

That guy got a career?

Contributed by Dan England
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Yep, he sure does, and now he's more than just the Hemi guy

These days, a lot of people are recognizing Jon Reep. But what you recognize him for may depend on what part of the country you're from.

Let's see. You're from northern Colorado, so you probably know Reep as the guy who just won NBC's latest version of "Last Comic Standing." That's how most know him these days, Reep said in a phone interview.

But if you're from the slightly hick areas of the country, NASCAR country, much like the areas where Reep grew up, you might know him as something else: the Hemi guy.

"I will never not be the Hemi guy to that world," Reep said and laughed.

Yep, that's Reep, the white trash guy wearing the wife beater who invaded the earlier part of this decade in Dodge commercials spouting lines like "That Thang Gotta Hemi?"

He's fine, too, if you don't know him as the Hemi guy. He'll actually like that, even if he enjoyed the commercials—they paid well and they probably brought more people to his earlier shows as a stand-up comedian.

"I know there were people who came out just to check out the Hemi guy," Reep said. "But stand-up comedy was my only job for three or four years before I did those commercials. So I was glad to make people laugh, that these people got to see that I actually knew what I was doing besides just being the Hemi guy."

Reep appreciates the fact that he won "Last Comic Standing" for his stand-up act, not on a bit part in six commercials. He was thinner for the show, chose not to wear a wife beater on stage and styled his hair a bit.

But he's also not afraid of his small-town, country roots. Reep grew up in Hickory, N.C.

"The most creative people come from small towns," Reep said. "You have to be entertained by the simple things in life. You know, the free stuff, like tubing down a river. To me, stupidity is gold in a small town."

Well, the kind of stupid like showing up to a party wearing a diaper, as he did several times, rather than the kind of stupid like sniffing glue or jumping off a roof into a kiddie pool.

In fact, acting a little stupid finally convinced him to give stand-up comedy a try. He liked being funny and was named Class Clown at high school (his dad earned the title many years before, and later his brother garnered the tag). When he went to North Carolina State, he was amazed to find a comedy club next to campus. He figured stand-up comedy was something you only did in the movies or on cable TV. As soon as he walked in the club, he knew he had to try it.

But he didn't go near the club for at least year.

"I really wanted to," Reep said. "But I was afraid to try it because if I failed, the dream would be over."

That year later, at a Carolina Panthers football game, he was acting out his role as Class Clown and began to dance to the music during timeouts. People laughed with him, and soon the stadium was following Reep's lead, especially once the Panther mascot invited him onto the field. Reep was performing "the worm" but was quickly arrested, the police oblivious to the fact that the mascot gave him permission. It was the icebreaker he needed.

"I figured if I could make 75,000 people laugh without saying a word, well..."

Now he's got a half-hour special coming up for Bravo, and appearances on Mad TV and in a movie, the upcoming sequel to "Harold and Kumar Go To White Castle" (OK, so it's not going to win an Academy Award, but a movie is a movie).

That stuff is nice, but he expects to always be a stand-up comedian.

"It's too much fun," Reep said.

And these days it's what he's recognized for more than being the Hemi guy, and that's mainly because he's on tour with the other comedians from "Last Comic Standing";

“I’ll be standing in line and people will be staring at me, and they’ll say, ‘You’re that guy from that show,’” Reep said. “I’ll say that I’m trying out for next year, and others will say I should have won. We love it.”

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