

WHAT IS SLOT RACING?

THE DIFFERENT SIZES AND STYLES OF CARS...are as varied in slotcar racing as on the "big" circuits! Are you a NASCAR fan? There's plenty of NASCAR and SUPERTRUCK competition available...and in *two sizes* - 4" and 4.5" wheelbase. Do you thrill at the sight of open-wheel cars turning circles at Indianapolis? Do you watch television shows of road racing from places like Watkins Glen or any other race track around the world? Wouldn't you love to drive one of those awesome machines? Well you can...and never experience any of the life-threatening accidents that plague full-size race car drivers. Just go race a slot version of your favorite class of car.

Walk into any slot shop and you'll hear terms like "HO," "1/32nd," "1/24th" or "Drags." It can be a bit overwhelming at first as you look into the showcases at the wide variety of body styles, chassis, motors, tires of every color, and the hundreds and hundreds of parts hanging on the walls and in storage bins. Don't panic. Your friendly and professional track owner is a member of the Track Owner's Association and is completely knowledgeable on every facet of this hobby. He or she - yes...there are ladies who own commercial slot car raceways...is there to help you. Many of the charming ladies also race (*very well, by the way*) and a few have achieved national prominence, so never fear asking them questions. They will help and guide you in your purchases as well as take you through the early stages of your training. To assist you through some of the things you will encounter on your first visit, you will be exposed to at least two or three different sizes of slotcars.

DRAG RACING: There's nothing in this world short of the US Air Force's "Stealth" fighter than can cover ground as fast as one of these earth-bound "rocket ship" slot dragsters! You simply have to see it to believe it! If you've ever seen a real, live drag program at your local drag strip, there's a class for the same style car in slot racing...everything from old style cars raced using the 'bracket' system, up to full-size "rail" jobs like "Big Daddy Garlits" and "Cha Cha Muldowny" ran a few years ago and pros today blister a one-quarter mile strip in less than 5 seconds. You think 1/1 dragsters are fast? Today's 1/1 top-fuel dragsters typically turn in runs of 300-plus mph. In scale drag racing, a "rail" car can reach scale speeds of over 3000 mph! Drag Cars can run OVER 120 actual MPH...and do it all from a standing start in only fifty-five feet using one tiny electric motor and sixteen volts of DC current! If straight-line racing is in your blood, you'll never experience anything like slot car drag racing!

1/24th SCALE: Of all the available sizes of slotcars, 1/24th seems to be the most popular at the commercial level. The cars are approximately 6 1/2" to 7 1/2" in length with a maximum wheel/tire width of 3 1/4". Within 24th scale, the two "wheelbase" dimensions (length from center of front axle to center of rear axle) are 4" or 4 1/2". Because of the huge popularity of NASCAR and SUPERTRUCK racing, many commercial slot racing centers feature these classes in *both* sizes. There are even "GTP's" (Grand Touring Prototypes), "WSC" (World Sports Cars), and INDY/CART cars in both sizes as well. Within the realm of 24th scale are two very similar, yet extremely different "styles." These styles are referred to primarily as "scale-appearing" and

"winged car." Scale appearing means just what it says...the cars closely approximate actual "big" car racing in appearance, and color schemes. Scale appearing slotcars are considered the more affordable, although at the higher levels of competition the cost can be more than a basic beginner car. "Winged" car racing is centered around slotcars which do not closely resemble actual race cars, but are the absolute ultimate in speed and handling due to aerodynamic additions to the bodies which "channel" the flow of air. As the durability and speed of motors increased due to technological advances and many years of research and development costing millions of dollars, winged cars became extremely lightweight. While perhaps not quite as popular as "scale appearing" slotcars, winged car racing continues to hold the fascination of hundreds of enthusiasts. For them only the thrill of being able to negotiate the nearly impossible feat of going around corners as fast as a dragster goes in a straight line is sufficient. Today's winged cars now negotiate very tight corners faster than 60's slotcar versions went on long straight-aways!

MOTORS: This is another area where the new customer can be quickly confused and sometimes overwhelmed with the number of available choices. Motors can range in price anywhere from around \$10 to over \$300! It is possible to have just as much fun - especially in the beginning - with a motor that is very inexpensive as it is with the ultra-sophisticated models. Again, you simply trust your professional track owner to sell you something that is within your budget and learning curve.

CHASSIS: Let me see...do I buy a "stamped steel" or a "laser-cut" EDM or a "brass-wire" combination...or what? Again, there are numerous styles available, depending upon what class or style of car you want to buy and race. Our recommendation? Buy a good "starter kit" at the raceway which has a car already built and "ready-to-drive" - usually has a steel chassis which has been "formed" and all the parts are lovingly assembled for you at the factory. The kit also has the "hand control" you'll need to "drive" the car around the race tracks. Some of these kits also have a few basic tools and extra parts. These kits cost anywhere from around \$50 to \$100 and definitely the only way to go for someone just getting started in this fascinating hobby.

BODIES...BODIES...AND MORE BODIES! Slotcar bodies are as varied as people, and when you look on the wall at the slotcar raceway, you'll be convinced. They are in all sizes and shapes for all scales and styles of racing. What you will see more of will be vacuum-molded of very durable "Lexan" plastic which resists tearing and damage. You can buy them "clear" and paint your own, or there are hundreds available that are already painted and detailed by a wide variety of companies. Whatever body style you choose, when it comes time to actually "race" it in competition, you'll need to add a driver interior, three numbers and appropriate decals. After all...this is "scale racing"...merely smaller versions of actual race cars. For years many enthusiasts built plastic model kits, then mounted them onto slotcar chassis and raced them. This very popular style of racing is coming back strong and is called "hard-body" racing. For some there is nothing like the thrill of fender-banging a competitor and knocking parts off in crashes.

TIRES: If you were amazed at the number of available motors, chassis, and bodies, just take a gander at the racing tires they have in stock! They are manufactured in almost every color of the rainbow, but black has become the most popular in the past year or so. Prices vary according to the type of rubber used and the hub material. Some hubs are machined from aluminum - others from lightweight magnesium. Many styles of rear tires now have "white" lettering on the sidewalls, such as "Goodyear Eagle" and such. Some newer slotcar tires are made of what can best be described as "fish" rubber...very smelly so keep away from your nose! You never have to worry about slotcar tires being "round" today like we did in the 60's and 70's. The manufacturing processes used today are extremely exact and they come right out of the package, ready to install and go racing. There are also different types of "front" wheels/tires which are used for non-scale racing. These are smaller, narrower, lighter, and are only on the cars because the rules state they must be there.

TOOLS and OTHER PARTS: You'll walk around many raceways open-mouthed, looking at regular customers and their large "slot boxes" crammed full of all sorts of tools and electronic gadgetry. Who knows...if you get into this like many of us have, you'll end up with something very similar. Don't worry about it at first...add what you need as the need arises.

PLAYING, PRACTICING and RACING: Many people become "hooked" on slotcar racing merely for the fun of playing with toy cars. They don't care if they ever enter an organized race event and just playing is enough. For others, only the thrill and excitement of competition will "light their fire." Part of the genuine fun and challenge of slotcar racing has to do with being knowledgeable enough to work on and even "build" your own race cars - as well as racing them in competition. This is another example of taking things one step at a time. First, learn how to drive; how to properly corner marshal (replacing de slotted cars back into their correct lanes); and how to maintain and care for your own equipment. Hang around the track owner and his or her experienced racers. Don't be afraid to ask questions - even ones you might think stupid. We all had to start somewhere and most will be very gracious, willing and able to help you or any new beginner. Don't be in a hurry to enter organized races, and understand going in that you (and everyone in the place) will lose many more races than you'll ever win. It doesn't matter because you're getting into this hobby just for the fun of having something to do that's affordable and exciting. When the time comes that you finally DO win that first race, there's no thrill quite like it. I can remember my first 'win" like it was yesterday. That "yesterday" was in 1959! You can never be too young or too old to race slotcars. It is one of the very few things you can do and enjoy for a lifetime!

TODAY'S RACEWAYS

The modern slot car raceway is, in most cases, an "emporium" - many times encompassing more than just slotcar racing. Many are also called "hobby shops" and offer numerous other hobby-related items such as kites, rockets, hard-plastic model kits, die-cast, NASCAR-collectibles, Scout clothing, Pine-Wood Derby cars (and tracks) trains, radio-controlled cars, planes, boats, as well as many items which ladies find appealing - bead kits, clay, and similar products. Many places diversify the business to include such things as go-karts, video games,

pool tables, Foosball machines, miniature golf, and snack bars. Most places conduct special birthday party functions for adults as well as the youngsters. The owners and employees of these facilities are required to be extremely knowledgeable about all phases of the hobby industry. Opening a modern facility such as the above requires an investment of tens of thousands of dollars and the typical work week for a track owner can be as much as sixty to eighty hours. In a lot of instances, the shops which feature primarily slotcar racing are open six to seven afternoons and evenings per week so they will be there when people want to come in a play. Rent and/or lease payments on these places can be exorbitant because they are usually fairly large and track layouts take up a lot of space. Just maintaining an adequate inventory is also very time-consuming and expensive. Today's modern raceway is well-lighted and comfortably climate-controlled. Virtually everything in the store is computer-controlled, including the sales area as well as the race directing on the tracks. These things require a lot of electricity which is certainly not inexpensive. Add to this the price of insurance for every person who walks through the door and you can see that owning a business of this type is costly. So those who go to the trouble, time and expense of providing the public with a fun place to play does so very carefully and with much pre-opening planning and thought. For this sizable investment, the owner asks only that the consumer enjoy themselves by behaving in a civil and reasonable manner.

TODAY'S EQUIPMENT

Marvelous improvements - far to many to mention - have taken place since the early days of slot racing. Slot car tracks have racing surfaces as smooth as glass. Power is now seemingly limitless and for the most part very "clean" - meaning you don't burn out motors like we once did so frequently in the 60's and 70's. Technology continues unabated at all levels of the hobby - both at the beginning as well as the advanced levels. Motors that used to have their lives measured in minutes now last for months. Chassis that used to bend if you looked at them cross-eyed now survive numerous crashes and stay properly aligned. Tires that used to wear out after ten minutes of racing now will go an entire 40 minute race and still "tech" legal. The original bodies, vacuum-molded from butyrate plastic which curled and cracked easily, now last for weeks because they're made from much tougher "Lexan." Cars and equipment produced for today's consumers are far superior to anything we had before - even as short as just ten years ago. Sure...the cost of technology can sometimes be high, and we've seen that transpire in slot racing as well. Yet this hobby remains one of the last real bargains to be had in America. Leisure time activities and discretionary income continue to spiral upward. People do have more time and more money to spend on the things they truly enjoy. For us...and we hope for you who are reading this information about slot racing or are about to try it yourselves...there is nothing as enjoyable as watching a pretty miniature race car going smoothly and fast around a slotcar track!

TODAY'S RACING

...is generations removed from what we did originally! As stated earlier, everything in most slot racing "emporiums" would appear to be operated by ultra-sophisticated computer systems. Many raceways now have several PC's - one just for the purpose of recording sales and

keeping track of the store inventory and ordering through the use of bar-coding systems. Other computers are used by race directors to stage races and virtually eliminate mistakes. Each lap turned on each lane by every driver is both counted and timed - down to the 10,000th of a second! Races can be set up for up on some of these systems for up to 150 racers, all ahead of time. Special "qualifying" events can be staged, as well as the running of numerous races - virtually automatically.

In the "old days" we raced what became known as "straight rotation" - competing for a given length of time on one lane - then moving up or down the track one slot at a time. Should you have been placed between someone better than you, or who lacked your driving skills, you were stuck there throughout the race. In the 1970's a much more equitable system was established, and became known as the "random-skip-lane" rotation. Many people mistakenly called this system "European" rotation, but was actually developed by Jim Honeycutt in San Antonio, Texas for the World Championships in the mid-70's. This system is now used almost exclusively everywhere in the world today and has been made a part of computerized race director programs which are available from at least five companies in the US.

Racing in the 50's and 60's was rather hectic, but not nearly so much as we see today because of the speed of modern equipment. Even though today's cars handle so much better, de slots occur at an alarming rate, much more so than we did back then with slower and much heavier cars. Even though modern drivers are have so much skill, accidents do occur much more frequently with the winged cars than those which are scale appearing. As the speed increased we saw a change in racing which transpired in the 70's and almost universally accepted by most - what is called a "track" or "power-off" condition. Many old-timers all but had a hissy when this came about because you couldn't make laps if the power was off and many of them practiced long enough to drive within themselves and not come off. Alas, "Track" calls became a reality because it became obvious that was the only way to save on ultra-expensive equipment.

Another equipment-saver was the implementation of "Rider" calls - where if your car jumped out of your lane and into another, the race director could kill the power to keep your car from being unceremoniously smashed into the nearest wall. There are very few races conducted in the US today where neither of these are permitted. Writer, race director/race announcer extraordinaire Gil Aubin was one organizer that did not allow either and his races were purported to be very smooth and well run. Two companies - Cidex out of New Jersey and Tilt 'n Tech in New York have developed "Yellow" or "Caution Light" systems where by track power can be reduced, but not shut off during Rider's and crash situations where track power would normally be turned off. We think this a much better system because the drivers who do keep their cars slotted are not penalized by those who crash a lot.

ORGANIZED RACING: Once you've learned to properly care for your equipment and you've practiced sufficiently to the point where you think you're finally ready to enter a race, start at your local raceway. Enter at least one - maybe two of the classes of cars they race on a weekly basis. Practice your driving and turn-marshalling skills until you begin to gain confidence in your ability to compete by keeping the car in the slot. Don't expect immediate success because there will always be those who have been there longer, practiced a long time, built their own cars and

worked on their own controllers, and entered a lot more races. If you're fortunate enough to live in a city which has more than one commercial raceway, *go to the other places and practice on tracks that are not familiar or like your "home" raceway.* We cannot begin to tell you how much you'll improve by practicing and racing on tracks that are different than what you're used to racing on all the time. Even if you have to travel for an hour or two...go to other tracks for the experience! When a regional race, or a series is started, enter and go to as many events as you can. Never be afraid to enter a larger race just because you think you're not quite as good as the other drivers. You will NEVER become as good as you can until you can compete on a regular basis with those who have had the same amount of experience as you. Most raceways do you the favor of putting you in races with others who have approximately the same driving skills an experience. As you begin to win, they will move you progressively upward until you're competing all the time with the "big boys."

RACING ORGANIZATIONS:

There are dozens spread all around the country and the world, but the granddaddy of them all is the USRA - United Slot Racers Association - a group which had its start way back in 1968. The Association was formed by racers, for racers and they write all their own rules. In three short years they were organized to the point that a National Championship was scheduled each year since 1971. Those who have won that prestigious title have gone on to become legends but sadly not "household names" as we would have liked. Just to have the opportunity and to be fortunate enough to "make the main" at the professional level in any of these events was akin to winning the lottery. Unfortunately, none of these winning drivers has ever entered, raced, or won simply for the money. No...the pace of pay has never - nor will it ever - match the pace of play, and that's too bad because they deserve it.

Because the country is so big, and the racing interests so diversified, the USRA began to divide the country up into Regions, all running their own monthly series. There are now 14 USRA regions and more are likely in the future.

1996 saw the USRA grow into two divisions - with Division I remaining the high-end "winged" cars and a separate group of scale enthusiasts now belong to Division II. Each Region may now schedule races for both divisions and these typically run for nine or ten months, culminating with the National Championship which moves around the country to various locations - all being "bid" for by track owners and the winning host voted upon by the 14 regional directors.

There are other organizations who have made quite a name for themselves in the past decade ; [the SDRA - a Drag Racing series sponsored out of Plano, Texas.](#) and the USRA. There are also numerous "club" style racing championships. Slot racing is growing, but not fast enough! We're hearing of more and more places opening in England, Portugal, and other parts of Germany, Italy, and Europe. We need to get the word out to the masses...we need to let the world know about the incredible excitement that awaits everyone. All they need to do is hear about it...read about it...see it...then *DO IT!* If we can just get them to pull that trigger one time...see that car whiz down the straightaway...then we'll have done our job because more people will start racing...more raceways will open...and more fun will be had by everyone! This is not a job for

one person...one company...or one association. It will take a concerted effort on the part of every person who now enjoys playing and racing with slot cars. Can we count on *YOU* to do your part?

To those of you who might be reading this, trying to learn more about this wonderful hobby and sport, may we take this opportunity to invite you to visit your nearest slotcar raceway and see what you've been missing. If you can't find one in your town, visit your local hobby shop and have them contact any TOA Officer, Board, or Track Owner Member for information on how they can start a slot racing business in your city. It will be well worth their time and yours. Thanks for taking the time to read the ramblings of an old slot racer. Keep it in the slot forever!