



From Race Car Driver to Soldier and Back

Roseville, CA - (May 11, 2010) - In his day job Michael Gorham takes care of helicopters for the Army, but on the weekends it is all about racing his No. 33 Street Stock car at All American Speedway.

Gorham was born in West Covina and raised in Lincoln. At age 10, he and his two sisters and brother participated in the 4H Club at the Placer County Fair. While there, he went to an Enduro race at All American Speedway and fell in love with car racing.

He started going to the Speedway regularly and he would go into the pits, talk to drivers and ask them all kinds of questions about racing. In 2001 his friend Luke Kaper, who drives the No. 39 Modified car, was helping Bomber driver Will Harmon with his car and Gorham started helping too.

In 2002, Gorham built a Bomber car with Kaper and they shared driving duties. It was Gorham's first experience racing a car. He said they pretty much destroyed the car after six or seven races. Kaper then built another Bomber for himself to drive. Gorham helped him work on the car, but he did not drive it.

Gorham continued doing that until he was sent to Iraq in 2004. He is in the Army National Guard and worked as a mechanic and crew chief on Black Hawk helicopters there. His job was to maintain the Black Hawks, and he was also a door gunner protecting the helicopters while moving troops and equipment. His stint in Iraq ended at the end of 2005 after a year of duty.

He said he flew many hours, but luckily, his stay in Iraq was mostly uneventful. He was involved in one helicopter accident in the dark of night flying with no lights when the helicopter hit the ground. There were no serious injuries to anyone on board and the helicopter was not damaged. Sometimes at night tracer bombs were aimed at his helicopter, but the enemy could only go by sound because of the helicopter being blacked out. "Life over in Iraq was about the missions," Gorham said.

After his first tour of duty ended, he came back home and bought a Street Stock. In 2006, his rookie year, he won a couple of heat races and a trophy dash, but never won a main event.

In 2007, he took a year off from racing to tear his car apart and rebuild it. Then in 2008 he was called up for his second tour of duty, this time in Afghanistan. During training before he left, Gorham was able to race three or four races in a car he borrowed from Kaper.

He said Afghanistan and Iraq were two completely different battlefields. While most of Iraq was flat and dusty, Afghanistan had tall mountains and valleys. Gorham was a medevac and a crew chief on a Black Hawk helicopter. The crew picked up U.S. and British soldiers and Afghan nationals, and provided care for them in the helicopter until they could get them to a medical facility or makeshift hospital.

He did not have much contact with the Iraqi people, but he said the Afghan people were usually smiling and outgoing towards the soldiers. They asked many questions about where he was from and about his lifestyle back in the U.S.

Gorham has been in the military for 10 years and has another 10 years before he can retire. He works as a full-time reservist in Rancho Cordova at Mather Air Force Base as a helicopter technician inspector.

He said racing is like having a second job because sometimes he works on his car more than he works at his regular job. He loves the camaraderie with the other racers. "I really like the adrenaline rush, he said. "Sometimes I get butterflies and get a little nervous before a race, but once I am on the track that all goes out the window. I love racing side-by-side with guys like Chris Lambert and Mickey Owens."

He loves working on the car and loves the geometry of making the car better in the turns. "It's a challenge," he said. "Even when I am not racing I watch Luke race his Modified and Cody Rickard race his Bomber, knowing that I helped them here and there with their cars."

His girlfriend Danielle Dumas is also in the Army National Guard and Gorham said she is very supportive of his racing. He said maybe in a couple of years, after he gets more experience, he'd like to try racing in the Modified division.

Gorham says there is a possibility he will have to go back for a third tour of duty abroad, but for now he is enjoying his racing. It is something he hopes to do for a long, long time.

PHOTO: Michael Gorham driving his No. 33 Street Stock at All American Speedway.
Photo: Jeannie Broussal

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