still win the round has done something genuinely difficult.

BURNOUT

Spinning the rear tires in water before the run to heat and clean them.

STAGING

Rolling forward into the beams at the starting line. Deep staging, shallow staging and staging duels are all tactical.

BUMP SPOT

The elapsed time required to make the field. At the 2026 U.S. Street Nationals, every one of the 32 qualifiers ran in the 3.50s.

OVERDRIVE

How much faster a supercharger spins than the crankshaft. 92 percent overdrive means the blower turns 1.92 times crank speed.

BOOST

The pressure of air forced into the engine, in psi. The best screw blowers make 45 to 46. Centrifugals are making north of 60.

WHEELIE BARS

Rear-mounted bars that prevent the car rotating too far under acceleration.

CHUTES

Parachutes deployed after the finish line to slow the car.

RETURN ROAD

The road used to bring cars back to the pits. At this event, it is also where the other teams come out to meet the winner.

8.4 · HOW TO READ A TIME SLIP

FIELD	WHAT IT TELLS YOU
Reaction time	The driver's response to the green light. .000 is perfect.
60 foot	How the car left the line. Under .890 is elite.
330 foot	Early mid-track. Where positive-displacement blowers show up.
660 foot / ET	The finish. The number everybody quotes.
660 mph / speed	Trap speed. The best single indicator of horsepower.

WHAT TO LOOK FOR

A quick sixty-foot with a slow ET usually means the car left well and gave it back. A slow sixty-foot with a strong ET usually means it struggled off the line and made it up on the back half.

Any elapsed time significantly slower than about 3.80 in modern Pro Mod is almost certainly an aborted run - tire shake, tire spin, a pedal or a mechanical failure. Do not treat those numbers as competitive data.

Speed tells you about power. Elapsed time tells you about the whole package, including traction and the driver.