



Balance is key

Is it possible to juggle work, a family and racing?

As racers, we are constantly confronted by friends, family and co-workers, questioning our very sanity for our pursuit to compete on the racetrack each week. Although the question may appear in different forms, the confusion, disbelief and lack of understanding is a common characteristic over those who cannot comprehend the firm grasp that racing holds over us.

In their defense, this group of 'outsiders' has every reason to question our judgment. Even at the local, grassroots level, racing is much more than just a hobby. Participation in motorsport is a lifestyle decision that requires sacrifice, dedication and commitment throughout the entire year.

As a new race team trying to become established in the sport, I am faced with a constant struggle to balance racing with a successful career and my commitments to family and friends. Other teams have similar challenges, trying to squeeze in a few hours at the shop after a long shift at their regular jobs each day. At times, correspondence with friends become limited to short, broken emails and a full night's rest and well-balanced meals are luxuries that the routine of preparing a racecar seldom afford.

The success of the race weekend is evident by my body language on Monday morning, and is easily read by my co-workers who also question why vacation time is scheduled for preparing the car. After an exhausting weekend in the shop or at the track has left me feeling stressed or burnt out, I understand the confusion emanating from the 'outsiders.' Are all racers chronically out of balance, or is achieving a healthy lifestyle that includes racing, work and other life commitments even a possibility?

The allure of competition extends beyond capturing the checkered flag after a hard-fought battle on the speedway. Racing requires a broad mix of management skills to assemble the best equipment and attract the right cast of people and sponsors that assist your race program. With the right supporting cast, in combination with sufficient driving skill and a little luck, success on the track can become an addictive experience.

However, there can only be one winner on race day, leaving the remaining teams to spend countless hours repairing, or re-examining their equipment, set-up and strategy in preparation for the next event. If left unchecked, this cycle may repeat



Even racecar drivers struggle with the work-life balance...

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each week, leaving competitors frustrated and tired, without any of the enjoyment that originally attracted them to the sport.

I am thankful to have learned the virtue of respect, a term often referenced in motorsport. However, its practice on the speedway must extend beyond its most common and immediate definition. As racers, I must believe that we all respect

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each other's equipment while on the speedway, as well as the talent of each driver behind the wheel. Without this basic understanding, I would not feel comfortable competing on the track. To limit our definition of respect to these brief points is short-sighted. Above all else, our definition must take the families and friends that support each competitor into consideration. Without their patience, support and understanding, we would not have anyone to race against. As competitors, we have the greatest influence on whether achieving a healthy balance is possible, based on our actions on the track.

In recent competitions at my local speedway, first-lap incidents have left

many cars heavily damaged, including my own. I understand my fellow competitors' desire to have a great start to the race, but everyone must be reminded that no races are won on the first lap. Patience is an admirable quality that if given greater consideration, may prevent many opening lap incidents. Time spent making avoidable repairs forces each competitor to keep prioritizing racing over other life commitments. Patience is also the first step toward achieve a more balanced lifestyle.

Off the track, each competitor must evaluate what really counts in their lives. It does not matter whether family, friends, career or racing rank at the top of your personal list. What is important is to realize that concessions must be made in the time spent on each activity. Even if racing is the highest priority, it must take a back seat, at times, to other parts of life. To make this easier, be sure to take time for yourself by choosing extracurriculars that bring enjoyment, rather than frustration to life.

Every successful competitor requires the dedicated support network of family and friends. Accepting their help and guidance will go a long way to relieving the pressures of competition. Take the time to show appreciation away from the track by planning non-racing activities that they enjoy. Doing small things will help to strengthen your relationships and will help to make you more successful in all of your pursuits.

As racers, we exert a lot of energy chasing a perfectly balanced setup. Spending a little extra time to balance the rest of our lives may have greater rewards, both on and off the track. ♦