



Holiday wish list

What Scott Gibson would like to see under the tree this year

As we enter the Holiday season, many look forward to the opportunity to reflect on the year that has passed, and the opportunities that the New Year will bring. By all accounts, '07 was a great year for the stock car community.

Large fields and close competition were seen at many local speedways and the inaugural season of the NASCAR Canadian Tire Series was an overwhelming success. But, with such a successful season in the record books, could next year be even better?

The continued success of the motorsports industry is entirely driven by the satisfaction of the race fans, who cheer for the competitors each week. Consideration of the racing fan must be central to all efforts for an improved '08. With this in mind, I have compiled my '08 wish list for the holiday season.

Fewer races that count

All race teams are faced with the decision to chase a championship by supporting their local speedway, or to venture beyond their own backyard to compete at other tracks. Unfortunately, this is almost always a mutually exclusive decision. Revising the point structure to allow each team to drop a pre-determined number of races wouldn't force race teams to choose.

Many of the top competitors would enjoy the opportunity to race at other speedways, but being involved in a wreck while visiting another track has the potential to end their championship hopes. The ability to drop their lowest finishes will reduce the risk of being involved in an incident and encourages teams to try their luck at other speedways.

The introduction of top competitors to the weekly show at competing tracks will bolster car counts, encourage inter-track rivalries and introduce race fans to new personalities.

Abolish the point fund

At first glance, it may be difficult to understand how eliminating the point fund can improve the state of grassroots racing. Racing is an expensive sport and many teams struggle to obtain the funding required to compete. But, this is the very same reason why tracks should not offer a points fund for their weekly divisions.

An unfortunate pattern emerges at our speedways each year; the season begins

with a healthy field of competitors but as the season progresses, the fields inevitably shrink. When each team's source of funding runs dry, on-track incidents may force them to be sidelined for the remainder of the season. Missing races during the championship chase further compounds the problem, with the points fund at many speedways only rewarding the highest finishing teams.

Redeploying the points fund to the weekly purse will help each team's cash flow throughout the season, which is when it is needed most. Allocating more funds to the back half of the finishing order will have the greatest impact. Marginal teams that might not otherwise compete regularly will be encouraged to return to the track and the increased funding will also help them close the gap to the front of the field. In turn, a more entertaining race will encourage fans to visit the speedway, contributing to the financial health of the racing community.

Common tire rule

The rule book has, and will continue to be a source of conflict within the racing community. Although there have been many efforts to establish a common standard, this will not become a reality in the immediate future. The difference amongst the limited and late model divisions has been given the most attention. However, the rulebook for Thunder Cars, Super Stocks and the four cylinder divisions are equally diverse.

Although everyone agrees that work toward a common set of rules must continue, any changes will result in some teams having to make an investment in new parts in order to meet the new regulations. However, there is a first step toward a common standard that will not force the race teams to spend more money.

Most tracks mandate a specific tire to be used for each of their classes and in the upper echelons of the weekly divisions; the tire bill may also represent the greatest weekly expense. Tires are also a consumable product, with most teams beginning the year by bolting on a fresh set. If speedway owners agreed to a common tire rule, it would be a step in the right direction. In fact, cooperation to select a single brand



Scott Gibson would like to see racers paid more during the season.

PHOTO BY DAVE FRANKS

for each division provides an opportunity to put money back into racer's pockets.

By working together to create a larger market through common rules and combining their collective purchasing power, volume discounts could save a considerable amount of money. Further savings could be realized by requesting tire manufacturers to bid for the business and rewarding the winning company by locking in the rules for several years.

NCATS at Delaware

Despite the great racing, exciting finishes and increased media attention during the NASCAR Canadian Tire Series' first season, something was missing. Delaware Speedway has been absent from the schedule since '05 and it's a shame that the birthplace of the former CASCAR series was not a part of its resurgence in '07.

Much of CASCAR's early growth was closely linked to Delaware Speedway, which was promoted by CASCAR founder, Tony Novotny. Its traditional race dates on Victoria Day and Labour Day weekends were the best attended and most prestigious oval events on the schedule.

Over the years, there have been many promises made from promoters about taking stock car racing "to the next level"; most involving the teams currently competing in NASCAR Canadian Tire Series. For this to become a reality, the series must return to its roots at Delaware Speedway.

Many of the top competitors in the series got their start at the track, and they deserve the opportunity to compete in front of their families, friends and long term supporters. The speedway and its fans both deserve a return to the national spotlight by headlining the schedule for the NCATS in '08. ♦