

AGAINST

“Internet chat rooms are a runaway destructive aspect of the short-track race business” says ACT and Thunder Road leader Tom Curley.

It is easy to see why Curley would not be a fan of such sites. With a popular series in The American Canadian Tour and a legendary racetrack in the form of Barre, VT’s Thunder Road Speedbowl, Tom Curley generates a lot of publicity. With that publicity come the opinions of fans and competitors of how he is running things. After any given event the boards come alive, pointing out both his successes and also any of his perceived mistakes. Many times the talk of perceived mistakes greatly outweighs the kudos for success.

It is hard for a track and/or series owner to have public critiquing of their work, especially when there does not even need to be a shred of proof to back up online posts. Says Curley, "I don't mind taking a beating [on message boards], but when the facts are just totally wrong it really does nothing but show how ignorant some people can be."

Race writer Big Bigelow of The Caledonian Record says “Tom has poured his heart and soul into racing for 30 plus years, but as hard as he works there is always someone bitching about something - and that's just hard to swallow. No one likes to get bitched at after working so hard on something.”

One of the biggest arguments against message boards is that people who post are allowed to remain anonymous if they so choose. Some people hide behind their handles, not revealing their real names nor providing their e-mail addresses. In some cases, these anonymous board posters turn out to be real troublemakers, as they often make provocative and wildly untrue statements and are then able to hide behind their anonymity.

Because message boards are a haven for free speech, members can say just about anything they want and get away with it. The poster’s opinion does not have to be substantiated or fact-checked. Sometimes rumors run wild based on nothing more than one poster’s desire to cause trouble.

Racers, track owners, series owners and the families of all of those individuals have been insulted, defamed and libeled in public forums, causing both financial and emotional harm to those being slandered.

Board operators and moderators have the power to delete and alter posts as well as ban the people who made the posts. However, controversy can drive interest in a board and increase traffic to the site. Controversy generates more buzz than positivity does.

Racing message boards, when done right, can be a great place for race fans and competitors to discuss racing. Unfortunately, the majority of boards foster lies, hate and personal attacks against those who race at and run race tracks and series. In an industry already made fragile by the economy, racing message boards could be the “straw that breaks the camel’s back” for many who compete at and run racing tracks and or series.

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Prior to racing message boards on the internet, racers and fans were forced to save most of their racing talk for the occasional phone call to a fellow race fan, a chance meeting in public or hanging out in race shops. Being away from the track used to mean limited talk about racing.

Today, however, message boards have given racers and fans unlimited opportunities to discuss their favorite sport with like-minded individuals. One doesn’t even have to attend the race in order to participate in discussions online 24 hours per day, 365 days per year. Results for events are posted on message boards, in many instances, quicker than the information is available from the track or series. News of on-track activity and results is oftentimes posted from laptops at the track while the race is running.

Several track operators, like Bruce Richards of Albany-Saratoga and Devil’s Bowl and Dick Therrien of Riverside Speedway in NH, have become proactive with their

use of racing message boards. Rather than wait for rumors to start on the boards, promoters like Dick and Bruce are posting news and correcting disinformation regularly through their posts. Knowing that these track operators are reading what is said, and that they are willing to correct inaccuracies, seems to keep the wild speculation to a minimum. It also gives posters the opportunity to post questions for these track operators and have them answered in a public forum.

There are many who think that any talk of racing, be it gossip or fact, is a good thing. The theory is that “any publicity is good publicity.” Dale Earnhardt Sr. is credited with saying that whether fans are cheering or booing a driver, at least they are making noise. The worst thing a driver can hear at driver introductions is absolutely nothing. Silence, said Dale Sr., means fans don’t have any interest in you.

The same can be argued for race tracks and series. Whether the internet chatter is good or bad, at least people are talking. When there are no posts in a week that deal with a particular track or series, perhaps then is it time to worry.

Whatever your favorite race track or series there is more than likely a racing message board that covers the racing that interests you. Besides chat sections of many boards, there are also separate sections for technical assistance, classifieds, member photos and even non-racing discussions.

Even with a certain level of disinformation, racing message boards still provide a place where race fans can talk about racing any time they want. As stated at the beginning of the OutsideGroove.com message board, “The boards can only be what you make of them. Make some friends, have some fun, get into some friendly debates, post links to things you think other people might find interesting, etc. Feel free to post what you want within common decency. Please don't bash drivers unless you're prepared to take as well as you give. But most of all, ENJOY!