Season Preview 2018
By Mike Weber

River City Speedway begins its 34th year of stock car racing with the 2018 season opener at 5 p.m. on May 5 at the Columbia County Fairgrounds facility in St. Helens. An offseason of changes included the addition of two new motorsport classifications as the track expanded to eight Columbia County Racing Association (CCRA) divisions.

Darrin Rye, the new CCRA club president, is hopeful that the two new classes (Super Sport, Tuner) will help benefit the overall atmosphere at the track by increasing both attendance in the grandstands and the number of participants competing on the quarter-mile clay oval track. A total of 30 drivers participated in the track’s Test & Tune practice session on April 21 at the speedway.

“We’re very excited about bringing in the four-cylinder Tuner Division and the Super Stocks to the track,” said Rye, of Warren. “We also have lots of volunteers and many other people helping out this year. We have a new sound system, a new announcer (Josh Warbis) and so we feel like 2018 is really going to be a great year. I’m dedicating all my time and effort in making sure that everything goes really well at the track. By having two four cylinder divisions, we are catering to the budget racers and also to people who travel from out-of-town that want to compete here. We’re hoping to gain 20-30 cars each week with these two new classes.”

Local drivers considered as top contenders for a CCRA division championship include Greg Brumbaugh, Justin McMullen, Teagan Fischer, Wyatt Kaptur, Stephen Kaptur, Natasha Rye, Dick Gaboury, TJ Wegner, Dan Smith and Terry King.

Brumbaugh, 56, captured the 2017 Street Stock Division title and he’ll be seeking to win a second straight championship while driving his CLT Trucking/Hoyt Construction 1985 Chevrolet Malibu. Brumbaugh recorded eight top-five main event finishes last year and he edged Justin McMullen of St. Helens by just six points in the series standings (1,139-1,133).

“I was really worried going into the last race (Sept. 16, 2017) because Justin and I were very close in the point standings, but I got a top-five finish to help make it happen,” said Brumbaugh, who works as a truck driver for CLT Trucking of Scappoose.

McMullen, a former three-time Street Stock champion (2012, 2015, 2016), notched two main event wins and he totaled nine top-five’s with his McMullen Water Systems 1979 Chevy Malibu. McMullen, 28, is a five-time champion, since he also won Four-Cylinder Division titles in 2008 and 2009 and he’s hoping to win a sixth CCRA title this year. Other top drivers in the class include Tom Zywicki of Portland and King of Warren. Zywicki took third (1,113)in the standings last year and King was fourth with 1,047. The 26-point difference between first and third place marked the closest Street Stock finish among the top-three drivers ever in the 33-year track history.

“I’m not sure if I’ll be able to enter every race but I’ll be out there and try to get some wins and see how everything shapes up, so I think could possibly have a chance to win the championship,” said McMullen. “I’m not going to make a committment to being there for every race though. It will be fun to see everyone at the first race and how well everything goes and who has the fastest cars. It’s exciting to see two new classes at the track this year too. The Super Sport Division should be a lot of fun. My dad (Scott McMullen) will be driving his new car (1995 Chevy Monte Carlo) in that class this year and I know he’s really looking forward to that.”

Natasha Rye and her husband Darrin competed as co-drivers last year, while alternating positions each week in the driver’s seat of their 2010 Chevy Cobalt and they took sixth place in the Four Cylinder Division. Natasha will compete in a different class this year as she’ll drive a McMullen Water Systems/Alliance Automotive Chevy Malibu owned by Scott McMullen of St. Helens, and she’ll enter Street Stock Division events.

“I’m super excited about it, but I’m not sure how often I’ll be able to compete,” said Rye, daugter of two-time CCRA champion Tricia Brittain of St. Helens (2008 Sportsman, 1999 Women’s Division). “I’m hoping to compete for at least half or more of the season. My goals are to just race the hardest I’ve ever raced. I know my dad will be with me every step of the way cheering me on and that motivates me to do better and try harder.”

Natasha’s dad Sam Brittain, died unexpectedly last summer at age 46. An event honoring her father will be held June 9 with the Sam Brittain Memorial Race. It’s one of the highlights of the 15-race schedule that concludes Sept. 15.

Drivers expected to be frontrunners in the Four Cylinder Division include defending champion Joel Davis of Kelso, Jason Scheibel of Longview and Wegner of St. Helens. Davis, 57, recorded nine top-five main event finishes, including one win with his Economy Auto Wrecking 1996 Nissan Altima. Davis is seeking a second straight series title and he’ll have a good shot at accomplishing his goal. If Davis wins the title, he would be the first repeat winner since 2012, when Joel Beehler of St. Helens won consecutive titles.

In the Sportsman Division, defending champion Clyde White of Longview is considered as the top contender again this year. Other drivers also expected to be series frontrunners and hoping to move up in the standings include Woodland’s Devon Reed, Wyatt Kaptur of St. Helens and Hunter Gollyhorn of Scappoose. The quartet of drivers all finished in the top four of the point standings last year.

In the Dwarf Car Division, defending champion Teagan Fischer of Warren, will return and try to capture a second straight series title while driving her TFT Construction/Finish Line Graphics 1934 Ford Sedan two-third scale replica dwarf car. Fischer, 16, broke the speedway’s record previously held by Cody Smith of Scappoose, as the youngest driver ever in the track history to win a division title in an adult motorsport classification. The age group record doesn’t include the Tracer Division, which is for kids age 13-16.

Drivers who will compete for the Tracer championship include Kelso’s Wendy Vough, Trenton Brogan of Kelso and Ryan Potter of Vernonia. Potter, 14, won the 2016 Tracer title and Vough took second in the standings last year to champion Cailyn Farness of Sandy. However, Farness will not be returning to compete at the speedway this year. Brogan, 14, will be driving one of the fastest cars in the series as he’ll compete in a 1996 Economy Auto Wrecking Nissan Altima.

In the Modified Division, Stephen Kaptur of St. Helens will be seeking to capture a second consecutive title. Kaptur, 42, drove the Somers Racing/Hudson Garbage Service open wheel race car owned by Don West of St. Helens, to eight top-five main event wins. Drivers also expected to be top contenders include Dan Smith of Scappoose and Clyde White, who is a double duty driver that will compete in both the Sportsman and Modified classes.

In the Tuner Division, drivers will compete in four-cylinder cars that have over 150 horsepower. The traditional four-cylinder class is for cars with 150 horsepower or less. Gaboury, of Rainier, will likely be a frontrunner in the new class while driving his Ram Light Truck Salvage 2012 Nissan Sentra, which has over 200 horsepower. Gaboury’s son Chris of Portland, will be a co-driver in the Sentra as the father/son duo will alternate postions in the drivers seat occasionally at the speedway.

The Gaboury’s are the only father/son duo to win a stock car racing championship at Portland Speedway (closed in 2001). Dick won the 1981 Limited Sportsman title and Chris won the 1999 Limited Sportsman title. The Gaboury’s also won a River City Speedway championship. In 2013, they were co-drivers of their 1996 Nissan Altima and they won the Four-Cylinder Division title. Dick Gaboury also holds the Four-Cylinder Division track record as he circled the oval track with a time of 15.68 seconds on Aug. 17, 2013.

“When Chris and I raced together, it was really special and we had a great time,” said Dick Gaboury, 69, who is one of the oldest drivers competing at the speedway. “I don’t mean to brag, but I’ve won two championships, so I think that I can still drive a race car pretty well. I don’t think anyone will ever break my track record that I have in the Four-Cylinder class.”

Following Saturday’s season opener, the next race is scheduled for May 12, followed by a race on May 19. Since races are sometimes cancelled by inclement weather, it’s recommended to call the speedway office at 503-397-6506 to verify the schedule.