



*Testimony of*

Antron Brown, NHRA Top Fuel

*before the*

Senate Environment and Public Works Committee

*on*

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When you hear the word motorsports, what do you think of? For most people speed, excitement, and entertainment come to mind. For me, racing is all about family. It is sharing my passion for competing on the track with my father, uncle, children, and the folks on my race team. Motorsports is also my career, which is why I am so passionate about preserving its future.

Racing has been a part of my life for as long as I can remember. I grew up going to drag strips with my father, Albert, and my uncle, Andre, who were – and continue to be – avid National Hot Rod Association (NHRA) Sportsman racers. My late grandfather, Albert, was also a drag racer. He started racing in the 1960s and passed his passion for racing on to my father and uncle.

Shortly after I learned how to ride a bicycle at age four, I began riding motorcycles. By the time I was 12, I started competing in motocross in 80 cc dirt bikes. In addition to racing, I enjoyed wrenching on my family's vehicles, including a 1972 Chevy Vega, a 1968 Barracuda, and a 1962 Corvette.

By my senior year of high school, I started competing at Atco and Englishtown dragstrips in New Jersey in addition to competing at drag strips in Cecil County in Delaware, Buds Creek in Maryland, and Maple Grove Raceway in Pennsylvania. At the time, I was racing a Suzuki GSXR 1100, which is a production motorcycle. My father and I along with his friend Bob Carpenter modified the cam and pipe on the bike to help me compete on the track. At the time, I was routinely making 9.2 second passes, nearly 160 miles an hour, in a quarter mile.

After graduating from high school, I went on to Mercer County Community College in New Jersey, where I was also a sprinter and long jumper. I graduated with an associate degree in 1997 and planned to accept a full scholarship to Long Island University. My goal was to one day be an Olympian; however, racing created a different path for me. Former NFL star and current NFL Vice President of Football Operations Troy Vincent, who is married to my cousin Tommi, started Team 23 Racing, and he provided me the opportunity to race in NHRA's Pro Stock Motorcycle series as his first driver. It was an opportunity I couldn't pass up and one that forever changed my life.

I competed for 10 seasons in the Pro Stock Motorcycle series, riding on a Suzuki PSM, which is designed specifically for drag racing. I had a great run in Pro Stock, winning 16 times, and I finished second in the points standings in 2001 and 2006. I made the move from racing motorcycles to competing in Top Fuel drag racing in 2008, joining David Powers Motorsports as the driver of the Matco Tools dragster. The transition to Top Fuel wasn't easy, but I worked hard and was fortunate to have early success. I won in just my fourth Top Fuel start, edging out three-time series champion Larry Dixon in the final round at Houston Raceway Park, which made me the first driver in NHRA history to win races in both Top Fuel and Pro Stock Motorcycle categories.

2009 was a pivotal year for me. I started driving for Don Schumacher Racing late in the season, and began working with chief Mark Oswald, the 1984 NHRA Funny Car champion, who is still helping to lead my team 13 years later. Over the course of that season, we won seven No. 1 qualifying positions and six event titles.

I've had an incredibly rewarding career that's included NHRA Top Fuel world championships in 2012, 2015, and 2016, and 69 NHRA event titles, including 53 in Top Fuel and 16 in Pro Stock Motorcycle. I'm now in my 25<sup>th</sup> year as an NHRA racer and, earlier this year, I started a new chapter in my life as a driver and a race team owner. It's a move I planned to make back in 2020 from driver for Don Schumacher Racing, to the role of driver-owner for our new team, AB Motorsports, however COVID-19 delayed the launch of our team. I'm fortunate to be surrounded by an incredible team, including my car chief Brad Mason and my co-crew chiefs Brian Corradi and Mark Oswald. They are responsible for the tuning my 11,000-horsepower Top Fuel dragster, which powered AB Motorsports to our first team win a few weeks ago in Topeka, Kansas.

I am thankful for the opportunities racing has provided me, my family, and the folks on our team. I love being part of NHRA, which was started by Wally Parks, editor of Hot Rod magazine, in 1951 to get hot rodders off the streets and competing at the drag strip. Over 25,000 racers joined NHRA in its first year for "safety, sportsmanship, and fellowship." NHRA initiated the 1954 "Drag Safari", a nationwide tour to encourage organized drag racing with an emphasis on safety. The tour met with law enforcement and local government officials at each stop to explain their program, involve local car clubs, set up sites, and run drag races. Drag Safari would lead to the 1955 US Nationals for drag racing. By 1957, NHRA more than doubled in size to 57,000 racers.

I'm proud to have carried on a Brown family tradition of racing in NHRA for many reasons, but the organization's mission and commitment to giving back to the communities where it holds races is especially commendable. I enjoy being a part of the NHRA's Youth and Education Services program, which provides me the opportunity to speak to hundreds of students during race weeks. I have the chance to tell my story and educate our youth on the importance of setting goals and working to achieve them. I also enjoy speaking to high school and college students through Matco Tools, which has sponsored my team since 2009. Racing has taught me so much, including everything from physics to perseverance. I'm fortunate that I get to share those lessons with young men and women.

I enjoy working with companies like Toyota of North America, Matco Tools, Lucas Oil, and many others to research and develop new technology, new innovations and new products that end up in vehicles – including Electric Vehicles – that you and I drive every day. Racing is test laboratory that is responsible for many of the performance, safety, and efficiency gains that have been made in the automotive industry over the last century.

I'm fortunate that I grew up in a family of racers and feel blessed to be able to share my passion for drag racing with my children. In 2013, my oldest son, Anson, and my daughter,

Arianna, started to compete in the NHRA's Jr. Drag Racing Series where children as young as five years old drive one-half scale dragsters. Anson was only eight when he started, but he proved to be a fast learner, winning six race titles as a rookie. Arianna, who was 12 at the time, became the first woman in the Brown family to compete in drag racing. My youngest son Adler is also an avid competitor. He started racing at age 12.

### **Converting Motor Vehicles for the Track**

Most racers don't start out competing in production vehicles, the reality is that for a large percentage of us, our first foray into competing on the track is done using cars, motorcycles, and even trucks that were designed for the street. The reason why boils down to economics. Racing can be an expensive hobby, and it's typically cheaper to take a motor vehicle and make some modifications to it for the track than to purchase a purpose-built racecar. As someone who didn't grow up rich, I'm passionate in my belief that we must offer a cost-effective way to ensure the sport is inclusive, allowing people of all different socioeconomic backgrounds to be able to compete on the track. That's why I'm speaking today in strong support of S. 2736, the Recognizing the Protection of Motorsports Act, or RPM Act as it's commonly known. Without the ability to convert a street legal motorcycle into a dedicated track bike, I don't know what I'd be doing today.

Motorsports has been an incredible source of joy in my life. It's something that I'm so proud to share with members of my family. I am incredibly blessed to race at the highest levels as my career. How many people around the world can say that they love what they do? I'm lucky to be in the small group, but that's not why I'm here today. If racers aren't allowed to convert street vehicles into dedicated race cars, it's not going to impact me or most other professional racers competing at the highest levels. I compete in a purpose-built top fuel dragster, which the EPA maintains is outside of the purview of the Clean Air Act, since it was never a street legal vehicle. I came to Washington to speak in support of the RPM Act, because this bill helps to protect grassroots racers, especially young men and women who have dreams of one day competing on the track as a professional. I want to make sure that government policy doesn't provide a roadblock to their ability to start competing on the track. Make no mistake. If you can't modify a motor vehicle into a dedicated track vehicle, this will stop people from getting into racing and deny people the opportunity to pursue their passion. This bill is also important because there are many other career opportunities that will open for young racers as a result of the technical skills they develop while working on and modifying competition vehicles.

### **The RPM Act**

The RPM Act, S.2736, is not new legislation. The bill was first introduced in 2016 to clarify in federal law that it is legal to modify the emission system of a motor vehicle in order to convert it into a dedicated race car. The bill, if enacted into law, would remove any uncertainty that it is legal for racers to convert a street vehicle into dedicated race vehicle, a practice embraced by grassroots racers for decades at a majority of the 1,500 plus racetracks across America.

NASCAR was founded on this practice with racers competing in modified street vehicles. The practice of converting a street vehicle into a race vehicle went unquestioned from the time the

Clean Air Act became law in 1970 until 2015, when the EPA issued a draft rulemaking (not finalized) clarifying their position that converted vehicles must remain emissions-compliant, even if they are no longer driven on public streets or highways. The EPA currently maintains there is nothing in law allowing the modification of a vehicle's emission system for the purpose of converting it for racing, which the agency uses as its justification to fine companies that manufacture, sell, and install race parts that impact emissions on vehicles that were designed for street use.

I thank Senator Burr for introducing the RPM Act and all the bipartisan cosponsors, including those members of the EPW Committee who are cosponsoring the bill. The RPM Act is one of the most bipartisan bills in Congress with more than 31 cosponsors, including 20 Republicans and 11 Democratic Senators.

As a racer and someone who is passionate about motorsports not just as a business, but as a way of life, I implore you to stand up for more than 400,000 racers across the country who compete using a vehicle that was originally designed for the street and is now trailered to the track and used exclusively for competition. In most cases, these vehicles are being driven a few times a year, as an infinitesimally small percentage of those competing do so as a full-time job.

I want to be clear. The RPM Act is about legitimate racing and ensuring that racers can purchase the parts they need to compete on the track. The bill doesn't protect companies that produce and sell products that defeat emissions controls that are used on the roads and highways. That's illegal under the Clean Air Act. The RPM act does nothing to limit the EPA's ability to enforce against bad actors. This is a narrowly tailored bill designed to provide long-term certainty to racers regarding the legality of modifying a car, motorcycle, or truck that is converted into a dedicated racing vehicle used exclusively on the track, giving them the peace of mind that their modified race vehicle is legal.

I would also note that the text of the RPM Act has been modified since the bill was first introduced in 2016 to ensure that race parts sold for the track don't end up on vehicles that are driven on our roads and highways. For example, Sec. 4(a)(3) of S. 2736 states that the regulations EPA writes to implement the RPM Act "provide that a manufacturer, seller, or installer of a part or component seeking to use the exemption under the amendment made by section 3(a) may not rely solely on unsupported declarations from the purchaser or owner of a vehicle about— (A) the legal status of the vehicle; or (B) the intended use of— (i) the part or component; or (ii) the vehicle." The RPM Act also has been modified from a excluding race vehicles from the Clean Air Act to ensuring that they are exempted from the law to protect EPA's ability to enforce against companies that break the law. The bill also now specifies in Sec. 3 that the exemption only applies to race vehicles that "are not authorized for use on a street or highway."

While the EPA has signaled that it does not plan to bring enforcement actions against individual racers who compete in emissions-modified vehicles, the agency maintains that it has the authority to do so. Racers make substantial investments in their vehicles, outfitting them with

products that improve their safety and performance. Racers and race teams spend \$7.8 Billion to purchase racing parts each year. Why not provide them absolute certainty that they are protected by federal law as long as they use their modified race vehicle exclusively on the track?

The RPM Act also provides assurances to companies that produce and sell the parts that racers need to build competition vehicles that can compete and win on race day. Most of these companies are small businesses that are simply looking for the federal government to provide them a legal pathway to conduct their business without fear of being fined. Motorsports parts businesses employ tens of thousands of American workers, creating innovative products to make race cars and motorcycles perform better. These products cover a broad spectrum, from improving fuel-efficiency, suspension, and aerodynamics to increasing power output and incorporating advanced composite materials. Once fully-outfitted, race vehicles bear little resemblance to the days when they were street-legal. From roll-cages, netting, a safety harness, and an interior that is void of most standard features, dedicated race vehicles that are converted from automobiles are easily distinguishable. Motorsports parts businesses need to be able to sell products to racers under a legal framework that is easy to understand and doesn't unduly burden companies making sales. This is important to the men and women who work both in racing and for motorsports parts businesses. According to 2012 study from Purdue University, , motorsports businesses employ over 23,000 men and women in my home state of Indiana and over 421,000 people across the U.S. For Hoosier workers, racing is not only exciting, but it also pays over 50% more than the average wage in other industries<sup>1</sup>. Passing the RPM Act into law is also important given that racing is a major source of entertainment in communities throughout the United States. Motorsports is especially critical in smaller and rural communities that are more likely to be home to racetracks and often have fewer entertainment options compared to metropolitan areas. The small business owners that own and operate these racetracks do so because they are passionate about racing. For most track owners, it is not a highly profitable venture. However, the men and women that operate tracks and drag strips know how important their facilities are to the people who live in their communities.

Local track owners struggle day in and day out to keep their facilities economically viable. From noise ordinances to urban sprawl, their business model faces daunting challenges, not the least of which is ensuring that they have a robust enough field to provide quality entertainment to the patrons in the stands. Tracks depend on having a strong field of racers to entertain their fans. Track owners need racers who will invest in their vehicles and show up to compete. Racers understand the importance of the RPM Act and crave the certainty in federal law provided by the bill. These men and women invest in their race vehicles, and they deserve to have a strong level of certainty that they will be enforced against for modifying their vehicles. Please help them.

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.purdue.edu/newsroom/releases/2012/Q4/purdue-led-study-highlights-motorsport-industrys-significant-impact-across-indiana,-worldwide.html>

I appreciate the Senate Environment and Public Works Committee taking up the RPM Act, because I understand what is at stake. This is about protecting the future of racing, which provides jobs and family-friendly entertainment in communities across our country. This is a passion for me and millions of Americans who love racing. It's a pleasure to have the opportunity to testify before the committee on something that is so important.