

## It's time to return to the track

by Cindy Brett

Very few weekends go by that I can't be found atop a set of grandstand bleachers watching and recording a dirt track race somewhere. Little did I know two years ago when I decided to share my dirt track adventures, so many people would tag along. I'm usually offered the option of videoing the race from a media tower, inside the booth, or even the flagstand. But I usually decline. See, the folks in the grandstands, those are my people. I stand behind families, and watch kids finally tucker out and fall asleep. I watch race fans stand to their feet and urge drivers on, pointing them in the direction of the checkered flags. I see fans young and old with the same passion, dirt track racing. But, our numbers are dwindling and I've started to ponder why, and what can be done about it.

So, why are some crowds getting slimmer each race season? While I'm sure that there are aspects of the sport itself that have changed, let's strip it down to the bare bones, and see what's still the same. This sport is about fast cars and the people who wheel them. Those two elements are still the same. Race surfaces are made of dirt or clay, and are oval to semi-oval in shape, that hasn't changed.

Racing is an entertainment sport, still there! Now, don't jump on me

with the "back in the day it's all we had to do" theory. There was plenty to do, we just "chose" to "go" to the track. Ummm, those two words "chose" and "go". Race fans this one is on us.

I'll be the first to point at the elephant in the room. Live streaming has become the norm for most race weekends. Everyone with a cell phone can broadcast a race to the masses free of charge. Media companies with subscription services are everywhere. And yes I know that I fall into the cell phone category, though I do not do any live feeds I do record and post all the racing action. (the week following

the event) And 100% of it is done with my trusty cell phone. I spend a great deal of time on social media, (it's my job). Not long ago a streaming service had made the commitment to broadcast a race, and due to technical difficulties wasn't able to air the event. The track Facebook page was inundated with angry subscription

holders, making the same comment, "if I would have known that they weren't going to show the race, I would have just gone to the track". Now, don't throw me to the lions just yet. I am beyond grateful that we have these services, there are instances where, were it not for these broadcast services, loved ones living far away wouldn't get to see little brother win his first race. Or aged grandparents who just can't get out anymore wouldn't get to be involved in the sport, reliving the old days and watching a race. But, there's a flip side. (there's always a flip side) Fans are using these services as a replacement for the race experience.

I have to be honest with you, we miss you! We miss watching you stand and cheer. We miss hearing you complain about the flagman, and all the track favorite conspiracies. We miss you being in our midst, rubbing elbows with you as we all stand in unison and film the four wide salute. We Miss You! Trust me when I say that the local track just isn't the same without you. Say what you want, you know that you miss us too. Those side by side finishes just aren't the same without the smell of race fuel. That three wide coming out of turn four and holding it all the way to turn one isn't as cool to watch when you aren't sitting with a race friend watching together.

I wish I could remember where I overheard this statement, but it is so true. "The most expensive seat at the track is the one that's empty". And yes some of the "expense" is monetary, but your absence is also costing the sport. The competition is just better when the stands are full of hometown folks. Drivers are pushed to "put on a show" for the fans. Much like the 12th man in a football game, you are just as important as the gas and a new set of tires to every driver to take the clay.

Racing is a strange sport if you think about it. It's one of the few sports that is actually performed by a single person, (the driver) but fueled by the crowd (you). This can sometimes cause us to lose focus on what our role is as fans. We are in the stands to be entertained. I hear stories on a weekly basis about fans leaving the sport because of a plethora of reasons. And to be honest, most of them are due to the fact that fans get a little too involved with the



goings on up in the tower, in the flag stand, the tech shed, or the pits. Folks, I know exactly how you feel. I spent a lot of time questioning calls, not liking track workers, a class of cars, and anything else you can think of. That was until I made it my business to try and put behinds in the stands of local dirt tracks. In order to do this without any bias I had to make it a point to stay focused on the goal. And not all the stuff that as a fan really wasn't any of my business. Trust me the racing got 100 times better. I was able to view each facility through the eyes of the weekly faithful fans that love their track. And honestly it caused me to fall more in love with the sport of racing.

I'm issuing you a challenge, go back to your favorite track this season and just sit back and watch some racing. Watch the entire track, not just the front. Watch classes that you usually got up and walked out on. Don't worry about how you feel about the track conditions, watch and see which of the drivers are able to rise to the challenge and beat the track. Regardless of what you may think about your absence you are missed. This sport needs you, we fans miss you.

And it's time to come back. So, go ahead and plan where you want to go racing next weekend, and I'll see you in the stands.

It's time to "chose" and "Go".



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