

# Home-Built: Helliwell Keeps Winning With His Own Late Model Design



**By KEVIN RICE**  
**PELHAM, NH** - In a time where most race teams buy chassis and parts to race with, American-Canadian Tour driver Wayne Helliwell Jr., of Dover, N.H. and car owner Bruce Bernhardt from Pelham, N.H. are the only ACT team racing with home-built cars. Helliwell, who finished second in the 2011 ACT standings will finish out the season driving their Late Model as a Pro Stock later this month at Wall Stadium's Turkey Derby in New Jersey. This team formed in 2008, running a Late Model Sportsman car that Helliwell also built with his own ideas for a chassis. They used that season to learn what works, winning the



**HELLIWELL-BUILT** - 1) Wayne Helliwell has driven his own chassis to victory more than two dozen times since 2008; 2) car owner Bruce Bernhardt with Helliwell's two home-built ACT cars at their Pelham, N.H., base; 3) Helliwell's intimate knowledge of his cars allows for informed set-up decisions. (Photos by Kevin Rice)

season title at Lee despite the fact that it was a year of experimenting with new ideas that led to the success of their ACT chassis car run this season.

"It's all trial and error," Helliwell says. "We built our first Late Model back in 2006. That first year we tried a ton of things. We tried one style snout and then we cut it off. We changed all of the angles and the geometry. That is kind of what we still run today."

Following their success in 2008, Helliwell and Bernhardt decided to move up to the Late Model class, building their own car for the 2009 season. They easily won the Lee (N.H.) Speedway championship in both 2009 and 2010, running a few ACT events along the way, including one at the New Hampshire Motor Speedway, where Helliwell finished sec-

ond in a 43-car invitational race.

When Lee dropped the Late Models from its weekly race program at the end of the 2010 season, the Bernhardt team decided to build a second car and run the full ACT schedule, where they finished a remarkable second in their first season on the tour, against full fields of "store bought" cars, with their older car getting most of the laps.

Helliwell recorded nine top ten finishes in 11 ACT point race starts, also winning non-point events at Waterford (Conn.) and Twin-State (N.H.) along the way. They won a second consecutive Ford Blue Oval Cup Challenge title this season as well. So how does Helliwell build a car with such success?

"I purchase a snub, which is the bottom half of the front clip and then I put all of our own pickup points on it," Helliwell offered. "The center section and rear clips are visually different than what everybody else is running. From a true Howe car or a Jeff Taylor car. Our stuff is different.

"Each chassis has its own little tricks. I think that our center sections are a little bit stronger than what everybody else is putting out. The difference is that I know what I'm getting. Doing this for the last couple of years, I kind of know what I want.

"I can build those little things that I like into the chassis that I can't get in a store built car. Certain parts of the car, like roll center adjustments and things like that. We're just running different front end geometry, spindles and things like that. Stuff that we've picked up on. Bringing that knowledge (from Lee) to the tour seems to transfer pretty well."

It has also transferred to success in the Pro Stock class, with the same Late Model car. Helliwell won both Pro Stock races he entered at Lee this season against some good competition.

"We just take the back off, put a four-barrel on it, the big tires and that's it," Helliwell said of the changes made to their Late Model to run as a Pro Stock.

"It's just unbelievable how it works. We use the stock calipers, the Koni Shocks, the whole nine yards. Whatever we're doing here is working. I don't know why, but it does."

Helliwell will take the same car to Wall for the Turkey Derby to run as a Pro Stock. Helliwell won at Wall in the November Late Model race in 2009.

"It's very similar to what we did at Lee," Helliwell explained of his effort at Wall this season. "We're going to leave the car pretty much the same way we ran it at Lee. The only thing is at Wall they don't allow a four-barrel so we'll be running the two-barrel. They only have a handful of rules, with different weight breaks for each size motor."

The Bernhardt-Helliwell team is not sure if they will be able to run the full ACT season in 2012. That is dependent on sponsorship dollars. The cars are kept at Bernhardt's Automotive repair shop, helping save them from a race shop bill. Every dollar has to be accounted for. Their success is clearly not because of financial advantages.

"I think Wayne is one of the best drivers in New England," Bernhardt says. "He's patient. He's methodical about how he passes people. He sets the car up himself. He's not just out there driving. He's thinking about the change that he is going to make when he comes into the pits.

"If we go race (a full ACT schedule) next year we want to beat Brian Hoar. We want to feel that we can beat him. I pay for a lot of this out of my own pocket. I can't do that again. If we don't get the funding we will probably just pick 10 or 12 of the best races and just go run those full bore."

Bernhardt, who developed an interest in racing because he lived down the street from now retired NASCAR East Series Hall of Fame driver Dave Dion's shop, has formed a successful combination with Helliwell as the driver. Where they go from this point is uncertain, but success wherever they run is not.

**This Black Friday start a new tradition & get him what he really wants at...  
 BFP Specialty's BLACK FRIDAY BLOWOUT!  
 FRIDAY, NOVEMBER 25 - Save 10%-20% on select items**



**Starting at 7am until 5pm get great deals on the area's largest Selection of quality dirt modified parts & services!**

**JUST FOR BLACK FRIDAY BFP Specialty Outerwear will be available for pre-order, purchase to receive before Christmas.**

**Ladies, for that hard to buy racer, drop in and pick up some apparel from some of his favorite brands, Teo Pro Car, Bicknell, BFP Sweatshirts, long sleeved t-shirts & hats.**

**While you're here why not pick up some GIFT CERTIFICATES?!?!  
 A gift that will keep on giving all season long!  
 Sale extended through Saturday, Nov. 26 until 12 Noon  
 DON'T MISS OUT!!!**

**Black Friday Only, place your body order for the 2012 season and receive a FREE \$50 GIFT CERTIFICATE!!!**

**BFP Specialty**  
 9090 Old Rt. 22  
 Bethel, PA 19507  
 Located just minutes off of I-78  
 717-933-4999