

Conflict of Interest: Bane or Boon

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Essentially all the work of the SCCA is done by volunteers. This is not at all to discount the dedication and excellence of our National Staff, but they are, as employees, a small minority. At the Regional level, the proportion of volunteers to employees is even more one sided, since only a few of the very largest Regions have even one employee. As we all know, the dedication of our volunteers, from trackside workers to Club Racing Board members is absolutely phenomenal.

So, how do you select the right volunteer for the job? Any job. If the job is running a refreshment stand at a Solo event, might you select a volunteer who, in "real life" manages a fast food establishment? Sounds reasonable. Or for the Club Racing Board, wouldn't you want the committee members to have some experience in racing, perhaps even professional experience in driving and/or servicing the actual classes of cars they are writing rules for?

Uh, oh; here come the Black Helicopters! In life, even in life outside SCCA, conflict of interest is inevitable and cannot be avoided if you want really competent input. Let me give you an absurd but true example of the result of overzealous avoidance of conflict: In the early '70's, the USFDA assembled panels of "experts" to review o.t.c. medications. They insisted that no panel member could ever have been an employee or consultant of a firm marketing any product under review. Since employees and consultants (mostly academics) of drug marketing firms are the only people really knowledgeable about the detail attributes of such products, the exercise was laughable until a "workaround" was found.

In SCCA we *manage* conflict, absolutely avoiding only the most severe examples such as when the brother of an appellant is a member of the C.O.A.. So, when a driver in B Mod who is a member of the S.E.B. recommends a rule change for B Mod, it is first reviewed by the whole S.E.B who do not all run in the modified category, and then the Board of Directors, who are removed from the S.E.B. and do not all run in solo, has the final decision.

Checks and balances: It's the American way and it's at the heart of the SCCA.. You cannot have absolute avoidance of conflict of interest if you want to get quality input to decisions affecting the members, but you *can* get the expert advice of our expert members while avoiding unbridled self interest.

See you at the track,

Gary Pitts