

# Northeast Outlaw Road Trip to Jersey

photos & story by  
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It all started with a phone call last fall from a perfect stranger. As I sat with my wife in our favorite restaurant, on the other end of my North Carolina-based cell phone was a man with a thick northern accent who was obviously very passionate about his racing series. “It’s more of a club than anything,” explained founder of the Northeast Outlaw Pro Mod Association, John Mazzoranna. “These guys are serious competitors when they’re on the race track, but at the end of the day we sit down together as friends and have good times and BBQs,” says Mazzoranna.

That’s all well and good, but why place a phone call to a stranger in North Carolina you ask? Simply put, John Mazzoranna felt it was high time he hired a press release writer to promote his 16 year old racing series. As fate would have it, Vinny Budano, driver of the Scott Shafiroff Racing Enterprises Camaro is a client of mine. Budano also has strong ties to the Northeast Outlaw Pro Mod Association, and put it’s founder in touch with yours truly.

As John and I spoke over the phone that day last fall, I learned many things about his northeast-based racing series and was soon convinced that it was one of the best kept secrets of any locale. Founded in 1992, it’s among the oldest of heads-up doorslammer leagues in the country, and quiet possibly the most diverse. It’s one thing to cater to just one particular style of race car, John Mazzoranna, however, invites them all. “We’re just crazy like that,” laughs Mazzoranna, as he spoke of the wide array of race cars that fans enjoy at one of his events.

Everything from IHRA-legal blower cars to mountain motor Pro Stocks to nitrous and even turbo-motivated entries routinely meet side by side on the starting line to battle it out. Most people rarely get the opportunity to see such a vast display of diversified power in a single day. What’s more, this club sometimes stages 2-day events and just for kicks, they’ll race to the 1/8 mile the first day, then let it all hang out with full 1/4 mile blasts on day 2.

Turns out, the more I wrote about this club for the purpose of generating internet press releases, the more I wanted to attend one of its races and get a first hand serving of the excitement that is the Northeast Outlaw Pro Mod Association. Mr. Mazzoranna and I went over the 2008 schedule, and pretty soon a road trip to New Jersey’s Atco Raceway was planned for July 12. With the aid of mapquest.com I chartered a course that placed me on 20 different highways through 6 states during my 10 hour trek north. With many rest stops visited, I rejoiced at the sight of Atco Raceway on a beautiful Saturday morning in July.

I phoned John as I drove through the pits, giving him a description of my rental car. “I’m wearing a blue shirt and I’m on foot,” said John. Within minutes, we crossed paths and for the first time I was able to meet and shake the hand of this mystery client with whom I’d spoken to so many times over the telephone. John took me around to each and every member in attendance, introducing them and telling me about their racing history with the Northeast Outlaw club.

The Atco event, billed as an “Extreme” race, was heavy on the purse thanks to keynote sponsors like club member Mike Ashley’s Lend America Mortgage company. A 16 car field of fast Pro Mods, thundering side by side down the 1/4 mile provided speeds in excess of 230 mph. The only thing missing was another full day of exactly what I had just witnessed on this beautiful Saturday in New Jersey. There’s always next time, and you can best believe that it’s already being looked into.

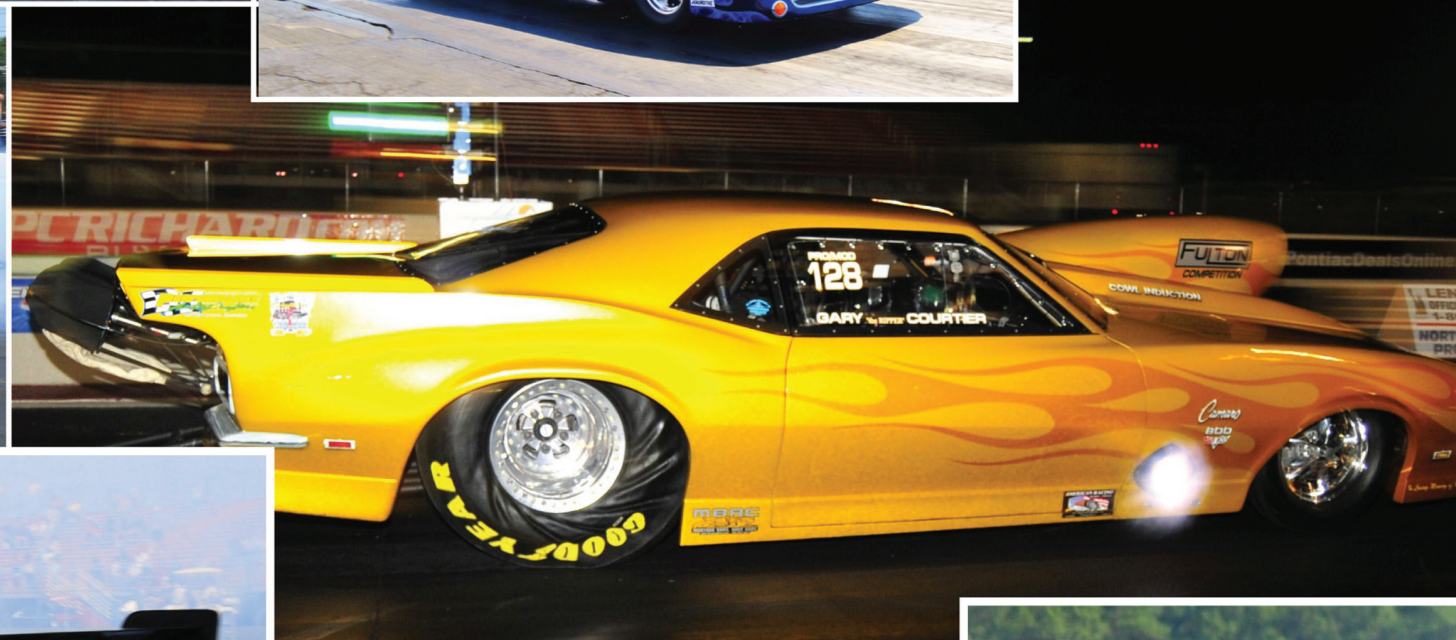


**RARE BREED:** Jimmy Barker’s blown Lumina looks like normal Pro Mod hardware at a glance, but this Bob Jenkins-built doorslammer is among the most surprisingly unique race cars ever built. Off the beaten path features include “Tilt-away steering wheel” for easier entry, and also a funny car-inspired flip top body. Barker shined in front of the New Jersey crowd, winning his first ever Northeast Outlaw event, while competing in the blower vs. nitrous category.

**HE’S BACK!** The fear continues as Tommy Gray spooks fans everywhere with his legacy of “Undertaker” race cars. Gray qualified #1 in Atco with a 6.29 @ 232mph, but mechanical problems prevented him from making eliminations. Tommy got his revenge in a few short weeks when he won an ADRL event in Maryland.

**WINNING COMBO:** Jimmy Barker (right) stands along side veteran car builder, Bob Jenkins. A builder of race cars for customers including, Joe Amato, Darrell Gwynn and Frank Manzo, Jenkins is also credited with building the Chevy Lumina of Jimmy Barker. Jimmy scored a win over Gary Courtier in the finals of their match-up, then got past John Pluchino in the “King of the hill” run off, thus being crowned the overall winner in Atco.

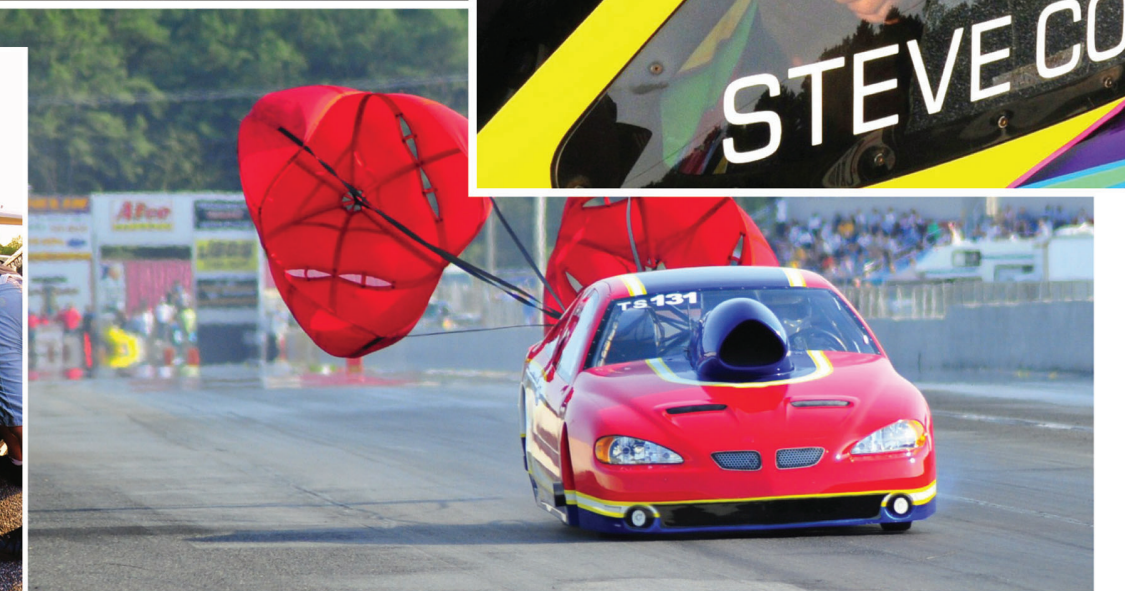
**HOOKIN’ HARD:** Bruce Mullins found some good bite out of the gate at Atco. Mullins qualified this slick 63 Corvette in the middle of the pack with a 6.60 @ 217mph. Mechanical gremlins forced Mullins to sit out eliminations at this outing, hoping for better luck in the near future.



**GOLD RUSH:** Gary Courtier turns heads everywhere with this stunning Montana Brothers 68 Camaro. Courtier struggled during qualifying, but dug down deep and fought his way to the finals with Jimmy Barker.

**SHE’S LOUD!** Benny Alfonso’s Montana Brothers Race Cars-built 57 Chevy is always a fan favorite at any event. When we met up with Benny in Atco, he was singing the praises of his tasty new sponsor, LOUD Energy Drink, soon to be found in retailers everywhere.

**LOW DOWN RIDER:** John Pluchino scored a victory in Atco with this slick, Jerry Haas Mercury Cougar. Motivated by John Kaase power, Pluchino routinely competes this car in IHRA Pro Stock, as well as being a charter member of the Northeast Outlaw club since its inception in 1992.

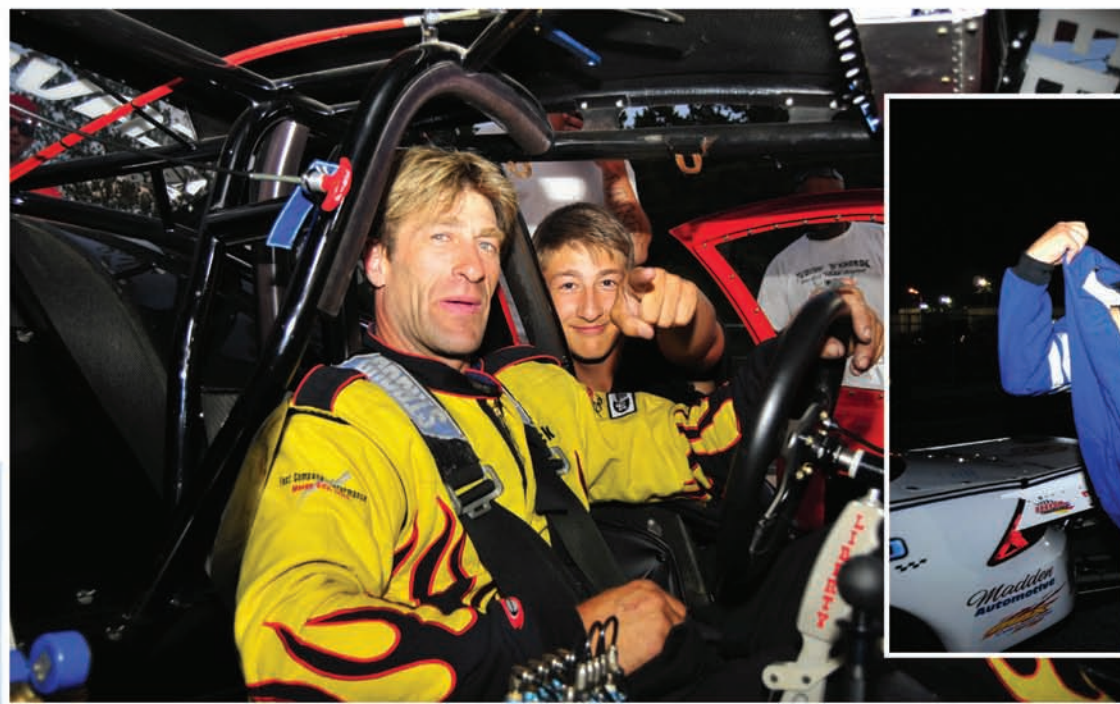


**KING OF QUEENS:** New Yorker Steve Cossis had a good outing at Atco, qualifying 6th with a 6.57 @ 210mph. Cossis was out first against John Pluchino in the finals, but the car moved out of the groove and touched the center line. Cossis tows his Corvette up and down the east coast for various heads-up events, and has scored a Quick-8 Racers Association win in Darlington in years past.

**FIRST TIME OUT:** Joe Dunne joined the Northeast Outlaws the very morning of this event in Atco. Dunne made the field on this pass, clocking 6.99 @ 207mph. Joe got past Steve Assenmacher in round one, then gave Gary Courtier a good race in the semi finals. Pleased with his efforts, Dunne vows a return to the Northeast Outlaw Pro Mods.



**HEY YOU!:** Matt Diestch, Jr. (right) helps his father get buckled down for a qualifying pass. Diestch has got his Rick Jones-constructed Cavalier running like a champ since hiring set-up wizard, Joe Lepone, Jr. Matt qualified 4th with a 6.49 @ 220mph, and made it to the semis before meeting eventual winner, John Pluchino.



**WE WON!:** John Pluchino, Jr. (right) didn't waste any time sharing the good news of victory. John Pluchino Sr. got past Jim Kane and Matt Diestch, en route to a show down with Steve Cossis in the finals.



**HANG ON!:** Chris Russo went for a wild ride in his blown, 63 Corvette at Atco. The wheel center almost broke completely apart on this opening round qualifying run, forcing Chris to do some impressive navigating to keep this car off the wall.

**NEED FOR SPEED:** Jeff Blasi streaks past the finish at 220mph during this second round qualifying attempt. Fresh off his first win within the series at Cecil County two weeks earlier, Blasi qualified 2nd at Atco with a 6.42 elapsed time. Blasi's Corvette is a creation of St Louis, Missouri's Mike Hodges, and is motivated by an electronic fuel injected Pat Musi-built 740.



**BEAUTIFUL BUICK:** Frank Patille could have easily won best appearing in Atco with this gorgeous 57 Buick. The car danced around during qualifying, but Patille still managed to make the show at 15th. In round one, Frank was out of the gate first against Joe Dunne, but the Buick began to move to the center line around half track, allowing Dunne to drive around for the win.

**Drag  
Illustrated**