



# WORDS OF WISDOM

Scott Gibson takes a second stab at influencing the oval scene

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The arrival of the holiday season brings with it many traditions and once again, I have the opportunity to reflect back on the 2008 season while sharing my own holiday wish list with *Inside Track* readers.

In last year's edition, I advocated several changes that were explored by several area speedways and hope that this year's list will be given equal consideration. We will have to wait for 2009 to unfold to see if I have been naughty or nice!

» **FEWER RAINOUTS IN 2009:** If nothing else on my wish list comes to fruition, I will be content if Mother Nature becomes more cooperative in 2009. Without doubt, the inclement weather played a significant role during the 2008 race season, which saw a high number of events cancelled due to rain. Sunshine and warm weather will go a long way toward rebounding in 2009. Let's just hope that the Almanac's prediction of drier than normal summer and fall hold true.

» **FORT ERIE RACE TRACK TO BECOME A REALITY:** As the 2008 race season came to an end, plans to construct a \$200 million NASCAR-worthy racing facility in Fort Erie were met with both elation and skepticism by racing fans. For many, they had heard the same story before; Niagara Falls Speedway, 'The Spider' and the planned upgrades for Cayuga to live up to its name as 'The Crown Jewel.' These all belong to a long list of projects that made grand claims but failed to deliver.

But with foreign investment from Dubai securing land in a prime location and the support of local municipalities, the latest efforts to build a large track in Southern Ontario appears to have some teeth. With a grand opening planned for 2010, I can only hope that this project stays on course.

But why has a 1.5-mile superspeedway made its way on to a short track racer's wish list? Similar to aspirational car models that attract footsteps into a dealership's showroom, a world-class motorsport facility will generate new interest by shining a bright spotlight on the entire industry.

Although racing wheel-to-wheel at the new facility will remain a dream for most in attendance, participation at a local dirt or asphalt speedway may be within reach. The excitement generated by the pageantry of professional racing in Southern Ontario will undoubtedly bring

new participants to our sport.

» **MULTI-GROOVE RACE TRACKS:**

The introduction of the crate engine, new technologies and a better understanding of suspension geometry have significantly lowered lap times.

Racing on tracks that were not designed to accommodate the increased speed, passing has become very difficult in the premiere divisions and has often resulted in follow-the-leader racing with few side-by-side battles. To bring excitement back to the fans, tracks and race teams must find a way to make the outside groove work.

An easy way to bring back close racing is simply to slow down the cars with harder, narrower tires. But, racing is a progressive sport and a step backward would not be well-received by race teams. As technology is further developed, teams would find ways to reclaim the lost speed and the present situation would eventually return. A sustainable solution must be found.

In last year's holiday wish list, I expressed my desire for the NASCAR Canadian Tire series to return to Delaware Speedway, which responded by announcing plans for \$2 million in facility improvements. Rebuilding the facility with progressive banking that gets steeper closer to the outside wall would be welcomed.

The additional banking on the track will allow the outside driver to negotiate the corner more quickly than the inside car, that must slow down due to the tighter radius of the turn. If executed correctly, a track with two equal grooves would be a delight for both race teams and fans and will transform Delaware Speedway into the premiere grassroots racing facility in Southern Ontario.

» **MORE EQUALITY BETWEEN CRATE AND BUILT ENGINES:**

No topic has generated greater debate than the introduction of crate engines to grassroots racing. Over the past five years, these engines have proven to be an attractive alternative to expensive, custom built engines that priced many teams out of the sport.

When first introduced, the unproven crate engines were provided with sanctions in an attempt to encourage their adoption. Stepped headers, small clutches and weight breaks were allowed and it did not take long for the crate engines to appear in the winner's circle.

But it was not anticipated that the crate

engines would soon take over, dominating the win column at most area speedways. To be competitive, the crate engine has become the only choice for teams who wish to win. No longer unproven, it is now time for the rules to be revisited.

As a team that builds its own engines, I struggle with a rule book that prevents me from competing with the crate engine teams on the track. With an engine that has been stretched to the maximum that the rule book allows, it still makes less power than a crate engine and the car must weigh more.

To bring parity back to the field, the weight breaks must be eliminated and a less restrictive intake manifold and exhaust headers should be allowed. This will bring choice back to the race teams who enjoy the challenge of building their own engines.

» **RETURN OF THE INDOOR MIDGET RACING SERIES:** Growing up in a racing family, being away from the track during the off-season was never something that I looked forward to. But, our annual pilgrimage to the Niagara Falls Convention Centre to watch the Indoor Midget Racing Series always provided a short refuge from the winter freeze.

Under the leadership of Harry Macy, this four-race series attracted the top midget, sprint car and Super Modified drivers from Canada and the North-Eastern United States who treated fans to intense battles on the tight 1/8 mile oval. But the races represented more to the motorsport community than the action that was displayed on the track.

Each trip across the border provided the opportunity to reconnect with a racing fraternity that spanned across many different disciplines. Drivers, young and old from circle tracks, go-karts and sports cars all joined together in support of a shared passion. But, after a tradition lasting seven-teen years, the last checkered flag waved in 2002 when the facility was transformed into a casino.

I covet a return of indoor midget racing during the winter months and hope that a suitable venue can be found. Promoting an event in partnership with the Canadian Motorsports Expo or the CPT Racing Experience will contribute to their success and I hope that this dream can become a reality for 2010. ♦