

## Backyard Racing – Family Style!

It's been there for about 18 months now, but like many things in our own backyards, how many of us have taken a serious look at it? I'm talking about the Sumter Motorsports Park (SMP) racing complex located at the Sumter County Fairgrounds on SR 471 at Beville's Corner, two miles north of Webster. Now that it's settled into a regular, three-times-a-month event schedule, this fifth-of-a-mile clay-based race track advertises itself as "a place where families can come and enjoy a day full of the most exhilarating and speedy events on the West Coast of Florida." As a die-hard race fan myself, and after attending several of the track's programs, I can attest to that claim...in fact, I think I may have become a regular fixture in their grandstands!

SMP's owner/operators Bill and Lori Cleary and Matt & Joe Garbinski have built what is on the threshold of being a thriving racing facility in central Sumter County. In a recent interview, Lori



Lori Cleary (center) keeps an eye on the track while track announcer Joe Gambino (left) and registration and scoring specialist Christy Jones (right) stand ready to jump in where needed.)

described their project this way: "Building a race track was always a dream of Bill's, and after approaching the Fairgrounds Committee and obtaining approval, we gave it a shot and its working." This may be sort of an understatement, since the August 15 racing card featured a full field of classes, ranging from micro- and mini-sprints, to Slingshots, ATV's, and dirt bikes, with two major touring series joining the show. Interviews with several of the drivers on hand for the night provided a consistent message about the quality of the racing surface...it's fast, and it's competitive. The Cleary's and the Garbinskis, supported by a handful of eager and talented volunteers have banded together to

bring the exciting world of motor racing to Sumter County.

But in addition to the pure quality of racing, volumes can be said about the atmosphere that surrounds a local racing venue like SMP. Although the racing is serious, the "competitors" are off-track friends, with an attitude that every driver wants success for every other driver. In fact, the time spent between on-track events usually involves teams of drivers going from car-to-car to help their fellow drivers diagnose problems, fix equipment, and get ready for the next event. The



family atmosphere is strong, with picnic-type camaraderie in the air.

On this particular night, the family-side of racing was even more evident than usual, with driver Ken Dye from Clearwater, Florida donning a special logo in honor of his recently-deceased mother Jean. Since she was considered one of his biggest fans, Ken brought her to the track



with him in the form of a “Racing With Mom” inscription on the sides of his Gadget Winged Sprint Car, pictured at left. In the photo below, Ken’s wife Janet (left) and family friend Becky McNeil cheer Ken on during his feature event. Their efforts were rewarded with a commanding win for Ken (and, of course, for his mom). Also competing in the event was the Dyes’ nephew Joel (JR) Dye, who finished a solid seventh in the

feature race. This is just one of the many stories that one finds at a local family-oriented racing facility like SMP.

SMP’s owner/operators are not a group to rest on their laurels, but are aggressively looking to the future.

“We at SMP are proud of the progress we have made in our short existence,” says Bill Cleary. With the facility only being about 65% complete, Cleary considers the track’s potential to be immense. In planning for the future, he reports that negotiations are underway with a number of sanctioning bodies to



bring a wide variety of specialty classes to SMP’s schedule. “Once we increase the track size to ¼ mile and address safety issues related to the larger track size, we will have the ability to promote Dirt Late Model, Open Wheel Modifieds, 360 Sprints, and other classes. Our intentions are to keep bringing quality racing events and venues to Sumter County, while remaining cost-effective for the fans,” reports Cleary.

So, if you like racing, and especially if you like getting close to the action, Sumter Motorsports Park is the place for you. SMP offers oval track racing on the third Saturday of each month, and mud bog racing twice a month, on the second and fourth Saturdays. For specific scheduling, check out their website at [www.sumterracing.com](http://www.sumterracing.com). It’s not only great sport, but it’s an affordable night out, with a gate admission of a mere \$5 coupled with concession prices that are budget friendly! On top of all that, there’s not a bad seat in the house. And best of all, all this is right here in our own backyard.