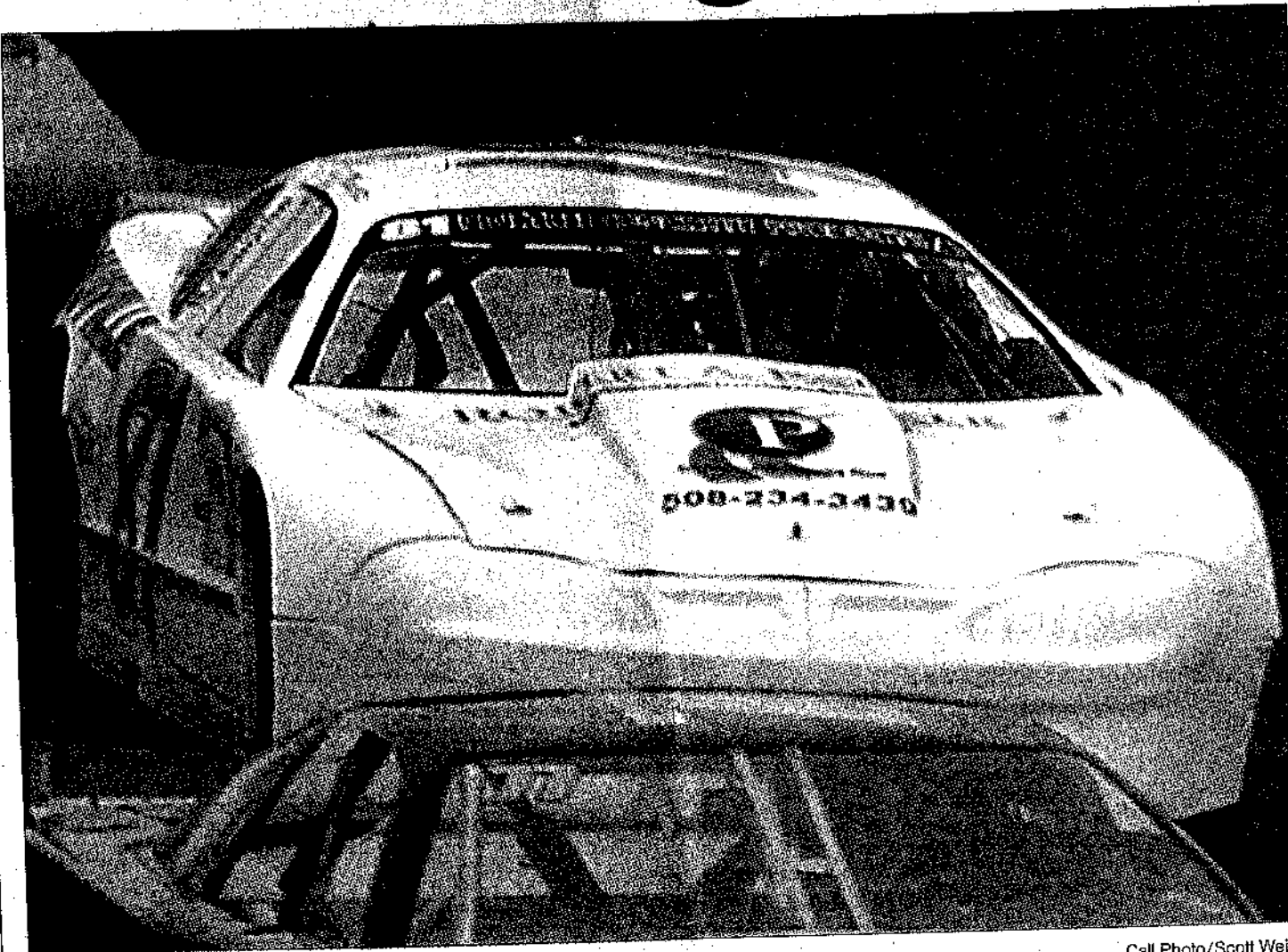


Marcotte gets first 1st



**Wins Thompson's
Late Model feature;
fellow Millville
resident Lemay
wins Pro Stock race**

By TRAVIS BARRETT
Sports Writer

THOMPSON, Conn. — In racing, as in life, timing is so often everything.

One night before good friend Joe Scungio's birthday, young gun R.J. Marcotte of Millville led the final 23 laps of Thursday night's Late Model division 25-lap feature at Thompson International Speedway to collect the first checkered flag of his racing career.

Marcotte dedicated the victory to Scungio in an emotional victory lane. Scungio would have been 23 on Friday were his life not tragically lost over the winter.

"It's so awesome that this could happen the night before his birthday," said Marcotte. "It's awesome that it could happen at any time, but even better that it was tonight."

Marcotte started fourth and had worked to second before the race's only caution

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MILLVILLE'S R.J. MARCOTTE steers the No. 81 machine during a recent race at Thompson International Speedway. Marcotte drove to victory for the first time in his career on Thursday night, winning the 25 lap Late Model feature race.

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flag flew on lap two. On the restart, he jumped around Darrin Stevens for the lead and never looked back. Runner-up Jeff Plakias trailed by as many as 10 car lengths before closing to half that margin in light lapped traffic over the final few circuits.

A caution flag may have presented a different scenario, but it never came and Marcotte leapt off his driver's side door panel and into the arms first of his father and then the rest of his crew in victory lane.

"I just have a great, great crew that always gives me a really good car," said Marcotte. "We just haven't always had the luck in the past... I was definitely glad that there wasn't a caution. My dad told me over the radio that (Plakias) was a long way back, and that was exactly what I wanted to hear."

Fred Laforge Jr., Rick Gentes and Charles Bailey III rounded out the top five behind Marcotte and Plakias.

Gentes, of Woonsocket, may have had the best shot of anyone at catching Marcotte had the race gone behind the pace car in the late going. He started 11th, narrowly avoided the spinning Rick LaFlesh and Jay Stuart on lap two and passed a total of seven cars on his way to the front of the field.

"There were no cautions, so what are you going to do?" Gentes asked. "It would have been nice to see what would have happened if the tires had a chance to cool down."

Regardless, Gentes made up 12 points on Late Model leader Scott Bronczyk (10th place finish) to cut his 26-point deficit entering the night nearly in half.

"I do want to win that third championship," admitted Gentes. "I do care about it, but I just don't want to get tied up in all that mess just yet. When September gets here, then I'll worry about it."

The rest of the top 10 consisted of John Falconi, Stevens, Dennis Botticello, Corey Hutchings and Bronczyk.

The night, though, belonged to Marcotte. Marcotte and the memory of his friend, that is.

"He really meant a lot to me and to my racing career," said Marcotte. "He's a big part of this (win)."

"Four years is a long time to get the first win, but I think there's probably a couple more right behind this one. Usually we have a problem in the heat race and then we adjust on the car for the feature, but we ran pretty close to the same thing tonight."

JOE LEMAY HAD a long week, one that required repairing a severely damaged Pro Stock.

But the work paid off, as Lemay made it a "Millville Double" on Thursday night by winning his second 30-lap feature of the year. Lemay's entire rear end had to be cut off and replaced after a tangle with the turn four wall the week before.

"We really had a great car the last three weeks, and it was right back where it was," said Lemay, who had to hold off a furiously charging Dave Berghman on the final lap. "I knew it after the heat race, and I told my brother that it was going to be good. But after last week, I didn't expect the car to be this good again."

What looked like it would be a week-long reparation project when the car left the track last Thursday actually turned out to be a pretty quick turnaround, thanks to a yeoman's effort from Lemay's hired help.

"I can't thank my crew enough," Lemay said. "They had this thing painted by Sunday night — and people saw how bad it was wrecked. They just did an awesome job."

BO GUNNING DOMINATED the night's big event, a 75-lap Sunoco Modified feature. Gunning led more than three-quarters of the going, only briefly losing the point when the third caution of the race closed the field with 15 laps to go. Modified points leader Eric Berndt worked around Gunning for a few laps before Gunning eventually went back around him in turn two and drove off to his second win of the season.