



Racing safety luminaries share knowledge at Safety Foundation Seminar

Monday, 27 April 2015

The Stand 21 Safety Foundation held its fourth annual seminar at the Toyota Grand Prix at Long Beach weekend, attracting an audience of close to a hundred from many widely diverse types of motor racing. Attendees came from the world of sports cars, Indy cars, drag racing, off-road racing, land speed-record setting, drifting, time attack, midget racing and motorcycles, in the role of professional drivers, sportsman drivers, auto manufacturers, motorsports reps and sanctioning body personnel, all there to learn about better protection at the track.

"Racing is a passion shared by all the different racers in this room, and the safety principles are the same," said the Foundation's president, Yves Morizot. "All of these racers want to enjoy their passion on the weekend, and return home safe to their families on Sunday night."

Keynote speaker NHRA Top Fuel Champion Larry Dixon began the free, half-day session, putting motorsports safety improvements made through the years into perspective, by comparing two very similar crashes he endured in 2000 and earlier this year. In both cases Larry's Top Fuel nitro-powered dragster broke in half in front of the cockpit, sending him flying over 30 feet into the air on over 400 feet distance.

In the first incident, in Memphis, Tennessee he ended in the hospital with a broken leg and multiple other injuries, while in the latter at Gainesville, Fla., he walked away. He credits the use of the HANS device, improved helmet design, better roll-cage padding, panels lining the cockpit and use of 7 point seatbelts in making the difference between then and now.

Dr. Ed Potkanowicz informed the audience about the dangers of heat stress, while explaining the importance of keeping hydrated, handing out reference cards to check personal hydration levels by simply using urine color.

Reflecting the diverse audience profile, other speakers covered safety practices in different types of racing, and how their safety challenges can be unique. Andrew Weyman, president of the Porsche Owners Club, described POC's three levels of car prep for different levels of track activity. Joe Powell, while describing emergency response at drag races at the local level, advised participants to be aware of the limited safety resources at many small tracks. Martin Christensen, desert racing innovator, described safe emergency helmet removal when medical teams aren't close by, with use of the Lid Lifter device. And Hector Cademartori talked about the high standards of car safety and driver safety equipment mandated by the organizer of the La Carrera Panamericana road race, so important given its many remote stages.

The two major standards-setting organizations in the U.S. for racing equipment, the SFI Foundation and the Snell Memorial Foundation, each had representatives who talked about work they are doing to make racing safer. Mike Hurst of SFI cautioned about the wearing of synthetic garments under a driving suit. Basically, nylon/polyester materials can melt to the skin without being on fire themselves, even thru a thick driving suit. Ed Becker, the head of Snell, advised that the new SA2015 and previous SA2010 helmet specs are similar, and that a helmet meeting either one offers state of the art protection for most applications.

Dr. Jacques Dallaire of Prime Performance demonstrated, with audience participation exercises, how the mind can only focus on one thing at a time, whether driving on the track or on the street.

Drop-in guests included Jim Michaelian, President of the Long Beach Grand Prix Association, with his message of continued support for the Foundation's seminar held annually at his legendary event, and IndyCar veteran Oriol Servia, who took to the stage to tell of his own harrowing track experiences.

Post-event feedback from attendees indicated that they walked away with at least one new idea to apply to their own well-being at the track, which was the mission of the seminar.

As a motorsport safety source, the Stand 21 Safety Foundation, "Racing Goes Safer" is a non-profit organization with a primary purpose of promoting enhanced motorsports safety, achieving this goal in collaboration with medical and scientific bodies, as well as with major series' organizers in order to bring awareness of safety issues, and solutions to the forefront of the motorsports world. To learn more, visit <http://www.racinggoessafer.org>.