

Many Factors Led To Tire-Wear Problems At Brickyard

BROWNSBURG, IND.

Now that the dust has settled from the Allstate 400 at the Brickyard, it's time to look at the tire situation with an open mind.

There has been a tremendous amount of "mud slinging" because of the tire-wear problem and most of that comes from people that really don't know a Goodyear tire from a crescent wrench. People often come to conclusions too quickly.

There's no doubt about the fact that this year's race wasn't good. The tire wear created the need for "competition yellows" so crews could change rubber before tires blew out from excessive wear. NASCAR did what it had to do given the situation. It was the right thing and saved a tremendous amount of carnage.

The show wasn't good for the race fans. They paid money to travel to Indy and see one of the biggest races of the year at the world's most historic track.

Let's analyze what caused the tire problems that occurred this year.

This isn't the first race that has seen excessive tire wear. It's been happening since the advent of the racing tire. There's a fine line between building a tire with enough grip for a given car and track combination and getting the wear required to have what is perceived as a normal race.

If everything in racing were an exact science, it wouldn't be very exciting to watch. There have been many races, in all forms of motor-

sports, where the tire didn't wear good enough to make it to the end of the race. I've experienced this in Indy cars, sprint cars and other forms of open-wheel racing. This race was a worst-case scenario.

It was the first race for the Car of Tomorrow at the Brickyard. The CoT has a higher center of gravity than the previous car and doesn't have as much offset, or left-side weight bias. It has 40 percent less downforce than the old car and weighs more. These factors are contributors to the wear issue.

What happened? Basically, there was a lack of mechanical and aero grip for the tire design.

Consequently, it appears the tire was sliding across the track surface and not getting into the track. It had an emery-board effect on the tire, grinding the rubber off instead of allowing it to stick to the track surface.

I spoke with Robin Pemberton, vice president of competition for NASCAR, about the issue.

"This caught us off-guard," Pemberton said. "The right-side tires were the same compound we ran last year. In the past years, we always saw excessive wear for the first several laps of practice, but then the track would start to take rubber and it wasn't a problem any longer. We expected this to be the same with the CoT. We will fix this situation and it won't happen again."

I also spoke with Greg Stucker, Goodyear's racing director. Greg's

THE TECHNICAL SIDE



CHRIS PAULSEN

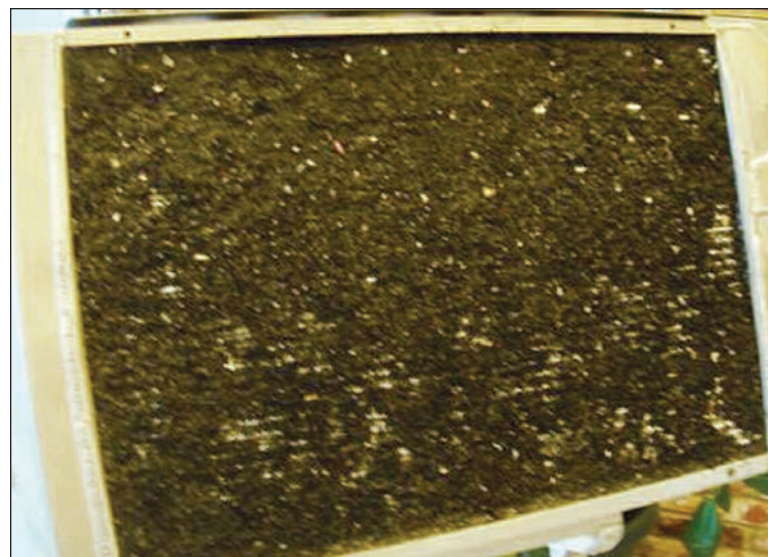
been with Goodyear Racing for many years and involved with all facets of the racing operation.

"The right-side tires had the same compound as in '06 and '07. We changed the construction of the sidewall slightly to give the tire more grip.

"We knew there would be heavy tread wear early. This is typical. We expected the track to rubber in by lap 35," Stucker said. By "rubber in," he means that the rubber should stick to the asphalt, giving the track a groove. "The fact that the rubber didn't adhere to the track is somewhat of a mystery that we are working very hard to resolve. We normally test in the spring for this event, but have scheduled tests this fall so we can get a leg up on this situation before the 2009 race. Everyone involved wants to fix this situation."

Another factor that has magnified this wear problem is that all the teams are rear steering the cars by canting the rear-end housings to help the car stick in the corners.

Basically, the rear-end housing is



CHRIS PAULSEN PHOTO

RUBBERY: Jeff Gordon won the NASCAR Sprint Cup Series race at Darlington (S.C.) Raceway last season with an inch of rubber on the core face of the radiator.

aimed to the left so it isn't square in the car. When the car's in the corner, this helps keep the rear of the car under the driver so he can run harder through the turns. By doing this, the car has a lot of yaw down the straightaway.

This yaw creates excessive tire wear. Now consider that Indianapolis Motor Speedway has four straightaways, two of which are almost a mile long, and you can understand where some of the additional tire

wear comes from.

It's a huge challenge for Goodyear to create a tire that will withstand the wear at this unique race track, plus be soft enough to give adequate grip.

The end result was a race that was spoiled by competition yellows in the interest of safety. The mechanical aspect of racing is a moving target and there's always the chance something can go wrong.

That's racing.

Mandy And Daryn Pittman Share Highs, Lows Of Outlaw Racing

WEST LEBANON, N.Y.

If you're not a believer in the saying, "Behind every successful man is a good woman," you haven't met Daryn and Mandy Pittman.

They've been in the news since Daryn won Eldora's \$50,000 Kings Royal and the opening night of the Summer Nationals at Williams Grove, but their story goes way back to Tulsa.

"It started in '96 at Creek County during Speedweek," recalls Mandy. "We'd made eye contact, but my dad crashed really bad and we had to go to the hospital. Exactly a year later, Daryn asked my dad how old I was when they went to the driver's meeting on the four-wheeler. We talked after the races and dated from there."

Mandy's dad is former sprint-car driver Mike Ward, so she knew racing inside and out. But even that didn't prepare her for the World of Outlaws travel schedule.

"It seems like we have part of every season where we struggle. If we could take bits and parts of every year, we'd have an unbelievable sea-

son," she says. "Winning the Kings Royal was really good, because this has been a stressful and mentally draining year. It's hard to watch Daryn being hard on himself and the team been down on themselves, too. It's hard to watch the guys go through the mental turmoil.

"To see the elation on his face was unbelievable. The money helps, too. Luckily, we've got a great car owner from Australia, Reeve Kruck, who's never questioned what was going on, even in the tough times. He just asks what we need to get the job done."

Local racers can imagine the pain gas prices have inflicted on touring racers. Mandy knows firsthand.

"When we first left home, Daryn would see that the price had gone up and only put a little bit of fuel in the motorhome. Then we'd have to stop an hour or two later and it would be more expensive. We finally decided that when we need gas, we get it. It's part of what we do."

Between fuel prices, rainouts one after another and disappointing results, the Pittmans had plenty to

THE LONG LOOK



RON HEDGER

think about this year. Then came Eldora.

"I'd been counting laps for fuel, because they had 65 to 70 laps before they'd have a red for fuel. I was watching it wind down and the last five, I could see that Jason Meyers was closing on us," she recalls. "He could come off the rubber in two a lot better than Daryn. You could see him coming, then the lapped cars were kind of out there in Daryn's line. I was really nervous, stomping my feet on the roof of the trailer. Then we were celebrating."

When asked if Daryn was a different guy the next day, Mandy says it

didn't take that long.

"On the way home to Indianapolis, he was a totally different person, smiling, happy and talking with and texting people. The next day at work, we were totally busy because we're only home two days from now to the end of October, but we were satisfied knowing we'd gotten that first win of the season out of the way. That it happened at the Kings Royal didn't hurt either!

"The Grove was good to watch, too. He got to third and I said, 'Happy with third.' Then he slid Kemenah, and I said, 'Happy with second.' Then we had a restart and I'm thinking, 'Maybe Schatz will go to the bottom and we can stay on top.' Schatz actually went to the top, and to see Daryn slide under and pull it off got us jumping up and down again. He had the confidence in himself to pull it off and we knew we had our driver back."

Mandy is the corporate secretary for garage and carport manufacturer Kruck's Titan USA racing business and handles permits, fuel taxes, bills,

hotels, the apparel business and anything else that comes along. Most wives know generally how the team is doing. She knows to the penny.

"Sometimes that's good, but when there's not too many pennies there, it's not so good to know," she says. "But I like having that role. It lets me see a different side of things."

That the Pittmans live in Indy is another sign of how organized they are.

"When we got married, we took the WoO schedule and counted the days we'd be home if we lived in Oklahoma and the days if we lived in Memphis. We had friends who lived in Indy, so we counted and it was 67 more days if we lived there. It doesn't sound like much to the normal person, but if you can sleep in your own bed 67 more nights a year, it's worth it."

Pittman, who just broke back into the top 10 in the WoO standings, values his wife's support.

"It's hard to be out here and struggle," Daryn says, "but she's always there for me."

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