



Section B

South Lane County Sports and Recreation

SPORTS

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Speedway: Where family and racing become one



PHOTOS BY ZACH SILVA

Left: Evan (back) and Mike (front) Britton check on Evan's car before the races begin at the Cottage Grove Speedway on Friday. Top right: Mike Britton celebrates after his son won on Friday night. Bottom right: A crew works to put out the flames of Evan's car after his race.

The Cottage Grove Speedway is a home away from home for the Britton family

By Zach Silva
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The Cottage Grove Speedway is full of dirt.

Dust gets everywhere. From the cars, to the bleachers, to the back of your throat, the dust leaves its mark. And while everyone, especially those working on the cars and the racers themselves, leave a little dirtier than they arrived, the racing that is done at the Cottage Grove Speedway is a thing of beauty. A perfect encapsulation of this speed, precision and grace is seen in the black and red 85 street stock car driven by 18-year-old Cottage Grove native Evan Britton.

The Britton name is not new to Cottage Grove racing. The speedway, which opened in 1956, was owned by Evan's great-grand uncle Wayne Britton in the 80s. Evan's uncle, Kreg, races currently races modifieds there. The Brittons have been at this track for a long time and Evan is the next family member to race.

"Every Saturday I'm here," said Evan. "I've always, since I've been growing up here, always wanted to have my own car."

This dream became a reality in 2015 when he sold his four-wheeler, got help from his dad Mike and bought a car from a family friend. This had come a year after he had used another car and at 14 years old and in his second, won.

"I don't really know how," said Evan. "I somehow got lucky."

But since then, Evan has been working on getting better with the hope of moving up through the ranks and maybe one day making it big. Regardless of where he one day finishes, Mike is glad to see his son doing what he likes.

"You know how this day and age works, if they don't find something they are into they get into drugs and alcohol so it was kind of my way of keeping him out of that," said Mike.

Last Friday, as the heat hovered above 100, Mike and Evan pulled up to the speedway for a night of racing. As they, and many of their friends, learned that it was my first time being at the speedway, they all greeted me with the same retort: "You're in for a treat."

As the Brittons looked around pit row at who was there to race on the day, they excitedly turned and name dropped racers names

that only the biggest of Cottage Grove Speedway fans would know. But when it came to stock cars, Evan's event, they just had to look across the way to see the 74 car driven by Andrew Langan to see their main competition.

"We base ourselves off of that car," Mike explained to me during the earlier rounds of racing.

After all the necessary adjustments were made to the car, Evan went to change from his Jordans and cut off shirt to his racing suit. The only issue was that the one he had brought had ripped on the leg. With the help of duct tape, Evan patched it up and looked to his dad and said, "Hopefully I don't catch on fire."

With that, the races were ready to begin.

The evening started with the time trial where Evan ended up finishing with the fastest time of the eight stock cars racing that night. After a few adjustments were made to the car, he was back out for the trophy dash. The race saw Britton work and weave between the other cars on the track in an effort to get to the top spot. With four laps to go Britton had positioned himself to take the lead but spun out prompting a restart. With two laps to go he was in fourth after a second restart. He worked his way to the front of the pack but came up short and finished third.

"If there was only one more lap," said Mike before trailing off as he thought about Evan's winning potential. "I just get excited. Just watching him drive it is a huge adrenaline rush. I get excited and scream and yell."

Back at their trailer, Mike and Evan discussed the race and Evan stated in a disgruntled tone that he felt that it went "alright." The brief sulking changed to excitement for the final race of the day. The 20-lap feature race had eight cars all determined to win.

After two false starts, the front cars were moved to the back and Evan now was in the pole position. The race jumped out to a quick start and after initial jockeying, Evan fell into second place where he soon found his rhythm.

"I didn't think we would give it a shot," said Evan after the race. "But once the top came in it was mad fast."

While most of the other drivers in the competition prefer to stay low, Evan likes to race at the top edge.

"Once he found the top, which is where he runs, that's what he does every time. He gets up on the top and he can make that car

work on the top. I don't know how he does it," said Mike.

The race wound on and with each passing lap there was still a chance for Evan. He was locked in an unrelenting battle with Langan of the 74 car. At each spot where it seemed he would pull away, Langan simply sped up and regained the lead.

As the engines roared around and Evan's family and friends screamed for him, the racers entered into the final lap. After botching turn one, it looked like the 85 car may have blown its chance. But along the back stretch Evan picked up speed and positioned his car just right and crossed the line in first.

"I was just waiting, waiting, waiting for the white flag and as soon as I saw it, I thought, damn, this could actually be it," said Evan. "This was the most exciting race I've ever been in."

The excitement did not stop with the victorious wave of the checkered flag but took a final turn. As Mike and friends screamed on the side of the track, they began to walk towards the scales where each of the top three cars has to weigh in after each race to make sure they reached the minimum weight requirement. Evan's car was not there and Mike began to wonder why. He suddenly turned and looked up to see the black and red car that he has put so much time and effort into on fire.

Mike sprinted to the car screaming for Evan to get out. Evan had already climbed out into safety and in all the chaos, the hood was taken off of the car, which is where the fire was located, and the engine promptly doused and put out.

"I went to put it in neutral and then the oil pressure went down and I went to give it gas and then the flames just started," said Evan who was shook by the events but was able to quickly and safely get out of the car.

"He was already out of the car once I got there," said Mike. "It's scary. The scariest thing so far," said Mike.

Back at the trailer for a final time, the Brittons tried to take in everything that had happened. The thrill of victory had been promptly replaced by the flames in the car. Now that all was safe, they began to wind down and to take in the victory that they had just experienced and move on to thinking of the next race.

"He's okay, the car is okay and we'll get it back up in a couple of weeks," said Mike.

Athletes of the Week



This week's athletes of the week are the 17 girls who came out to volleyball camp. The girls worked on their skills and got to play their favorite game "dead fish" which is a serving game. To read more about summer sports camps turn to 2B.



FREE FAST FRIDAY AND LOGGERS CUP

AUGUST 11TH & 12TH

FREE FAST FRIDAY General Admission is FREE
Event Classes

Late Models and Mohawk Metal IMCA Modifieds

Saturday Event Classes

Late Models, Todd's Auto Body Sprints, IMCA Modifieds,
PHRA Dwarf Cars