



JOE WAS 14 YEARS OLD," says Palmer, who met young Eder in 1987 when Palmer was running a single-engine tractor at a state-level tractor pull. Eder had written his name and phone number on the back of a torn-off piece of beer carton. "Joe said, 'Mister, I want to go to the next pull with you.'"

The two have worked together ever since.

Eder was just shy of his 16th birthday when he first pulled competitively. Before long, Eder officially transitioned to driving, with Palmer working the pit. "I was totally obsessed; I just couldn't get enough of it," Eder says.

Eder's first pulling tractor cost around \$8,000. He bought the frame from one guy, the engine from another, and pieced the thing together. "A lot of our learning came from fault or error, or something literally burning up," he says. After more than a decade of working through the kinks, pulling from the state level all the way up to the National Tractor Pulling Association, Eder branched out and built his first tractor for someone else, and he took over an existing business—Banter Brothers, legends in building pulling tractors—that evolved into Eder Motorsports.

The tractor he's pulling this year is called "GEICO 75th Edition" because it was the 75th frame he built. Besides his own pulling prowess, Eder, now 43, is a renowned chassis builder. "We have 92 frames out there," he says. His customers count among them 21 Grand National championships, and many more over the years on the state, regional and national pulling circuits.

On the family farm in North Collins, N.Y., the welding and fabrication shop for Eder Motorsports sits across the road from great piles of steaming bark mulch, stripped from timber cut at a local sawmill that was once owned and run by Eder's parents. "We had sold the sawmill and my parents retired," he says. "I

was driving by one day and I thought, 'Why couldn't we do something with that byproduct?'"

He's been "doing something" with it for 10 years now, starting his first year with 2,500 cubic yards of material, and currently producing 35,000 cubic yards of bark mulch a year. And, for the past 15 seasons, he has provided a turnkey harvesting service for dairies: "Mowing, merging, chopping. We truck it. We pack it. It's complete." It's a family business too. His wife, Karla, loads mulch, runs the merging tractor and drives tractors between worksites. "She's the backbone of the business," he says.

No word, though, on when Eder finds time to sleep. He laughs when asked about it. "Hey, I'd say our success is about diversity." Plus, the population on the farm just grew by one: He and Karla just welcomed their first child, Little Joe. (Barney Palmer says Little Joe waited to be born until the Lucas Oil tour was over last season, but just barely.) No word, either, on when Little Joe will make his first pull.

THROUGH THE GROWING FARM BUSINESSES and tractor-building success, it's the driving that gets Eder going. "These modifieds," he says, gesturing to the GEICO 75th, "this is where it's at. At any point something is gonna fly off or be on fire or go through the air." He gives a sly smile. "So that's pretty cool."

On his first run in Louisville, that's pretty much what happens, but not with the tractor. Eder hitches to the sled for his first prelim run and gets about 80 feet down the track before something feels wrong. On the pull before Eder, one of the chains that pulls the weight box up the rail on the sled broke. The back of the sled is manned by a driver, but the broken chain went unnoticed. Eder