

If Not Money, What Do Racers Want?

FONDA, N.Y.

When Fonda Speedway promoter Ric Lucia dug up enough sponsorship to make his new five-race "Go Green NMX Fonda Thunder Series" feasible, he expected numerous outsiders would challenge his modified regulars for race wins and the series' point fund money.

The 40-lap opener and another 40-lapper in late June sported a \$4,000 winner's share, with upcoming 50-, 60- and 100-lap events set to pay \$5,000, \$6,000 and \$9,500 to win, respectively. And the top three in points are guaranteed \$4,000, \$3,000 and \$1,500.

With most central New York tracks paying \$1,500 to win, observers expected 10 or 12 outsiders for the series. But the region's all-time leading winner, Brett Hearn, was the only "name" to appear.

"Race car guys live to complain, mostly about money," said the disappointed Lucia. "Then, when the real deal comes to town, they don't show up. Why do they complain about purses all the time, then go race for \$500 or \$1,500 to win? They need to sit down and be quiet. They complain about money, but that can't be the real issue. Otherwise, they'd show up."

If it's not money, then what is it that attracts racers to a particular track?

"Whether they admit it or not, guys are results oriented," said Lucia. "They'll tell you it's money, but they're looking to go somewhere they know they can win, or at least get a deal. But if we're trying to elevate the sport, and everyone tells you that's what they're trying to do, you can't race where it's easy or for the perks, the extra \$100 the promoter gives you not to go somewhere else. You've got to go race for the purse. And besides, only the chosen few get the perks anyway."

According to Lucia, his regular Saturday night purse is in the \$9,800 to \$10,200 range, with the 40-lap specials paying some \$14,860.

"It's hard to get guys to move around on a Saturday night for any amount of money, though one of the five is a mid-week show and another is on a Sunday, so it's not all Saturdays," offered Hearn. "I came because I think if a promoter puts up that kind of money, plus a point fund, you should come."

THE LONG LOOK



RON HEDGER

And you'd think the guys running for \$1,500 to win, who can't possibly win a track title because they'll miss races for some DIRTcar Tour events would be here, too."

Former champion Bobby Varin, who along with defending Fonda titlist Matt DeLorenzo and Ronnie Johnson tops the local contingent, agreed with Hearn.

"There should be more cars here," he declared. "A purse like this deserves more cars. I'm glad to be involved with a track trying to make things better for everyone and I hope it works out for Ric in the long run."

Lucia's frustration was obviously stoked by the lack of newcomers, but that wasn't the initial source. He's been upset since another track opened nearby and, because it was new, offered much smaller purses than the long-established Fonda. And when Varin's owner, who Lucia says has complained for years that Fonda should pay more, took over the track last season, things got worse.

"This is all about taking care of my local guys, both the racers and the fans, by giving them series events without them having to travel all over and buy a lot of gas," said Lucia. "But it's a world of double standards. I still can't understand how guys can buy a new TEO chassis and a good Enders small block and go over there to race for \$500 to win. And how can a car owner say I don't pay enough, then pay a fraction of my purse at his track?"

"Why wouldn't it make sense for everybody to cut their purse? If this series doesn't succeed in drawing cars and people, why shouldn't I cut my winner's share to \$1,500 like the DIRT tracks in central New York, or even lower; down to what Glen Ridge pays?"

"If we're not careful about managing our sport differently, we're looking at a sunset for racing as we know it. You can't have all this fragmentation, with guys racing for \$500 and \$4,000 to win a couple of miles apart. It's not a great time for the sport."

DeLorenzo won round one and Pat Ward took the second event in the series.

"The bottom line?" summed up Lucia. "I can't make it any easier for guys to race for extra money."

Trying Something Different

FARGO, N.D.

If you love what you do for a living, everything is supposed to be gravy, right? Easier said than done when your profession is driving a 900-horsepower sprint car more than 80 times a year from coast-to-coast.

I've been fortunate to build a career in racing, but every time I get into a sprint car my expectations are to win.

In the past couple of weeks, I've had the chance to have some fun racing outside my normal World of Outlaws job. Two weeks ago, Danny Lasoski came over to me at the last minute and asked me to be in the annual Michael Ross Memorial Celebrity Race of Champions in Sedalia, Mo. The Dude was in a pinch, so I figured I'd help him out.

There were a handful of guys from different types of racing in the event like Gary Scelzi and Jim Head from NHRA, some NASCAR guys like Clint Bowyer, Dave Marcis and Randy LaJoie, and me, racing modifieds right in the middle of a regular World of Outlaws points race.

Tony Synder, from Kansas, built an awesome race car, and I got to hot-lap it for about three laps...the first three laps I've ever made in one of those cars. I was pretty squirrely, but that's what happens when you get in a car that works exactly the opposite of a sprint car.

When I went back over by my sprint car, my dad says, "Man, Tony (Stewart) didn't look real good in the modified. You think he is OK?" I told him that was me out there and thanked him for the vote of confidence.

After warm-ups the car owner told me to just run it in there, and it would stick through the corners, and I'd go to the front. Not quite the "matched set of tires" speech that Cole Trickle got, but it worked. We started fifth and drove to the front.

There was a late restart, and we had a green-white-checked finish. I was leading and Clint Bowyer was right behind me. I knew Clint brought a good car to this event, and I've seen him race a modified and late model on dirt before, so I knew I would have my hands full. He was running the bottom and we were on the high side and I just kept it as straight

SNAP SCHATZ



DONNY SCHATZ

as I could. I jumped the cushion at one point and thought I was doomed, but he never got under me.

The other fun thing that I got to do recently was race against Tony, Kasey Kahne and Dave Blaney in sprint cars. The Ollie's 360 Challenge is a three-race event that we are excited to be a part of, and it kicked off last week at Sharon Speedway.

I hadn't been in a 360 since 1996, so I was really looking forward to it. Logistics were a bit of an issue since the two Tony Stewart Racing Outlaw rigs were in Kansas. We ended up using my transporter that we used last year, and both Tony and I worked out of it.

I always get asked what's it like to drive for him, so the fun part about this event is that we get to work out of the same trailer, talk about the track and race each other. He asked me a few things here and there, and we talked a little bit about making sure he didn't get too balled up in the corners during the starts, but for the most part, he had it figured out.

Dave Blaney and his family have done a great job with Sharon. It's a perfect place to race because you can roll the corners nice and either keep it held to the bottom or slide up to the cushion. Tony did a good job moving forward in both his heat and the B. I lapped him late in the feature and (Stewart's crew chief for the night) Jimmy (Carr) told me after I lapped him, he got behind me, followed my tracks and did pretty well. The bottom line is that he had a blast.

We'll get to do it again right before the Kings Royal, and, fortunately for us, we have a \$50,000 incentive. The series organizers put up a bonus for any driver that could win two of the three challenge races.

Paul Kistler, who builds the motors for the Bass Pro Shop World of Outlaws team, built a phenomenal engine for us. We took the lead in the feature on lap 12 and went on to win the race.

I couldn't think of a better way to start the Kings Royal week than by picking up \$50,000.

It's fun to be able to get away from our regular World of Outlaws stuff on occasion. Not too often though; things are going OK there, too.

Keeping Your Engine Cool Is A Year Around Job

BROWNSBURG, IND.

It's that time of the year. The heat of summer and the challenge of cooling your race car when temperatures are in the '90s.

Although we've talked about cooling in this column before, I don't think we can stress enough the importance of maintaining your cooling system. It is an area that many overlook.

For this column, we're going to assume that your race car has the proper radiator for the horsepower and car you're racing, and that all other components are correct for the application. Let's look at the components and what needs to be done to make sure they're up to the task of cooling your car.

■ Radiator Maintenance — The

radiator is the primary component in cooling. It's the heat exchanger that rejects the heat created by the engine. The most important thing to do is keep it clean, inside and out. The inside of the radiator is often overlooked, but very critical in keeping the radiator efficient. Typical tap water is full of minerals like lime, iron and calcium. When water is heated and cooled, the minerals separate and stick to aluminum surfaces, not only inside the radiator tubes but also the block and cylinder heads.

When these deposits coat the metal surfaces, it hurts the efficiency of heat transfer. Block rust will also reduce efficiency. It's a good idea to use an anti-corrosive additive to help keep the deposits to a minimum. Products like NEO Keep Cool or Red

THE TECHNICAL SIDE



CHRIS PAULSEN

Line Water Wetter have very good anti-corrosive agents in them. If possible, use distilled water.

The cooling fins are also very important to keep clean. The integrity of the fins is critical. Engineers are always working on cooling-fin design. Inside the fins are thousands

of tiny louvers that direct the air and carry the heat away. If the fins are filled with dirt or rubber, it reduces efficiency. When cleaning the radiator, be very careful not to damage the fins. On aluminum cores, the fin is very delicate.

■ Water Pumps — There isn't too much that can go wrong with a water pump. The pump seal is about the only vulnerable part. Keep up on the pulley and belt in the case of belt-driven applications.

■ Fans — Electric fans are the predominant choice on race cars today. Make sure they are performing to the manufacturer's specification in regards to CFM. Typically, the fan will not work when it fails. The best way to check out the performance is with an Ohm meter. Every fan will

have an amp draw rating for start up and continuous run. These numbers are part of the spec of the fan. If the amp draw is substantially higher than the spec, chances are it's not performing properly.

■ Duct work — It takes air to cool. Duct work into the radiator is critical. As the season goes on and a little beating and banging takes place, the integrity of the duct work needs to be maintained. Proper duct work ensures that all the air goes through the radiator core. Make sure the radiator is sealed to the duct work.

All of these things will help keep your race car cool during the hot days of summer racing. Keep it clean and maintained so you can be there at the finish.

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