

# A FLAGGER'S PERSPECTIVE

by Nancy Johnson

Some drivers hate us. Some drivers love us. A yellow flag means catch up to the pack, right? Waving yellow? Isn't it just the same as a yellow flag, but the corner worker is really excited? Some drivers think we don't know what we're doing, and sometimes flaggers wonder about the drivers.

So why be a flagger (AKA corner worker, turn marshal, Flagging and Communication volunteer)? Yes, there's an adrenaline buzz, but you can get that in the stands. Yes, many of us would love to race, and more and more often you see us in driver's suits; others are content to remain notorious corner workers and car magnets. So we're gluttons for punishment: standing on a corner for eight to twelve hours a day, sometimes up to three days in a row, during heat, rain, and snow with little or no shelter, and lovely weather in between. There are times when we move heavy cars - or try to, times when a racing car tries to take out the turn station and workers with it, the early morning meetings, limited bathrooms, short breaks/feeding times, limited time to hob-nob in the paddock, the list goes on, but . . .

We get to see some good racing - on the spot - not just for first place, but through the pack! We get to travel and enjoy "working" new race tracks that we haven't been to before. The friendship is great! We have the opportunity to meet new people and make new friends. We tend to travel in groups of "flaggers" to other race tracks in far away places.....

IRP is a fun track with lots of excitement. There is a very long front straight because they also hold NHRA drag races there. Workers receive lunches and freebies, last year Easter baskets were hidden on each corner. It's become a sort of kick off weekend for flaggers because we go to the INR race in April, which is also the first national race in our Central Division.

Any race at Mid-Ohio is sure to be fun. Some of us work this track so often, it's almost like a second "home". There is fun to be had both on and off the track, like incredible go-cart racing, well stocked worker parties and dinner at Bucks. Although some turns see more excitement than others, there

is no such thing as a boring turn at Mid Ohio. Out-of-towners usually get decent corner assignments, because most LEC workers welcome Detroit region workers as one of the family. WOR Games is a great weekend because it's toward the end of the season and the team spirit is high - everyone knows that fall is here and winter is a long dry spell for flaggers.

The track at Grattan has a world renown Pig Roast, free lunches and camping (with showers!). Our Showcase National race has a tradition for high car counts - there's more racing to be seen. You'll see many Detroit

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*You'll see many of us working at Grattan, cheering for our favorite local drivers.*

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region drivers and workers at Grattan, we are able to work with familiar faces. Yes, you can hear us on the corners cheering for our favorite local drivers. We usually have a campfire on Saturday night in the gravel pit at turn one. I remember Memorial Day weekend a few years back when it was so cold that the frost was on the inside of the van windows. Yes, Grattan weekends are known to have extreme weather conditions,

ers travel long distances for these races. I have met people from as far as Seattle, Texas, New York, California, Australia and England. Indy car and the promoters treat all their volunteers well, it's a high profile event with many celebrity personalities.

East of Toronto, Ontario is Mosport. It is a lovely track and it's under the jurisdiction of the Mosport Marshalling Services. They use a lot of FIA flagging rules, which are quite different from SCCA or Indy Car rules, so not many Detroit region flaggers go there. It's also a five hour drive for a weekend event.

A handful of flaggers have been to Roebing Road in Georgia. They were told not to drink out of the water jugs because they contained a combination of rubbing alcohol and water to put on their bodies for the heat. The region gave them all lithographs, t-shirts, pins and lunches with a Saturday night feast. They still joke about the six of them crammed in a van all that way...

Most of us have never been to Nelson Ledges because of the condition of the "facilities". However, I've heard the races are fun and camaraderie is high. The 24-hour race is supposed to be a blast with a lot of improvisation in lighting.

Gateway Park? It's a long drive for a weekend race but I've heard from the flaggers who have been there that it was fun and they've been well fed and pinned.

Road Atlanta - I love it! I saw my first Run Offs there. The scenery is great, the

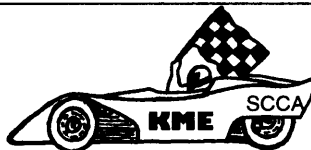
track is challenging for workers and drivers. I saw my first live lizard (or something) there darting under a corner station. I saw a neat snake that looked like a worm. I was going to pick him up to show another worker when I realized that I shouldn't pick up strange animals when I'm in a part of the country and I'm not familiar with the local wildlife. There are knotted ropes and ladders going up from the track to the turn stations, and if there's an incident, it takes some quick

thinking so you don't fall off a hill. Remember to purchase some local laundry detergent so you can get that "red Georgia clay" out of your whites!

Waterford race track, although not an SCCA track, really seems to be the Detroit region's home track. There is a welcome

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but a high car count, and the food and lodging will draw many flaggers.

Throughout the summer, the Indy Car races are fun, there's an excitement in the air, even with some slightly different rules and a more formal atmosphere. The backup races vary and sometimes cause hold-ups, but a good time is had by all. A lot of work-

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region's home track. There is a welcome atmosphere and one gets to know everyone. You'll see workers and drivers talking with each other, there is no division between us. There have been times when one driver has loaned a competitor spare parts knowing that competitor will go out there and beat him! There is some serious racing going on here, even though the races sometimes only last 8-10 laps. Races are held both Saturday and Sunday, so drivers get more track time. It's here "in town" so transportation and lodging are within budgets. The drivers usually buy us soda pop during worker break and more beverages at an informal award ceremony after the Sunday races. There are often door prizes for the workers and worker awards are given to all at the end of the year.

I've heard stories about the Daytona 24 hour race. Such as that this was a "male only" race, and the adventures off the track. I think this was some sort of male bonding thing (and you know who you were). In reality, it's quite a rush for cars to be zooming by you at 200 mph in the dark with their headlights on. Its a Pro race, so you've got professional drivers and tighter flagging

procedures. I have this on my schedule for February 1996: "SWF seeks adventurous, thrill-seeking, racing fanatics for Daytona car pool."

Sebring race track has a 12 hour race in the spring also. Several have attended this event and had tons of fun, but details sketchy at this time.

There are so many tracks, Watkins Glen offers NASCAR races in addition to SCCA, Brainerd is in Minnesota... more in Central Division... more to see....

So why be a "flagger"? (So why do you drive? Why do you work grid, tech, timing and scoring, registration, you name it?) We go because we can. We go because we want to. We go because it's fun. Because it's as close as you can get to being a participant in auto racing without being behind the wheel. I flag for the people involved in flag-

ging, not just the racing.

"I exist; therefore, I flag."

"If a flagger pulls his pants down in the woods, and nobody sees him, was it truly a full moon?"

We're just a bunch of lone wolves...

Although we have our separate lives, flagging has pulled us together and at times our lives depend upon each other. We're like a family, we have our sibling rivalry, our pet peeves, and some obnoxious habits, but none of it matters, because we're family.

Each person you ask will give you another ten different reasons why they "flag"...

"I've been used as a apex marker, a brake marker and an impact marker...hopefully I will never be used as a speed bump."

Oh, heck, we're just people who support each other. The few, the proud, the totally insane.

# FAMILY FUN WEEKEND

by Pat Pierson

July 13 and 14 - a weekend of family fun! The Detroit Region is trying something new this year. We are hosting a weekend event at Waterford Hills for region members and their families.

There will be a road race (license required), a solo, a rally, a dinner, worker training, and kid's events. The event will be open to region members and you can enter all of the events or pick the ones that appeal to you.

It would be great to have the racers and rallyists try the road course as a solo course, have the solo drivers check out a rally, and have the flaggers and pit marshals try a solo and a rally. Just see "how the other side does it."

The organizing committee has been planning this event since August 1995 and has come up with some unique ideas:

1. The road race will have the usual practice, qualifying and race sessions and a special handicap race on Sunday.
2. The solo will take place on both Saturday and Sunday - two events for the price of one.
3. The rally will be a rather open format with unmanned controls and can be run as a standard TSD or a fun/kid's rally. You can use a rally car or the family car.
4. The dinner will be held at the main clubhouse on Saturday night and all participants are invited to attend.

For worker training we are encouraging all participants to try something new - solo and rally people are invited to come out and work a corner with our flaggers or having drivers ready on the grid or help man pit lane, drivers and crew members can work solo or rally tech or shag cones or score a rally.

We want you to get a new perspective on what other members of the region do for fun! There are plans for the kids too--not a babysitting service--rather, there are planned activities for the children. A scavenger hunt for the older kids, games and activities for

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Joe O'Connor of Farmington took his VanDiemen RF94 to 11th in FC DON CASTLE



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