



# The Lemon King

With the 24 Hours of LeMons, a send-up of endurance racing open only to junkers that cost less than \$500, **Jay Lamm** has created the country's fastest-growing road-racing series.

**With ten LeMons races slated for 2009, have you become the Bill France of road racing?**

More like Groucho Marx. I didn't intend to get into the racing business. But I'd been an automotive journalist, and anything was better than that.

**How'd you come up with the original idea?**

I'd helped put together the Double 500—a 500-mile road rally for \$500 cars. But that proved to be too easy, so I said we ought to make it more challenging, to separate the check writers from the guys who worked on the cars themselves.

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For more information on the 2009 schedule, visit [24hoursoflemons.com](http://24hoursoflemons.com)

**Is this the outcome you were hoping for?**

I expected to lose all the money I'd put into it and probably end up in jail. When it was over, all I felt was relief. I'd been working so hard for so long and had been feeling so much anxiety that I was just happy to get out with my skin intact, and I said to myself, "I'm never going to do that again." Then people started asking me when the next race was going to be.

**How do you explain the LeMons' success?**

There are millions of car enthusiasts who want to go racing, but they don't know how. LeMons defanged the idea of racing and showed them how to make the leap. We took the anxiety and a lot of the expense out of the equation. Newcomers don't have to worry about screwing up, because we're all screwups.

**“We don't want professionals or, even worse, semiprofessionals beating up on our beer leaguers.”**

**What's been the highlight so far?**

A Honda CRX done up as an Eldorado, with the team dressed as pimps and hos. That's when I realized that people really got it.

**Joking aside, is it real racing?**

Absolutely. We use tech inspectors from the SCCA [and other sanctioning bodies]. The first year, I didn't think any of the cars would last longer than 18 hours. But \$500 cars turned out to be pretty good race cars. Who knew?

**Still, you don't see “BS-Factor” judges dressed in robes and wigs at Indy...**

The judges perform two functions: they're entertainment, but they're also supposed to weed out the people who would spend \$5000 on a cheater motor to win \$1500 in nickels.

**To punish teams for making bonehead moves on the track, you sometimes weld junk onto cars in the middle of the race...**

The penalties reinforce the notion that you're here to have fun. You're not here because you're going to become a star or win a lot of money. We don't want professionals or, even worse, semiprofessionals beating up on our beer leaguers. Serious racers have other places to go. We have LeMons. — PRESTON LERNER