



Talking with the best off-road racer

by John Howell

FIRST MET Brian Kinwald at the '92 ROAR Off-Road Nats in Dallas, TX. One of my assignments while I was at the race was to conduct a mini-interview with Brian as part of our race coverage. When I caught up

with him, my first impression was, "Now here's a really quiet, somewhat shy dude, who digs R/C cars." As soon as I saw him hit the track, though, my impression quickly changed. His personality split, and he was a madman out there. You could tell he didn't want to settle for second place. He made driving an R/C car that fast look easy, while everyone else was struggling. Brian went on to win the Modified 2WD national title at that event, and he also made it into the 4WD A-Main.

Since then, I've had many opportunities to see Brian in action. I've watched him come through the ranks to win not only a ton of other national titles, but also to claim the title of off-road world champion. In my opinion (and those of many others), he's the best off-road driver in the world at this time. Brian is one of the most dedicated racers in the sport, and it shows; he excels at any type of off-road racing, be it electric or gas. There have recently been a lot of changes in Brian's racing career; most noticeable is the major change of sponsors—from Team Associated/Reedy to Team Trinity/Team Losi. No matter where he goes or what he races, he's sure to be one of the fastest, if not *the* fastest, on the track. Frank Masi and I ran into Brian at the RCHTA show in Chicago, and the three of us sat down and talked about his racing career—how he started and where he's headed.

Doog: How did you get into R/C car racing?

Kinwald: Basically, one of my friend's older brothers had an RC10, and I just played around with it. He found out about a local track nearby and he started racing, and I went to watch. This was around '87. I watched him for a while, and then I got into it and started racing.

Frank: When you saw your first race, what was it about racing that really got you turned on to it and made you want to do it?

Kinwald: Probably the monster trucks. The first JG-type, conversion-type trucks looked pretty cool to me, and we all wanted to get them. That's mainly what got me into it—just messin' around with that type of thing. Then I actually found out I could race in an organized fashion. I used to race BMX, so I already understood the basics of racing.

Doog: When you first started racing, what equipment were you using?

Kinwald: The first car I had was a Losi/JG conversion monster truck.

Frank: How long did it take, from when you started, to find that you were a really good racer?

Kinwald: When I went through about four months of just breaking...I couldn't even get through a 4-minute race; then I started watching people, and I noticed that everyone was crashing. I figured that even if I go slow, as long as I don't crash, I'll most likely end up winning the race.

Doog: How long was it before you started winning consistently?

Kinwald: It probably took me a year. After a year, a year and a half, you could say I was competitive.

Frank: Was there ever a point where you said to yourself, "I have to look for a sponsor," or did a sponsor seek you out?

Kinwald: I never really went looking for a sponsor. It was one of my goals, but at the time, the teams were pretty small and there weren't a lot of sponsored drivers. So I didn't really think I had a shot at

getting sponsored; but apparently I did. My first sponsor was Peak Performance; that was around two years into my racing career.

Doog: What propelled you into the spotlight, or at what time were you first noticed?

Kinwald: The ROAR Nationals at the Hobby Haven raceway in 1990. Mike Reedy kind of knew that I wanted to run his motors and to be sponsored by Associated. I asked him what it took to be sponsored by them, and he told me that you have to make the Main at big races. I qualified fifth at the Nationals, so that kind of got me in the door at Associated.

Frank: With the way races are run right now, do you feel that you need one major sponsor to even make the show? What chances are there for the privateer?

Doog: Like when Masami won the 4WD Worlds without a sponsor. Can that be done today?

Kinwald: I think so. In on-road I don't, but in off-road, I think it's possible. I know people who aren't sponsored by anybody, and they have enough talent to go fast, if they take it seriously.

Frank: What do you think about a separate class for factory drivers?

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Do we need it at this point?

Kinwald: I think that would be good. I'm not really sure if we need it. I think most of the sponsored guys will tell you we don't need it; but most of the unsponsored guys will say we do, mainly because we have access to prototype parts or tires that they don't have access to. Also, I've found that the guys who want the separate classes are usually the guys who hang out with factory drivers. It's the guys who don't hang out with the factory drivers who like to race against us most of the time. Usually, they want to see how they could do.

Doog: I'm curious about when you walk onto the drivers' stand right before a big A-Main at a national event; what goes through your mind right before the buzzer goes off? How do you focus on your race?

Kinwald: I mainly try to be as calm as possible and not really worry about it. Usually, I'll think about where I am on the grid, or mainly about the start; I think about the start the most.

Frank: Considering all the people you've raced against, does anyone stick out in



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your mind as being a calm, cool racer—someone you can't psyche-out on the drivers' stand?

Kinwald: A few people won't get psyched-out, just because they've been doing this for a long time and they're calm. Jeremy Kortz is probably the only one you can't rattle in any way. He basically doesn't care about racing at all, so that makes him fast—in my opinion.

Doog: Who's your toughest competitor at this point?

Kinwald: Mark Pavidis.

Frank: You've been around for a while now; what do you think has changed the most in racing to make it faster?

Kinwald: Pretty much everything. When I started racing, the cars weren't very advanced; as for tires, no one really thought about using softer compounds; there were different patterns, but that was it.

Doog: Yeah, everyone took two sets of tires to the track and that was it.

Kinwald: Exactly. I would buy a new set of tires every week; and I thought that was a bit much.

Frank: Now it's one run on a new set.

Kinwald: Yeah. Mainly the equipment has changed. When I first started, I didn't go to too many really big races, so it's hard to say what it was like back then; but I'd say the equipment is definitely better.

Doog: Give us some of your impressions on running Losi and Trinity products.

Kinwald: I ran for Associated for four and a half, five years, and I basically had the same car from the time I started racing. I saw all the people around me switching teams and going back and forth, and I had never changed a sponsor. I'd been running the same car the whole time, and I'd just won the Worlds and every big race that I could have, and I just wanted to change everything; to see if I could do it with another car and different equipment.

Doog: So basically, it was along the lines of, "Can I still be as fast with a different setup?"

Kinwald: I don't think I could duplicate how I've done in the past few years; it would be pretty hard to do it again. But I knew that Losi's car and Trinity's motors and batteries were, at the time, better than what I was running. I didn't have any doubts that I might switch and be slower; I knew that I'd be faster. But there's still a lot of luck involved in racing, so I couldn't say that I'd win as much, but I knew I would be faster if I switched.

Doog: Thinking back to the IFMAR World Championships in England, I remember watching you dominate the race when the 2WD Mains came around; did you have a game plan going into the event?

Kinwald: Basically, Joel Johnson and Scott

Brown went out every round and set a new TQ; they were fast every time they went out on the track. The Associated team was pretty much struggling because we didn't really know what to do to our cars on a rough track like that to be as fast. So when it came around to the last Qualifier, I put a Hydra Drive in my car and it instantly went faster. But that was the last round; I was still eighth qualifier, and I was going into the Main with my car different from how I had run it, so I didn't really know how it would work. Then, when I went out in the practice Main, I found I could go as fast as, or even faster than, everyone on the track, without much difficulty; so I knew if I could get a good start, I had a good chance at winning the race.

Doog: At the start of the third A-Main, you holeshot everyone off the line, took off, and made them all look as if they were in reverse by the end of the first lap. It was a pretty amazing drive. Would you count that as your biggest accomplishment in your racing career thus far?

Kinwald: I'd have to say that it is.

Frank: What could you possibly do for an encore? What's next?

Kinwald: I'd like to keep racing and go to more world championship events. Also, another reason I wanted to run for Trinity was their on-road reputation. I feel that I could go out and be competitive in on-road. I don't know how serious I'm gonna take it, but I'm gonna start learning all I can, and eventually, I'll start going to some big on-road events.

Doog: Are you going to try out superspeedway?

Kinwald: I think so.

Frank: It seems that you have started to develop your own product line with Trinity; what can we expect to see in the future?

Kinwald: Well, right now, we have the Kinwald modified-motor lineup, and we have some new heavy-duty pinions. We have a lot of things planned for the future that are hush-hush right now.

Doog: What's the toughest racing situation you've ever been in?

Kinwald: Two are equal. The last Main of this year's 2WD NORRCA Nationals is one. I was TQ and ended up second in the first of three Mains—fifth in the second Main. The only way I could win the race was to win the last Main, but I would have to have somebody else besides Mark Pavidis or Matt Francis finish second. I had to win and make sure that someone else got second besides one of them. I was following Mark most of the race, and we got together, and he flipped. Someone else, I think it was Carlos Gonzales, got into second and ended up staying there, not knowing that if he let Mark by, Mark would have won. So I ended up winning by a point.

The other race was this last ROAR Truck Nats at So. Cal.; I was second

Qualifier in the Modified class. In the first Main I finished second, in the second Main I finished second, and I had to win the last Main to win the race. I followed Pavidis for almost 4 minutes—until two laps to go—and he barely got loose. I just got by him, and we finished one and two that way. It was pretty intense.

Frank: I notice that you do all your own work on your car at races; how important do you feel it is for racers to understand their equipment and do all their own work and setups?

Kinwald: I think it's really important. Masami, for example, doesn't work on any of his cars—his dad does everything for him. He knows how to do it; he just kind of takes the approach that it's easier to race when you're not worrying about your car. I think that's true, too; it's a lot easier. But, when you go up on the drivers' stand, you want to know how your car's gonna work, and if you don't work on it, you're not sure how your car will react.

Doog: How do you practice?

Kinwald: I usually practice at club races. I don't actually run pack after pack at the track to practice driving that much. You learn more from true racing situations.

Doog: What advice would you give to a racer who wants to dedicate more time to and get a little more serious about racing?

Kinwald: First, I'd tell him to practice; go out there for 4 minutes and don't crash. Get comfortable enough to where you're in control and you're not flying off the track everywhere. If you can go out there and take any line you want and you're comfortable and you're not crashing, then start working on making the car easier to drive with different setups.

Doog: What do you do in your spare time when you're not racing?

Kinwald: I pretty much work on my car [laughs].

Doog: Because the Double-XT is so new, we really haven't received much feedback on it from any racers. Give us your expert opinion of Losi's new truck.

Kinwald: I think it handles great. From the first time I threw it on the track, I was laughing at how well it worked, without even doing anything to it. It's basically easier to drive than any other truck I've ever driven, and I found that my lap times dropped considerably. It handles more consistently.

Frank: What advice do you give to up-and-coming racers?

Kinwald: Don't get discouraged; keep trying. Eventually, one day you'll do really well, and when you do it once, that's a big step.

Thanks, Brian. ■