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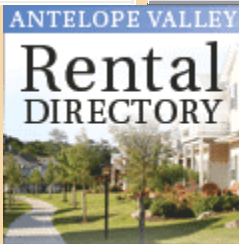


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Hornaday is once again comfortably in the driver's seat

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By **BRIAN GOLDEN**
Valley Press Staff Writer

Since his days of legend at Saugus Speedway, Mesa Marin and The Orange Show, Ron Hornaday has been the undisputed "King of Restarts."

Hornaday was going zero-to-60 before it became a popular advertising slogan.

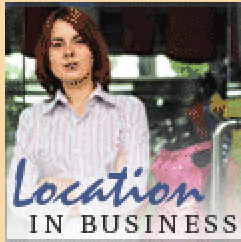
Seemingly even as the flagman is raising the green flag to resume racing after a caution period, Hornaday is already climbing up through the gearbox, and the field.

But after another of his signature gambits, holding off Kyle Busch on a green-white-checkered finish to win the NASCAR Craftsman Truck Series Sam's Town 400 at Texas Motor Speedway in Fort Worth last Saturday night, it's clear something even more amazing is afoot.

Hornaday isn't just restarting races.

He's restarted the greatest auto racing career in Valley history with his move to Kevin Harvick, Inc. and his return to the Truck Series.

Just nine races into the 2008 truck series season, the former Palmdale resident has re-established



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himself as the man to beat.

"It's a great feeling to know when you unload at the track every week, you have a chance to win," Hornaday said. "This KHI equipment, with (crew chief) Rick Ren and our crew, is just unbelievable."

The defending NASCAR Craftsman Truck Series champion is winning now in places he never won before.

His victory at Texas was the first of his career there, as was his dominating run April 26 at Kansas, when he stepped aside to let KHI teammate Jack Sprague lead laps and pick up bonus standings points. He led 140 of the 172 laps at Texas, establishing a new TMS track record.

Hornaday has now been to Victory Lane six times in the last 34 truck series races, and has 18 top-five finishes in that span.

He takes a 45-point lead over Tulare's Matt Crafton into this week's Cool City Customs 200 at Michigan International Speedway, one of eight tracks on the 22-track truck series schedule where he has yet to win.

"We finished in the top 10 the last two races there," Hornaday said. "Michigan is a lot like California as far as the (two-mile) layout, but for some reason, it doesn't drive like California does.

"I think we may have picked up a few things over the past couple of races at Michigan that can make us better this time."

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Hornaday posted second and fifth-place finishes the last two times out at Michigan's sister track in Fontana.

With the addition of Sprague, who's tied with Hornaday at three NCTS championships apiece, both race teams are benefitting from the additional race data.

It's enabled KHI, which Kevin Harvick began out of his garage for laughs in 2001, to challenge factory-backed Bill Davis Racing and Roush Fenway Racing for Craftsman Truck Series supremacy.

"The neat thing about all of this for me is that this isn't just business, it's personal," Hornaday said. "(My wife) Lindy and I helped Kevin get started when he first moved here from Bakersfield, and he really helped me out at a tough time in my career by giving me this opportunity to drive for him.

"Kevin and DeLana ran this program out of their own pocket for a while to keep us going, and they didn't have to do that. It meant so much to be able to give them their first championship, the way I was able to do for Dale Earnhardt at DEI (in 1996)."

Hornaday moved into Dale Jr.'s vacated seat in the Nationwide Series in 2000, but found himself out of a job when Earnhardt shifted the familiar NAPA sponsorship to the Sprint Cup Series with Michael Waltrip in 2001.

Hornaday did realize a lifelong dream when he drove the Sprint Cup Series for A.J. Foyt Racing in 2001, winning Rookie of the Year honors in

the Daytona 500 that claimed Earnhardt's life.

The season ultimately proved disastrous, with a solitary top-10 finish in 35 starts.

Other than 2003, when three wrecks by Shane Hmiel cost him the Nationwide Series championship while driving for Richard Childress, Hornaday seemed to fade into obscurity in NASCAR's two other regional touring series.

The return to the truck series in 2005 changed all that.

Hornaday turns 50 on June 18, but only shows signs of speeding up as his career race win total (35) keeps climbing toward his age.

"When you win one championship," Hornaday said, "it only makes you want to win the next one even more.

"And I'd love to win them back to back."

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