

Auto Racing: Who has the edge on Tomorrow?

by Jane Miller

The next Car of Tomorrow test isn't until April 21 in Phoenix but teams got no rest from the new machine this week.

Many drivers tested it at Richmond, Va., site of the May 5 COT event earlier this week. "I think the car is going fairly decent right now," said Greg Biffle after the morning session on Tuesday. "This is going to be a big deal here to see how it turns. You know, we knew about the car a few years ago, and what we've learned last year and this year is the car doesn't turn as well as the old car. The car doesn't have the front downforce and isn't all sloped and kicked out like the regular car is.

"It's a little bit harder to get it to turn around the corner, and because of that, the higher speeds here, this is going to be a place where we're going to have to work on it and working toward getting that front grip to get the car to go around the corner."

Despite its goal of leveling the playing field, Evernham Motorsports driver Scott Riggs says the better-funded teams still have the edge with the COT.

"Stronger teams have more resources and more people and more man hours during the week, having more engineering. No matter what problem you throw out there, no matter if it's the COT or a different tire, the better teams, the smarter teams, the teams that have more resources to learn it quicker are the people that are going to be up front. That's why you see the same people who were in the Top 10 last year are the same guys in it this year. The same guys run in the top 10 every week. It's because they're top teams, not because the car made the difference."

ON HOLD

International Speedway Corp., the track-owning arm of NASCAR's France family, has decided to back away from plans to build a racetrack in the state of Washington.

Biffle, a native of Washington, said that while he believes there is a great deal of fan support in the area, he agrees with ISC's decision because of the amount of resistance the proposal was generating.

"I'll tell you what," he said, "NASCAR is much more persistent than I would be. - I'm kind of closed-minded, so when I got all that harassment on trying to go in and build a racetrack, I would have turned around and

walked away and said, 'Your loss, not mine.' I'm from the state of Washington, and it is frustrating for me that we can't get a racetrack there, that we can't get those people on board yet."

THANKS A LOT

Formula One teams never let their drivers get too big for their britches. McLaren Mercedes rookie Lewis Hamilton earned a podium finish in his first race, mighty impressive by anyone's standards.

Indeed, the team was pleased but tempered its enthusiasm in this release in advance of this weekend's Grand Prix of Malaysia.

Said Mercedes-Benz Motorsport Vice President Norbert Haug: "Lewis started his Grand Prix career in an impressive way. For more than 10 years, no Formula One rookie ended up on the podium in his first race. - As a driver, he may not always do everything right this season, but the team will back him all the way."

FOR ERIC

Eric Medlen's good friend J.R. Todd dedicated his Top Fuel race-winning trophy Sunday to Medlen's family, as did Funny Car winner Ron Capps.

Preliminary reports have indicated the 33-year-old's severe head trauma occurred before the car hit the guard wall during the test at Gainesville Raceway and was the result of an extreme vibration.

WORKING HARD

Defending MotoGP World Champion Nicky Hayden's season has gotten off to a rough start, with finishes of eighth and seventh in the first two races.

"I'm not going to try to hide the fact that things haven't quite gone to plan the first two races and we've still got a lot of work to do but we made some progress (during the test)," he said. "I'll use these few weeks off to think about a few things and try to make that step up needed to get back to the front."

Hayden is in sixth place in the MotoGP standings with 17 points. Leader Valentino Rossi has 45. The next race is April 22 at Turkey.

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