

NASCAR's latest tweak to the Car of Tomorrow design got a thumbs up from drivers and crew chiefs this week as NASCAR begins to transition from the rear wing to a more conventional spoiler on the Car of Tomorrow chassis.

Nearly 50 of the top teams concluded a shakedown of the new rear spoiler in a two-day testing session at Charlotte Motor Speedway, which wrapped up on Wednesday.

NASCAR plans to begin implementing the change during this weekend event at Martinsville Speedway, with this week's testing sessions giving teams a chance to try out the new spoiler on a mile-and-a-half track in advance of next week's race at Texas Motor Speedway.

Jeff Burton set the fastest time of the two-day test, turning a lap of 189.215mph in the morning session Wednesday.

By in large, the reactions from most drivers were positive, although this is only the second test of the new design following last week's test at Talladega.

Burton, like many drivers, say while the testing was valuable for the teams, the truest test for the new spoiler will be under race conditions.

"We've had a very productive test and all of the RCR teams have learned a great deal of information," said Burton. "The cars drive a little different and the reality is that the conditions and the tire combination are different than what it was last year. So we're learning new things that we can apply to every race from here out and hoping that our test data will translate well over to race conditions."

The most notable difference between the spoiler and the wing has been lower RPM's than has been typically seen at similar tests in the past at CMS.

As a result, NASCAR Vice President of Competition Robin Pemberton said teams have allowed teams to switch to last year's gear ratios to make up the difference.

"We had made a gear adjustment for Charlotte based off of last year's information to try to cut some of the rpm back," said Pemberton. "Because of what we learned today, we're already readjusting and going back and putting in last year's gear ratios, which should help a little bit of rpm and get the rpm up, and drivers will like that a little bit better."

The change from the wing to the spoiler has been long anticipated since the introduction of the COT.

When first introduced in 2007, the COT feature many design innovations intended to increase competition and driver safety while reducing costs for the teams.

But while many lauded the car's innovative safety designs, it was the much maligned rear wing, which drew the ire of many longtime "core" fans - as well as many drivers - who felt the unconventional wing was further proof that NASCAR had gone away from its moonshine running roots.

Pemberton said the backlash at the use of a non-conventional wing over a spoiler was one of the reasons for the switch.

"Nobody really warmed up to it," said Pemberton. "They didn't like it. They didn't like the appearance of it, so they didn't embrace it."

But while switching to a conventional spoiler may go a long way to squelching some of that criticism, NASCAR's change from a rear wing to a spoiler go beyond mere aesthetics, as Brad Keselowski's crash at Atlanta, while not solely the fault of the rear wing, has led NASCAR to look into more ways to keep the cars on the ground, including adding a fin to the car as well as changes to the decklid.

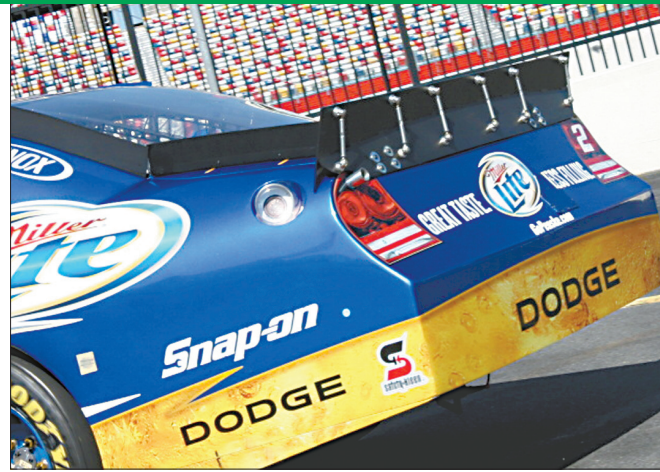
"Some of the things that you see with the larger fin on the deck and the back glass are based on tests that we have been doing right along that weren't in play in Atlanta," said Pemberton. "So we have already made adjustments post-Atlanta to help with the liftoff speed."

While drivers stuck to mainly single-car runs on Tuesday, Wednesday's sessions featured several packs of cars running together in the 1.5-mile quad oval.

When asked about the differences between the spoiler and the wing, most side the same thing. "Not a whole lot of difference, but definitely some change," said Kyle Busch. "Whether it's change for the good or the bad yet, we don't know until we get into a pack of a race. Initial thoughts are that it adds a lot of grip to the car, makes the cars comfortable to drive, but to me it might make it harder in traffic."

"If I didn't know that spoiler was back there, the first few laps especially yesterday, I couldn't point to something and say, 'Hey, this thing feels different here,'" said Carl Edwards.

"I really like the spoiler. I think it looks great. I think it's a great move. The fans are gonna like it and it doesn't seem to make the car feel much different."



Story by Pete McCole, Photos by Rhonda McCole - www.ARI.com

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