

ROAD LESS TRAVELED: Georgia Tech Senior Shines In Uncommon Territory

HAMPTON, Ga. (July 19, 2017) – Walking into the garage at Atlanta Motor Speedway sporting denim shorts and flip-flops, 21-year-old Georgia Tech student Amber Fleeman isn't your typical racecar driver in the Thursday Thunder Legends Series presented by Papa John's Pizza, the track's 20-year-strong Legends and Bandolero racing series.

One minute, she's an aspiring engineer, bustling across campus between classes in the heart of Midtown Atlanta, and the next, she's racing door-to-door on AMS's quarter-mile "Thunder Ring", in full firesuit and helmet behind the wheel of her No. 98 Legends car, while competing against the best drivers from around the region. As one of just a handful of females in the program and not one to do much boasting, many are stunned to learn exactly what it is she does in her free time.

"I get that all the time," she said. "Actually, I usually don't tell many people at school. It's just not something that comes up in normal conversation. Georgia Tech actually did an article on me several years ago, and lots of professors and students found out, and it kind of went viral for a little bit. Everybody was like, 'Whoa, this girl is a racecar driver?'"

"When you see me at school, it doesn't really match to what you see at the race-track."

But since she was just nine years old, that's what Fleeman has been: a racecar driver, thanks in large part to her father, Russell, a decorated pro late model driver and currently a driver in Thursday Thunder's Racing Radios Pro Division. In a typically male-dominated sport, she has kept pace with her peers every step of the way. From go-karts, to Bandoleros, and right on up to Legends, her navy-blue car and neon-colored numbers have been a mainstay on local race tracks all across Georgia.

At some point along the way, her competitive racing turned from weekend hobby into future career ambitions where she can fully immerse herself into the world of racing and the science of race cars. Now a college student in one of the country's premier technical institutions and with graduation on the horizon, the reality of a career in racing is becoming more and more real by the day.

"I'm majoring in mechanical engineering, so hopefully when I get out, I'll go straight into engineering within the racing industry," she said. "That's the goal at this point."

Of course, with racing in her blood from a young age, a budding career in the industry won't keep her from behind the wheel herself. Even as she prepares for her final year at college, Fleeman always finds time to wrench on her car and make

it to the track in time to do the thing she loves.

"It's different (being a full-time college student and racecar driver). During the summer, it's not so bad, because I'm racing all the time and taking a break from school," she said. "But during the school year, it's a little more difficult. You've got to juggle racing on the weekends and studying. But it's worked out for me. I only have a year (of college) left, so not too much longer."

"The hopes are that when I get out of school, I'll still be into racing. I'll hopefully be doing engineering and racing. I'll still be involved, it may just not be in the same way that I'm used to being in it."

One thing that will undoubtedly make it hard to stay off the track even despite the rising demands of her impending vocation, is the recent success she's experienced behind the wheel during the 2017 Thursday Thunder season. After nearly a decade mastering the difficult flat conditions and varying surfaces of the Thunder Ring oval at AMS, she finally realized the one thing that has eluded her over the years: a well-deserved trip to Victory Lane.

Taking advantage of a front-row starting position for the Week 5 Semi-Pro Division feature race, Fleeman showed good entry and exit speed in the corners to stay at – or near – the front of the pack the entire way and used a late-race pass to claim her first-ever Thursday Thunder victory. She described the feeling of taking the checkered flag ahead of every other car in the race as one of the most amazing feelings ever.

"It was huge," she said. "It was eight years in the making. I've been trying to go for that win for eight years between Bandos and Legends cars, and it just hasn't worked out year after year. It usually takes me until the end of the season to get my momentum rolling, and then by that point, you lose time."

With the victory midway through the season and a couple of solid top-five finishes so far in 2017, Fleeman has positioned herself favorably for a shot at the elusive season championship. With three races to go entering tomorrow night's Week 8 action, she sits just 21 points off the lead in a tight Semi-Pro Division with a bunched group of the top seven drivers all separated by less than 30 points.

"I think the momentum of that win will hopefully help us," she said. "It definitely gave me a lot of confidence and momentum to roll into these last (three) races of the season. We'll see how it goes, but I'm hoping the momentum will be good for us."

No matter the outcome of the 2017 racing season, Fleeman has a promising



future ahead of her both behind the wheel and as a professional within the industry, and she credits the people around her for the encouragement she's experienced thus far.

"Everyone is super supportive of it. I put a lot of my school into my racing. A lot of my friends come to support me, so

it's a lot of fun to put those together."

For more information about Atlanta Motor Speedway's Legends and Bandolero racing program, or to purchase tickets to Thursday Thunder, fans can contact the AMS ticket office at (770) 946-4211, (877) 9-AMS-TIX or visit www.atlantamotorspeedway.com.

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