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Something Old, Something New-The WDRL PolyDome Late Model Series

Welcome back my friends to the show that never ends,
We're so glad you could attend
Come inside! Come inside!

Step inside! Hello! We're a most amazing show.
You'll enjoy it all we know
Step inside! Step inside!

You've got to see the show, it's a dynamo.

-ELP, "KARNEVIL NUMBER 9"

On July 22nd, Jim Wilson's carnival of speed, the World Dirt Racing League PolyDome Late Model Series celebrated its milestone 100th event at Mid-Nebraska Speedway. In doing so the PolyDome Late Model Series avoided the politics, controversy, and claims of favoritism that beset other late model tours to become the top regional tour in the country.

Something old, something new, something borrowed, something blue? Well the WDRL is no longer the blushing bride it was in 2001, but Midwestern fans, drivers, promoters, and sponsors still have a love affair with the series.

Fans know they can count on a 40 plus car show, with a healthy helping of local hot shoes, top regional drivers, and an occasional drop in by national stars like Jimmy Mars, Steve Francis, and Brian Birkhofer.

Drivers count on being treated fairly by series officials. PolyDome Late Model Series officials see a car coming to compete, not a number, or the name on the side of the car-the playing field is level. Racers expect the event to be hard fought, but clean, AND, good for the racing budget, no trip to the tire trailer for treads that can't be used in any other race.

Promoters are not easily pleased, but working with Wilson's team means dealing with professionals. While the WDRL logo in a race ad can't guarantee perfect weather for an event, it can guarantee full pits and a packed grandstand.

Sponsors expect some bang for their buck, a return on their investment. With the WDRL PolyDome Late Model Series traveling to 18 tracks in six Midwest states for 29 sold out events, sponsors know they get their message across. In 2006, over 20 businesses are partnered with the series.

Something Old

Why is the WDRL the best of the regional tours? Start with founder Jim Wilson. Wilson has been involved with dirt track racing for over 30 years, and Dirt Late Model magazine named him as one of the 25 most influential people in late model racing. Call him a visionary or admire his courage, but when NASCAR cancelled the popular Busch All-Star Series after the 2001 season, Wilson left his Regional Director position with the association, and formed the WDRL.

Craig Kelley, former owner of Sunset Speedway and GM of Nebraska Raceway Park, now a consultant with KARMA(Kelley Auto Racing Management Advisors) had this to say of Wilson. "As a track promoter who worked with EVERY sanctioning body at two different race tracks I operated, and as a racing official who worked as a scorer with most of the sanctioning bodies as well, I credit Jim with having the FULL series director package. By that I mean Jim has vast knowledge and experience in every series need, such as rules-making, scheduling, marketing, sponsor acquisition and retention, and most importantly, solid and fair race event operation. I have enjoyed working with Jim for over two decades, and still enjoy working with him very much in our present roles." Added Adams County Speedway promoter Greg Hampel, "Jim is a no nonsense kind of guy. Don't try to get away with anything with Jim. He does things the right way."

Add an experienced and professional group of officials. "I have one of the most devoted crews in racing," stated Wilson. "Everyone works hard. They give up vacation. There is never enough pay. You gotta love the sport to do this." The officials are like family. "I feel everybody that is involved with the series works their hearts out to put on a good show. I consider them all family and true friends," stated tech director Mark Ludwig. Media rep Phil Roberts added, "it's an honor to be associated with a series like this."

Something New

The PolyDome Late Model Series trailer is dirt racing's version of an aircraft carrier. It comes with a lot of firepower. Using technology is not in the series' future, it is a big part of current operations.

Start with four laptop computers, three printers, and a copy machine. And mobile internet service to update the WDRL website immediately(a new site designed by eCreative Group, www.worldraceleague.com). Add to this a new scoring system, sponsored by Iowa Illinois Taylor Insulation.

And not just any scoring system. Transponders used are by AMB, the same transponders as used by NASCAR in their "Big 3" series. Orbits software,

also by AMB is used with the transponders. Jim Wilson did all the wireless networking, and installed an antenna on the tech trailer.

According to the PolyDome Late Model Series computer guru Nancy Wilson, “the transponders have been a huge success for us. There are no scoring disputes with these being electronic and devoid of any bias. They are totally and completely accurate.” When a caution occurs, scorer Chris Hansen needs only to bring up the previous lap, and he has the running order available to radio on track line-up man Mark Ludwig. Announcer Tom Lathen with another laptop is able to provide fans with accurate information immediately.

AMB has a website called MyLaps.com. Any driver who runs a WDRL race can record his transponder number, go to the site, enter that transponder number, and see his entire racing performance, including lap times, best speed, and time relationship to the winner.

Other programs were done in-house and use MS Access and Excel. Since the PolyDome Late Model Series uses qualifier passing points to determine starting positions in the feature, there is an Access program that is a “Passing Points Calculator.” A heat finish is entered, and the program immediately calculates finish points, passing points, and total points. Line-up programs are done with Excel.

QuickBooks Professional allows for check writing at the track. In fact, the only thing done by hand is contingency certificates, and “if we can find a way to get all the contingency sponsors to use the same size and style of certificates, we’ll be doing them on the computers as well,” commented Nancy Wilson.

Something old-doing a job right with experienced and dedicated officials never goes out of style. Something new-the latest in computer technology to assist officials. And something great. “Walking out of the tower after a good night of racing, fans will come up to me and say the WDRL is the best show they have seen in a long time,” said series scorer Chris Hansen. And, back to the Emerson, Lake, and Palmer lyrics:

Come inside, the show’s about to start
Guaranteed to blow your head apart
Rest assured you’ll get your money’s worth
Greatest show in Heaven, Hell, or Earth.

Sidebar-A Hard Days Night

Race fans marvel at the distance and long hours drivers travel to compete. WDRL PolyDome Late Model Series officials also travel long distances to get to an event. Just like drivers they leave work early and take vacation days to race.

Everyone does work hard. WDRL officials are at work setting up several hours before the first tow vehicles pull up to the track pit gate. Driver sign in can be hectic, and pre-race tech is hopping until minutes before the evening's pit meeting. Then on to hot laps, including the new WDRL time trials system, followed by qualifying heats. At least one consolation race, and an eight car pole dash precede the evening's feature. Following the feature there is post race tech, making sure all rented transponders are returned, writing checks and contingency certificates, and finally loading up equipment for the next race. When everything goes right, officials are through for the evening about an hour after the last checkered flag falls. A long drive home, or maybe to a motel for a few hours rest before another hard days night at the track.

Sidebar-Behind The Oval Office

Just like President Bush, Jim Wilson has an "oval" office. The President's office is more plush, but Jim's oval office is a half mile around. The President can call on advisors anytime, anywhere. And of course he has a Chief of Staff who limits access to his oval office. Jim has several hundred close "advisors" in the pits, and they do not hesitate to enter Jim's office to voice their opinion on any number of subjects.

Jim does have a Chief of Staff though, his wife Nancy. "When I first met Jim seven years ago, I asked what he did for a living," said Nancy. "He told me he worked for NASCAR. I had heard of NASCAR, but I thought it was an auto parts store. He told me he traveled a lot, so I asked, oh, do you sell auto parts? He laughed and said yes, in a round about way."

"He asked if I was familiar with stock car racing, and I explained I had seen some as a child at the Lakeside track in Kansas City. He asked if I had ever heard of some drivers and started listing names. I hadn't heard of any of them, and not wanting to appear too ignorant about the sport, I asked if he knew Mario Andretti."

"For some reason I cannot fathom, he asked me out for a second date."

Nancy is the PolyDome Late Model Series' behind the scenes official, or "invisible" official as she calls herself. Her responsibilities range from registering drivers to printing media reports to writing checks to inputting points. And double checking everything. And she never gets to see a race. "I'm in the tech trailer all night. I've nagged Jim about that for years," she laughed. Of course on a 100 degree late July Iowa afternoon, Nancy sat behind a computer desk in an air-

conditioned trailer. And in the chilly early spring and autumn evenings, that same space is heated. Plus her computer lets her know the race outcome as it happens.

Said Nancy, "I may have a Masters Degree in Bus. and Adult Ed., but Jim has a Ph.D. in racing and we respect each other's area of knowledge, experience, and expertise."

Sidebar-The PolyDome Late Model Series Family Tree

Jim Wilson-won World 100 as a car owner, 20 year employee of NASCAR, series founder, one of Dirt Late Model magazine's 25 Most Influential People.

Nancy Wilson-Jim's better half and co-owner of the series. "If she is so smart, why did she marry a racer," asked "anonymous". The invisible official and computer expert of the PolyDome Late Model Series.

Phil Roberts-distributes over 1,000 of each press release put out by the series. Has worked with Jim since 1990 and the NASCAR All-Star Series days.

Tom Lathen-Director of Marketing and Media, Announcer. Has announced races for 30 years. One year with NASCAR traveling series, and the WDRL announcer since its inception. Arranges contingency sponsors-over \$1500 in contingency awards are handed out at each PolyDome Late Model Series event.

Mark Ludwig-Technical Director, conducts on track race operations during each event. Has also served as tech inspector for NASCAR Nextel Cup, Busch, Craftsman Truck, and Winston West series. Associated with Wilson for nine years.

Art Daufeld-Tech inspector. Been with Wilson since 1989. Like Ludwig has also worked as tech inspector for NASCAR Nextel Cup, Busch, and Craftsman Truck series.

Ron Streger-tech inspector, maintains radios, drives pace car. 40 year racing veteran, has worked with Wilson for 12 years.

Dean and Shirley Howe-Dean is the series flagman, and Shirley registers drivers. Dean has flagged for Frieden Inc. and Simmons Inc. tracks, and has worked HAT and NARA late model races, and the WoO sprint series. Has worked with Wilson since 1987.

Chris Hansen-first year with the PolyDome Late Model Series. Operates the transponder system and scores the race.

Eldon Wilson-Jim's brother, works series events gratis. Helps set up and take down equipment, directs cars in pit area. Four years with the WDRL.

Tim-here is a quote that you might be able to use as a floater somewhere in the article:

"It's a lot of work and consumes more time than I probably should allow it to, but I thoroughly enjoy dirt track racing, I love the series, and I love being involved with the teams, the drivers, and the fans. This is like a little piece of heaven for me."
Tom Lathen, WDRL announcer.