Racing Promotion Monthly
The Idea Newsletter For Auto Racing Promoters

Kicking Off A Remarkable 47th Year;
Special Issue For New Promoters;
You Can Still Make RPM@Daytona!

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Hoosier RACING TIRE
This Month In RPM

The Idea Newsletter For Auto Racing Promoters

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On The Cover: As this goes to press, Florida racing begins. We wish promoters all the best for the new season. (Burback Photo)
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We’re Racing! Marketing Tips For New Promoters; A Dose Of Reality For Over-Excited Newcomers.

The winter of 2016-2017 has so far been a typical “off-season.” In our conversations with promoters, we’ve heard pretty much the same about the 2016 season as we’ve heard about others recently—“much squealing, not much wool.” The winter unsurprisingly has had its share of upbeat news releases boasting new series, new events, and bigger driver payouts. Nothing unexpected about that, after all our readers are “promoters.”

In December, the big news was the PRI Show and the Gateway Dirt Nationals. PRI is (More, P7)
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Welcome Readers

Welcome to Racing Promotion Monthly. With RPM, you benefit from over 45 seasons worth of ideas proven at short tracks. This newsletter and the RPM Promoters Workshops are your place for networking and ideas. In more than 100 Workshops and 500 issues, RPM has gathered a 46-year knowledge base. If you’re new to race promotion and looking for someone you can bounce ideas around with RPM is here seven days a week to help you make connections. Enjoy this newsletter. Join us one of the three RPM Workshops next winter. It’s time well-spent that will boost your attendance car counts and sponsorship.

a world-scale celebration of myth and hyperbole where the robust aftermarket, which makes most of the money in racing, and the racing press, make sure all the false idols are polished and properly placed on their pedestals. The Gateway Dirt Nationals proved a huge bright spot, where a promoter fairly new to the sport with the means to take a risk seems to have found a sweet spot to build an event, and from what we can learn, despite the usual first-time temporary-track issues, it was a first-year success, maybe even broke even financially. The ChiliBowl and the IceBowl, were big, the IceBowl, even on a snow date.

Shortly, come February, we enter the annual cockeyed optimism phase of the so-called off-season (even though

(More, P9)

Hilton Recovering Nicely!
The Hilton Daytona received damage to its lower levels, and is undergoing repair. Refurbishment scheduled before the hurricane is also underway. When we arrive in February, we will find the South Lobby closed due to construction and all check-ins will take place in the North Lobby (adjacent to the Steakhouse). But, the South Tower, Grand Ballroom, where RPM convenes, has reopened and will be ready for us. But for some mopping up, they tell we would not know there was storm.
we’re already racing) where promoters gather at Daytona, back slap each other, and tell our gathered group, “I really feel like 2017 will be a good year,” while whispering that they hope they have made enough cuts and adjustments to sustain themselves weekly until they get to the their BIG events that make the bottom line every year. We feel for the scores of tracks out there without those one or two BIG events. For them, 2017 will likely be the toughest season ever. No newsflash here! The sport has operated this way for the last 15 years or more. It’s just reality.

The Daytona Workshop, and promoters’ bravado displayed there, are the annual promotional rite of spring. It’s OK! Any athlete, and business person psyches

(Lysakowski Photo)

*Workshops Achievement Award:* It was with great pleasure at RPM@Indy, that we had the opportunity to recognize the work of KEITH SIMMONS, promoter of three northeast Iowa tracks. Keith began as an engine builder and car owner and became the car owner of the first NASCAR Busch Tour champion. He later worked for SABCO Racing. Upon returning to Iowa he acquired the promotional operations of AL FREIDEN. He’s a racer through and through, and overcame many adversities with his tracks. Congratulations Keith!

(More, P10)
themselves up for the big game, or the big deal when it’s nigh. And speaking of “Deals”...

We know--if the promotional community reflects the greater population of the U.S.--49% of our readers might go off the rails when we write this, but there has been palpable sense of added optimism since about 2:00 a.m. November 9. We are not making a political statement here. We are reporting what voices in our phone and keyboardists in our email tell us. Take it for what it is! Never before in our 25 years as your editor, have we heard the promotional community so excited about the peaceful transition of power in our country. This can only bode well, if not for 2017, then for 2018, and beyond. But with the foregoing said, let’s be realistic.

(More, P12)
“What If?”

World Wide Web gives ignorant blowhards a megaphone reaching hundreds of millions, but more damaging, close by extended family, employees, sponsors, suppliers, and present and potential fans.

Our sport needs to search its collective soul and find a new way of getting along before more promoters walk away. This season several have called it career saying they can’t compete with or are sick of being the target of social media negativity. The racing community usually views these
about the short term— the
season already underway.
Smart promoters are playing
2017 as they have the past 10
years or more—cutting
expenses to the bare bones,
eliminating marginal race dates,
restructuring successful race
dates to cut risk and expense.
They’re keeping stocks on the
shelves at bare minimum. They
are looking for marketing
partners they can leverage at
minimum cost through co- and
piggyback promotions, they’re
feeling their way through the
dark room of social media trying
to find a way to use it where
they can say, “Yes, that sold X
number of tickets.”
They are struggling to keep their
tracks staffed on race night in a
social environment that no
longer provides an adequate
pool of part-timers. They are
struggling to find and train new
officials with the commitment
and fortitude to work with pits
full of members of the spoiled
entitlement generation.
The most senior members of
(More, P13)

Pre-Season Risk Management Walk-Through
Q: Our insurer encourages us to do a pre-season, risk management
walk through, looking for hazards. Can you suggest a checklist?
A: Before the new season, perform a risk management walk-through.
Get your insurer’s guidelines. Many provide checklists. Here are our
suggestions. Walk through before the season, but also each week before
the races. Look for: potholes, tripping hazards, loose sewer grates,
manholes, uneven or eroded walkways, objects protruding into
walkways above or below eye level or on the periphery of vision. Look
for damaged or missing barriers, fences, or gates, vandalized or
damaged signage, exposed electrical hazards, burned-out walkway or
parking area lights, loose or damaged seating boards, grandstand
walkways, railings, kick boards, or backs. Look for liquid leaks that
could create slippery conditions, outdated or discharged fire
extinguishers, adequate and up-to-date first aid supplies, unsecured
pressurized containers like LP. Check for weakened debris fence posts
or damaged fence mesh or cables. Cordon off hazards with barricades or
yellow tape. Even better, remedy hazards before the arrival of patrons.
Advice For Newcomers

the promotional community approaching retirement are looking for trustworthy successors with not just the means to pay a fair price for a going concern, but also the big-boy pants to persevere, whom they can trust with their life’s work. Not much new here. It’s a timeless small business battle fought in early 21st Century terms.

Against this back drop, it’s the time of year we must offer advice of substance to promotional newcomers. As a caller, a long-time promoter, said to us recently, “Any time you buy or start a business you don’t quite know what you’re getting into, but racing... most of these guys have no idea!”

So, especially for the season’s promotional

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newcomers, these bits of advice. First, enjoy the honeymoon. Like our new president, you’ll have your 100 days. Then, the fun will begin. Keep a stiff upper lip and don’t let ’em see ya bleed. Second, believe what you see in YOUR car counts, pit pass sales, and ticket stub numbers. No matter what you have been told about past crowds, past car counts, believe what you can verify--your own numbers. And if they exceed your expectations, DO NOT assume they will hold up by season’s end. Keep everything close to your vest. Don’t get spendy.

Choose your friends and allies carefully and presume everyone in the pits and in your tower has an agenda until proven otherwise. Before you spend big on marketing or advertising, apply these simple, low, or no cost marketing principles (some of which might not by others be considered marketing).

Under promise and over deliver. Do not book-in or promote a show that will disappoint the fans. You cannot afford to alienate them in your first year. Watch out especially for boastful series operators who would convince you they

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RPM Promoters Workshops

RPM@Daytona

Dates: February 19-21, 2017
At Hilton Daytona Beach Immediately following the NASCAR Unlimited Registration & Reception, Sunday, February 19
Sessions: Monday & Tuesday
February 20 & 21
9:00am-5:45pm

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Hilton Daytona Beach
**RPM Promoters Workshops**

**RPM@Daytona Session Lineup**

**SUNDAY, FEBRUARY 19, 2017**

4:30 p.m. **EXHIBIT SETUP, CREDENTIAL CLAIM, FUEL TIX GET-ACQUAINTED SOCIAL HOUR**, Hilton Daytona Grand Ballroom and Convention Center. (No credential required)

**MONDAY, FEBRUARY 20, 2017**

7:30 a.m. **WORKSHOPS GUEST SERVICES DESK OPEN, EXHIBIT SETUP**, Claim credentials, workshops trade show, continental breakfast.

9:00 a.m. **Call To Order, Sponsor And Community Welcomes, Chairman’s Remarks**, Grand Ballroom, St. Johns & Halifax Rooms, Convention Center, Hilton Daytona Beach Resort Ocean Walk Village. followed by... The 32nd Annual Workshops Awards Ceremony, honoring Regional Auto Racing Promoters of the Year, revealing the 41st Auto Racing Promoter of the Year, Racing Promotion Monthly Award for Outstanding Short Track Event.

12:00-1:30 p.m. **LUNCH BREAK**

1:30 p.m. **WORKSHOP CONVENES**, announcements and introduction of special guests, followed by...

WHERE DO WE STAND: 2016 SEASON REVIEW: An open forum with promoter panelists examines the 2016 season looking of long-term implications of trends seen this season. A promoters’ opportunity to compare notes on the season. With promoters DENNIS GAGE, Silver Dollar (CA) Speedway, and STEVE BEITLER, Skagit (WA) Speedway.

**THREAT OR MARKETING TOOL? FAN CELLPHONE STREAMING:** A hot topic among promoters is smartphone live streaming by fans and drivers and the risks to ticket sales it presents. We’ll examine the implications of Periscope and Facebook LiveStream and find out where promoters stand.

THE MADHOUSE IN OUR HOUSE: 40th Auto Racing Promoter of the Year, Bowman Gray Stadium’s GRAY GARRISON, shares his insights into how his family has retained Bowman Gray’s appeal with fans for more than 60 years.

**EXHIBITOR APPRECIATION HOUR:** Network, shop, and buy in an hour for promoters to get to know Workshops sponsors and exhibitors.

**ANNUAL CASE LAW SUMMARY:** CARY AGAJANIAN and PAUL TETREAUTL, partners at Agajanian, McFall, Weiss, Tetreault & Crist, Las Angeles, review for promoters the implications of the year’s case law decisions.

**PROMOTERS’ PRO-BONO HOUR:** With attorneys Agajanian, Tetreault, DON ORNELAS, and RON BENNETT, Bennett, DiFilippo & Kurtzhalts Law Firm. Legal experts answer questions about the waiver, minor waivers, kids in the pits, zoning and regulation, sound issues, tech and confiscation, intellectual property, and more.

**TUESDAY, FEBRUARY 21, 2017**

7:30 a.m. **WORKSHOPS GUEST SERVICES DESK OPEN, EXHIBIT SETUP**, Claim credentials, workshops trade show, continental breakfast.

9:00 a.m. **WORKSHOP CONVENES**, followed by...

SPECIAL GUEST SPEAKER JOHN DARBY: The prominent RPM panelist and tech expert throughout the ’80s and ’90s, who rose to be the NASCAR Sprint Cup Director is our special guest speaker. We look forward to welcoming him back to our stage and to wisdom he will share...

**EVENT SECURITY: RISK ASSESSMENT & PREPAREDNESS FOR PROMOTERS:** Are your big events soft targets? A review of the traditional basics, plus a discussion of the challenges of safely hosting the public in today’s world of multiple threats. With STEPHEN BERES, Senior Director of Security, Daytona International Speedway, International Speedway Corporation.

FROM THE MOUTHS OF BABES, KIDS IN THE SPORT... How can tracks engage young fans? Short track racing from a teenager’s point of view. Today’s young people look for more than traditional race fans. Where are promoters missing the mark when they look to engage the youth market? ZACHARY and JOE SKOTNICKI Race of Champions Series.

11:45-1:15 p.m. **LUNCH BREAK**

TECH TALK: TIRE SOAKING & PARTS CONFISCATION: Following the DSQs at The Dream Race, we’ll examine enforcement, and confiscation protocols, equipping promoters with best practices to ensure the integrity of the non-conforming parts confiscation process.

**WHY YOUR PRESS RELEASE GOT TRASHED, MEDIA RELATIONS**

101, MIKE LYSAKOWSKI, Lysakowski shook up promoters last winter with his “Thick Slice” remarks, and he’ll do it again with additional insight for promoters.

**THE CRATE NATION 2017, BILL MARTENS, Chevrolet Performance,** previews what’s new from Chevrolet Performance and offers a progress report on CT525, 602, and 604, applications in oval racing including open wheel and upper level late model classes.

**LIGHTNING ROUND: SURMOUNTING RACE NIGHT SURPRISES:** Moderators and the audience will share experiences and tips for handling scores of unexpected accidents, oversights, emergencies, which can crop up during race weekends. Tips that minimize interruption, inconvenience, embarrassment when things don’t go to plan.

**BIG EVENTS: THE DEVIL IS IN THE DETAILS:** BILLY THOMAS, shares what he has learned about organizing and presenting big events, preparation, staffing, procedures, and more.
Shorten The Show, Get Rid Of Dust, Clean The Johns, Keep Prices Low!

can bring you a big boost in ticket sales. Too many come up short for promoters, and you will shoulder the fan’s blame.
Shorten the show! It doesn’t matter how long it was last year, whether it ran to 2 a.m. or finished at 11:30, shorten it. Every short track race night in America can be shortened. When you do it, fans will be happier and a positive vibe will develop around your track. You’ll send more families with children home pleased with their leisure-time investment. This is advertising.

If you have a dirt track, get rid of dust. Make sure you are budgeted for enough help and diesel fuel to properly prep the track. Analyze your track material. Make it hold water better. Get enough water in it. Eliminate or shorten hot laps. Get rid of qualifying with point average handicapping. Shorten heat races and features. Do anything you can to make sure it doesn’t go away before the fans head for the exits.

Clean your johns. If you want families, you must impress the mothers with cleanliness. If you have the cleanest public johns in town, you will make loyal fans. This too, is advertising!

Keep prices low. You are probably a recently retired driver or car owner reading this. Racers will pay (almost) anything to race. Not fans, as you will soon find out! If your ticket price is as low as it can be, fans will spend more on food and drink. They come to have fun--and to eat and drink. Make it easy for them to do so! And, speaking of food and drink, make it hot, make it tasty, and don’t gouge.

(More, P19)
Get A Colorful Announcer, Stay Cool, Make Money, Be Happy

Nothing beats a low-priced, surprisingly big, unusually fresh, hot, hamburger. Think of your track as sports bar with live entertainment instead of big-screen TVs. And whatever you do, don’t you dare lease out the concessions. Those profits are essential to success.

Get a colorful announcer and make heroes. Too many announcers drone on imitating play-by-play announcers from other TV sports. Racing is exciting, it’s unpredictable, it’s not a game, and a commentator with a good sense of humor who is acquainted with the drivers and crews can connect fans with the spirit of the drivers.

Race drivers at weekly short tracks are ordinary people just like your fans, doing extraordinary things your fans dream of doing, and an announcer who can connect the two is worth anything you must pay him or her.

Good luck this season. Stay level headed. Stay cool. Don’t let anyone get under your skin. Don’t be ashamed to to make money. It’s not necessary to tell people you did. In fact, especially drivers and car owners, want to believe you aren’t making money, so help make their cosmology complete. A happy promoter is infectious. Happy promoters have enthusiastic fans and loyal drivers and bigger crowds.

RX For A Back-Foot Start

Spring is a time for optimism. But, every season, weather puts a few promotional newcomers on the back foot. It’s always good have a fall-back plan. Here are some ideas for

(More, P20)
newcomers who find themselves strapped after a shaky start.

**Keep your wits.** If panic sets in, so does the tendency to make emotional decisions instead of business decisions.

**Don’t cancel races or cut the schedule.** Fans and sponsors count on completion of your schedule as published.

**Don’t cut advertising.** If there is a certain forecast of rain, canceling ads makes sense, but try to stay the course on promotional plans.

**Cut purses as last resort!** A good way to cut purses without the bitter entrant backlash is to alternate weeks off for classes. Use the pretext that races must finish earlier.

**Save on payroll.** Instead of cutting employees, cut an hour from each on race night. Twenty workers equals, 20 hours. Over the season it adds up to hundreds of hours, thousands of dollars. As a last resort, alternate weeks off for employees.

**Cut event risk.** Call series and renegotiate. Instead of canceling, lease the track to them and make food revenue, or convince them to be 50/50 partners. Half of a winner is better than all of a loser.

**Spend lass cash.** Maximize barter. Trade tickets or advertising for equipment, repairs, fuel, advertising.

**Watch utility costs.** Avoid peaking the meter. Delay turning lights on. Start lights one circuit at a time. Can you unplug coolers between events, or run fewer coolers?

**Sell high-profit items.** Promote the sale of high-margin fun foods like cotton candy, walking tacos, popcorn. Use the PA. Feature them during race meets.

**Call suppliers.** If you’re behind, don’t hide. Keep them abreast of (More, P21)
what you can pay and when you’ll pay it.

**Sponsor unsponsored events.** Sell a sponsor to cut downside risk on special events.

**Buy smarter, smaller.** Don’t overstock. Discounts don’t save if they use up cash. Sam’s Club can be less costly than suppliers.

**Promote harder.** Work with a mail house to distribute coupons to new subdivisions in your community. Try buy-one-get-one-free coupons to draw new fans.

**Sell advanced tickets.** Raise cash by selling tickets in advance to your big year-end race. Renew sponsors in advance at a discounted price.

**Add low-cost, low-risk events.** Try adding novelties to your regular race meets, or a demo derby produced at low cost with minimal risk.

**Add back gate classes to big shows.** Bolstering the back gate cuts the risk on big-purse special events.

**Postpone improvements.** Do without anything you can do without, until things turn around.

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