

Former racer gives fans a real sight

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In all his years of racing, he could never hear the crowd cheer over the rumble of his Modified engine.

All that changed Aug. 9, when Larry Woody stepped behind the wheel and drove in front of race fans again at the Cottage Grove Speedway.

As his borrowed Sportsman stock car slowly made its way around the track, Larry wasn't about to set any track records or qualify for an A-main. Those days are over.

However, for a man who lost his sight 16 months ago in a horrific accident on Interstate-5, speed wasn't his mission. It was all about redemption.

"I could hear the crowd," said an exuberant Larry. "In all the years I



Larry Woody, a former Modified stock-car driver, was blinded in an accident on I-5 in 2002. He fulfilled a dream on Aug. 9 by taking a few laps around the track at the Cottage Grove Speedway.

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raced, I never heard the crowd. I could hear them loud and clear. It was an amazing feeling."

Larry, who was given directions and assistance over a radio by track official Ernie Olsen, took four laps around the track. Each time he approached the main grandstand just past Turn 4 the crowd cheered him on.

One man, a tough looking pit crew member, was brought to tears as Larry made his laps, and his mark on the crowd. It was poignant moment at the track.

"Part of the reason I wanted to do this is that it was a dream of mine to let people in the stands — and that read this — that there are still things you can do with a little bit of a disability or a major disability," said Larry, 42.

In April of 2002, Larry was

gearing up for his comeback on the Modified circuit at the Cottage Grove Speedway. He had raced there since 1997 before taking a hiatus after 2000. He wanted to get back to the 1/4-mile clay track.

However, when he was traveling on I-5, a tractor-trailer crossed the center median, striking Larry and his car head on. Larry amazingly survived the wreck, but his sight was lost forever.

Larry had broken ribs, a lower back fracture, and several lacerations to his knees and legs in the accident, but his face and eyes were severely damaged. He underwent a 7 1/2-hour surgery as doctors essentially rebuilt his face from his jawbones to his eyebrows, said Larry.

After a long recovery, Larry was able to start attending races again this year. But still, there was something missing. He could feel it. He wanted to step

behind the wheel of a stock car again. After some discussion with Olson, Larry was given a green light to take some test laps on the Friday before the races.

"On Friday night, I was extremely nervous," he said.

He took 25 laps that night, but nothing would compare to the four he would take on Saturday.

"For me, it was just like getting back in the car again for racing," he said. "It was just an awesome feeling hearing the crowd over the sound of the engine. It was a great feeling."

Larry, who is a track regular, plans to continue going to the track every Saturday even though he'll never see another main event again.

However, he's a skilled mechanic and plans on continuing to help out his friends in the pits any way he can.

"They can't get rid of me out here," Larry joked.