

Racing mourns fallen friend

Family, teammates, fellow drivers, crews, officials and fans from the bleachers will gather as one to bid Godspeed to "Scotty," the Mt. Clemens native who died in a fiery crash at 300 miles an hour last Saturday.

In the blink of an eye, the accident in Englishtown, N.J., claimed one of the most admired and fierce drag racers of the past 25 years and left a gaping wound in the heart of Ypsilanti-based Kalitta Motorsports, owned by Connie (The Bounty Hunter) Kalitta, father of Scott and former driving great who ran muscle cars on the streets of Mt. Clemens as a teen and, as a crew chief, tuned Shirley Muldowney to a pioneering Top Fuel championship.

"Having the last name Kalitta didn't make me a racer," Scott once said, "but it definitely makes me want to be a winner."

The death of Scott Kalitta, a two-time NHRA Top Fuel champion and the first driver in the class to win four consecutive races, has struck the racing community, not just drag racers, hard in Michigan, where the Kalittas are known as tough, well-financed but, above all, honorable competitors.

Patriarch Connie Kalitta, 70, owns Kalitta Air, a worldwide freight and cargo carrier, which is based at Willow Run Airport and, among other services, brings the remains of U.S. servicemen home from war zones around the globe.

"Losing a family member is always tough, but losing my son has been incredibly hard," Connie Kalitta said in a statement. "Scott was a great racer and a great son. ... Scott died doing what he loved to do, and I am very proud of what we accomplished together both on the track and off."

Kalitta's comments Wednesday were his first since the accident. As the racing world prepared to pay its final respects to Scott Kalitta, the Free Press talked with Michigan's racing community about Kalitta's legacy and the agony when death intrudes on its sport. Teacher and mentor

Scott Kalitta, 46, lived in Bradenton, Fla., with his wife and their two young boys. He had retired a couple times over the years but always returned to the sport he loved.

He died when his nitro-methane-fueled Funny Car burst into flames and hurtled into the netting and a retaining barrier at the end of the quarter-mile track shut-off area during a qualifying run at Old Bridge Township Raceway Park, where he had made his professional debut in 1982. Kalitta's parachute, meant to slow the dragster at the end of a pass or in an emergency, failed to correctly deploy.

Luke Bailey will be in Norwalk today when the world's fastest racing circuit bids farewell to a fallen hero, a second generation racer who grew up in Michigan and competed at Milan Dragway before moving to the big leagues.

Bailey, a 46-year-old drag racer from Davison, lost his brother Wayne, a Top Fuel driver from Leonard, in a horrifying IHRA crash in Shreveport, La., in 2000. Wayne's dragster split in two at more than 280 m.p.h. and flipped over a wall. Luke, who was crewing for Wayne, watched his brother's last run from the starting line and flew with his stricken sibling as he was transported by helicopter to a hospital.

"It's important for us racers to go to Scott's memorial service," said Bailey, who, like his brother, purchased used parts from Scott Kalitta and his race team as younger men. "Scott was a teacher and a mentor. He had a hard-guy persona, but he taught us how to do things the right way. For every one person Connie knew who loved his son, there are a thousand out here he didn't know who loved him as well. ...

"Hearing about the crash ripped me apart. We're shell-shocked, and it will take the Kalittas time to overcome this. But, as I learned, you have to get back on the horse because we love to do what we do. You never think it will happen to you, but it can. When Wayne died, I took a little wrench of his and put it in my pocket. I know he rides with me every time I race."

Eddie Sachs Jr. of Mt. Clemens, whose father was killed racing in the 1964 Indianapolis 500, will attend Kalitta's memorial as well. The younger Sachs, also 46, knew Scott and Connie and raced midgets and sprint cars against Doug Kalitta, Scott's cousin and a Kalitta Motorsports driver.

"Scotty became a first-class driver," said Sachs, who runs Kentucky-based racer Billy Smith in the IHRA Quick Rod class. "The Kalittas are going to have their sorrows, but they are in the racing business, they know the risks and they will move forward.

"As a racer, you give it your heart and soul to become a winner. Sometimes you pay the ultimate price. I'll be at the memorial out of respect for the Kalittas, Scott and my father." 'So very strong'

Muldowney, 70, is known as the First Lady of Drag Racing. She was the NHRA Top Fuel champion three times and the subject of the 1983 movie "Heart Like a Wheel."

"I don't feel whole right now," Muldowney said from her home in Willis, not far from Milan Dragway. "I can't get him out of my mind. Scott spent a lot of time with me on the road. He was always respectful. He might grumble some time, but he did what he was told. I'm crushed over this. I feel very bad for his family. ...

"Connie was demanding and carried a big stick. Scott had to earn his wings."

One incident stood out for her from Scott's teenage years.

"Before my first race in Columbus in 1976," Muldowney said, "Scott swallowed a plastic piece from a men's shirt box. He ingested it and it wound up in his lung. He didn't tell anybody because he wanted to go to the race. He went to his mother and he was rushed to hospital and they had to cut open his chest from front to back. He was so very strong even then."

Muldowney almost lost her life in 1984 during a qualifying run near Montreal when her dragster veered into a ditch at 250 m.p.h., shattering her legs, pelvis and wrists. She also suffered burns in several Funny Car fires.

"He took an awful, awful ride," Muldowney said. "I can't believe he's gone." 'That's what we do'

Over the next three days, Kalitta Motorsports teammates Doug Kalitta, Dave Grubnic and Hillary Will will compete in the Summit Racing Equipment Nationals at Norwalk. That's what's expected of them, and they know it and agree to it.

"We're a race team, and that's what we do," said Jim Oberhofer, Kalitta Motorsports general manager. "Scott was a drag racer to the core, and he would want us to compete in Norwalk, so we are going to go racing this weekend. Our thoughts are with his wife, Kathy, and sons, Corey and Colin, and Connie, but we feel it's the right thing to do."

Cousin Doug, driver of a Top Fuel dragster, said in a statement: "Words just don't seem to do Scott justice. He was so much bigger than life, and we all thought he was invincible. He loved being in a race car, and he was a great driver. We grew up together, and I really can't imagine my life without him in it, but we will come together as a family and as a team and carry on in his honor." Understands the pain

Lee Brayton, 74, of Coldwater knows the joys and dangers of racing only too well. Scott Brayton, his eldest son, lost his life in 1996, at age 37, during practice for the Indianapolis 500. Scott was a two-time pole-sitter at Indy and one of the most popular drivers to compete there.

"It's going to be tough on Connie," said Brayton, who drove Indy Cars and also raced sprints and midgets while building race engines for his company, Brayton Engineering. "But what do you do? End your life? There's no way Connie is going to do that.

"My Scotty loved racing. Indianapolis was his second home. It's hard on the kids, it's hard on the family at this time, but Scott Kalitta was a tough man, and so is Connie. You can't blame anyone. Racing is a lifestyle you pick. Racing is why we are here and have the things we have.

"But it can all go to hell in seconds."

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The man, the racer

Who: Drag racer Scott Kalitta, born Feb. 18, 1962. Grew up in Mt. Clemens. Lived in Bradenton, Fla.

Family: Son of Connie (The Bounty Hunter) Kalitta, who operates Kalitta Motorsports and Kalitta Air in Ypsilanti. Wife Kathy and sons Corey, 14, and Colin, 8.

Early days: Raced at Milan Dragway. Started pro career in 1982 in Top Fuel.

Pro career: Two-time NHRA Top Fuel champion (1994-95), first driver to win four consecutive NHRA Top Fuel races. Retired twice -- in 1997, returning in 1999 for a 10-race campaign, and in 2000-02, returning in 2003 to run Top Fuel with his cousin, Doug Kalitta. Returned to Funny Car full-time in 2006. Won 18 career events, last in Chicago in Top Fuel in 2005. Posted Funny Car runner-up finish in Chicago two weeks ago.

MEMORIAL

DONATIONS

A memorial service to celebrate the life of Scott Kalitta will be held at 7 tonight at Ernsthausen Performing Arts Center in Norwalk, Ohio. The Kalitta family asks that in lieu of flowers, donations be made to these charities:

St. Stephen's Episcopal School, Attn: Development Office, 315 41st St. West, Bradenton, FL 34209.

B.R.A.K.E.S. (Be Responsible And Keep Everyone Safe) c/o Doug Herbert Performance Parts, 1443 E. Gaston St., Lincolnton, NC 28092.

Cards for the family can be sent to: Kalitta Air, 818 Willow Run Airport, Ypsilanti, MI 48198. E-mail condolences can be sent to: champion@kalittaracing.com.

PENDING

AT MILAN

Milan Dragway hopes to schedule a memorial for Kalitta, who cut his teeth racing there.

"Nothing is set in stone," said track vice president Deneen Baxter, "but we'd definitely like to do something."

The dragway, which holds weekly amateur racing during the summer and an annual IHRA national event, is at 10860 Plank Road. For more information, call 734-439-7368.

The final word

"Scott Kalitta was a tremendous competitor and racing champion," said Roger Penske, the Birmingham race team owner and businessman who lost close friend and legendary driver Mark Donohue in a racing accident in 1975. "He and his family have been leaders in the motorsports community for years, not only in Michigan, but throughout the whole world of drag racing. Our thoughts and prayers go out to the Kalitta family. Scott will certainly be missed."

Physical impact of physical and mental health of young people drop

Recently, this reporter in Beijing to participate in a sport at the launching ceremony that the event less than 20 minutes will be more than 10 students can not adhere to the exit. To see such a situation, are not governed by people sigh, today s children how the body

Build good-looking physique is on the decline

September 18, 2006, the State Sports General Administration, the Ministry of Education held a joint press conference and announce the monitoring results. Based on the 380,000 students of physical monitoring showed that the overall situation mixed. Children s nutritional status and appearance is higher than in the past indicators, weight has increased, but in many physical indicators

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About the Author

From www.freep.com:

Information about steroid use among teens. When steroids are taken with a program of muscle building, there is an increase in body weight. Learn Men and Women Body Building Online for Free, with online Natural Body Building Workout and Exercise, Weight Training, Bodybuilding. Teen body building is rising in popularity as many young people decide that they want to get fit and be healthy. Starting an exercise program. Teenage muscle building is now a worldwide phenomenon. Most of the schools worldwide today incorporate some kind of weight training. A muscle building supplement will raise the natural level of proteins in your body. In the present times, the trend of teen body building. Discover the only teenage body building program that is both effective and safe for teens. Exact procedures are explained in detail. A free Bodybuilding Build Muscle article. Teen body building is rising in popularity as many young people decide that they want to get fit and be healthy. In detail about muscle building supplements. The interest grows With each daytime to teen muscle body building. Move over to section dedicated.

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