

January 2009

Due to events in my life I did not get a column done for you. Instead outgoing BOD member Larry Dent has allowed me to use his column. Please enjoy and publish as you see fit.

Duckster

TO THE MEMBERS OF GREAT LAKES DIVISION, and the SCCA

On January 1, 2009 I will officially hand over the reins of the GreDiv Directorship to my friend Marcus Meredith. For the next 3, or perhaps 6 years, he will be the person dealing with the frustrations of running this club. I have had many pleasurable moments in the chair, but the frustration has also been great, seeing the decline of the club in so many ways, and not having the ability to make the changes needed to assure our continued existence. So please indulge me a parting communication with comments coming from my 3 years "in the barrel".

The challenges facing the club are great and many, and if they continue to converge upon us without proper response it could well be the "perfect storm" in the making.

"MAKE IT EASY, MAKE IT FUN" was our primary objective in years past. Unfortunately the club has lost sight of this simple, fundamental reality. Instead we have become complicated and intimidating both to new people wanting to enter our programs, and to seasoned veterans trying to keep pace. This has happened over years of our leaders failing to realize that the club was on a slippery slope of bureaucracy and complicated rules, and even changing those rules on a monthly basis. I wanted very much to see a **rules season** again instituted. I worked hard to get one enacted. I thought the major rules changes should be done by the printing of the GCR, new car classification finished by January 1, and competition adjustments complete just after the June Sprints. Many members want something like this, but yet I was unable to get such a simple concept in place. The competition will eat our lunch if we do not simplify our rules, rules making and rules enforcement process.

"GRAYING OF THE MEMBERS". We are not attracting and keeping the new, young and energetic people we need to continue to be the premier sports car club in America. We have strong competition from other sanctioning bodies, mark clubs, vintage clubs, hot rod clubs and more. We were never the only game in town, but we were the BEST game in town. If we do not work to attract and KEEP young people active and happy in our club we will lose by default. New members are the gold of the club. They need to be welcomed, mentored, and tutored, so they can replace the silver haired folks like me when our canes, walkers and wheel chairs will no longer get us to the action.

"BOARD OF DIRECTORS". On old saying goes, "One AH SHOOT wipes out 10 ATTA-BOYS". My BoD has had too many "AH SHOOT's" and by shooting ourselves in the foot has garnered the disrespect of the members. Perhaps the Club has outgrown its governance. If SCCA wants to be a national presence, to compete with other sanctioning bodies, and to have the level of support and infrastructure that has developed over the years, it has to have updated governance. It cannot rely on Directors who are solely elected by popularity and without regard to qualifications. Every major corporation appoints its Board of Directors, and they are people of qualification. Businessmen with knowledge and training in the competitive world of business.

This BoD has not served the membership as well as we should have. I am not sure how this should or could change, but it is certainly a real problem. Couple that with the BoD being at odds with the CRB time after time, changing their programs and recommendations and you have ciao. The BoD has chosen to “tinker” with recommendations, programs and ideas, and this “tinkering” has usually resulted in a debacle such as the class consolidation rule that was passed and then rescinded several weeks later. Our leadership has failed you too many times recently. We did accomplish a lot of good things, so all is not gloom and doom, but the BoD needs to be a Board of Directors and establish policy, make good appointments and stay out of the day-to-day activities.

WHAT IS NEEDED? Rules stability for one thing. The BoD needs the courage to set policy and stick with it. They need to appoint good people to the CRB and SEB and then support them, not micro-manage everything that comes down the line. As I mentioned, a “rules season” would be a good start. A time for change, a time to stop changes.

“NATIONAL STAFF”. The BoD needs to support the staff. Don’t assign them a task and then discard it when the results are in. Communicate to the staff through the CEO. Staff works for the CEO not the BoD. Staff morale there has been a problem for this cause.

“CHAMPIONSHIP EVENTS”. We need to continue to make the Solo RunOffs and the Road Race RunOffs our primary participation experience. These two events need to shine brighter than the sun for our members, but they both have suffered some tarnish in the past couple of years. Fortunately that is past history with two new and great venues for them both. The future looks good here.

“SOLO”. The Solo issue is very acute. The club must take a proactive national approach to assisting regions in acquiring and managing safe Solo sites. This is far and away more important to the survivability of the club than all of the hand wringing over the next runoff venue or the national club racing program. The Solo program is our best outreach program. It is our star, but also has the potential for the most severe liability claims and possible destruction of the club if improperly or not proactively managed. Which leads me to;

“INSURANCE”. We all need to continue to work on holding safe events and avoid course designs that allow accidents. 2008 was another very bad year for solo accidents and these accidents can affect the insurance loss ratios very dramatically. If we lose our insurance we are out of business, period. In spite of our bad Solo loss record in 2008 we were still able to gain a very nice rate decrease overall for 2009. That could change if we do not control losses, and right now Solo is leading the loss parade.

“MEMBERS”. Participate, participate and participate. You get out far more than you put in, and if you put nothing in, you get nothing back. Be positive in your actions and your e-mails. When I got an e-mail that started “What are you morons thinking” I simply hit delete, which brings me to my final comment.

“NEWBIES” Finally, the regions need to work their tails off to recruit new people, introduce them to the sport, nurture them and make them feel part of the action without burning them out. We need to stop the downward trend of membership by making it “FUN and SIMPLE”.

For the sport, and the SCCA, I’m Larry Dent, proud to be a 45 year member.