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Neil's Corner



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16 races down - and it's now 10 to go. I can't believe those numbers!

We're well past the halfway mark and onto the Endurance races for the busy run to the season end...

After their early season dominance, Team Vodafone drivers Jamie Whincup and Craig Lowndes have come under a higher degree of pressure from the Toll Holden Racing Team duo, Garth Tander and Will Davison. So I get the feeling it's game on from here on in.

At Sandown, Will Davison and Garth Tander did a mighty job at knocking a sizable hole into the points margin enjoyed by Triple 8.

Will has been toiling away towards earning his first Pole Position, and remarkably, at Sandown, he walked away with two Pole Positions from both days of Qualifying!

I thought his lap on the Sunday was a terrific effort. He dug very very deep to find that extra slice of margin and claimed the ultimate reward. Well done Will.

Most recently at Queensland Raceway we were shocked to see 3 of the 4 Championship contenders sidelined with mechanical issues in Race 14.

Reliability has not been an issue for years in the Series, so it is reasonable to ask the question - why now?

Good question. And the answer lies within rule changes.

This year much has changed under the bonnet as a result of the introduction of CSR E85 ethanol fuels.

I might add, this is change for the better in terms of our overall green footprint and industry story but change can often be tricky to manage. I'll come back to this topic shortly...

Since my last column there's been an earthquake in the V8 pit paddock.

Team Vodafone shocked our world with the announcement that they are to swap brand allegiance next year, switching from Ford to Holden.

There's a view within our ranks at present that brand, or specifically vehicle brand, is no longer a big deal in our racing.

I beg to differ. I agree that the drivers play a significant part in our emotional attachment to racing, but brand passion remains strong too.

Look no further than the angry reaction from many true blue Ford fans when the Team Vodafone announcement was made.

It's a curious issue and I think when you live and work in the business, it's easy to fall asleep at the wheel when it comes to understanding our fans viewpoint.

Technically, the cars have fused in many keys areas over the past decade. This has been an important part of the parity platform that requires both brands to be relatively competitive when compared to each other.

The key point though for many fans is this: At their heart, the body shape and engine block DNA remain either Ford or Holden (GM) derived and this is an anchor point for many fans.

As we approach the next critical phase of the life cycle of V8 Supercar racing juggling the all needs of fans, Teams, promoters and sponsors is going to be very very important.

Mark Skaife is heading the task force to investigate the possibilities of where we collectively point the category as we embrace the Car Of The Future in V8 Supercar racing.

Mark has a major mission on his hands with this task.

And no doubt the Team Vodafone brand switch reaction will have raised a few eye brows within our post code.

Back to the earlier remark about change.

If you recall, in my last column, I noted the increase in fuel burn this year after switching to E85.

Teams have invested lots of time and money maximizing engine performance and trimming their fuel burn after the new fuel arrived.

This development process has triggered the recent spate of engine and related failures. This has important implications for the Super Cheap Bathurst 1000.

1. Reliability will once again play a vital role in generating a result.
2. The race was previously a 4 or sometimes 5 stop event. Now with the bump in consumption it will become a 6 maybe 7 stop race.

The consumption jump will result in changes to the way the drivers approach the "stints". I expect to see many double stints this year. And I think we're going to see more reliability trouble and more "finger" trouble as a result of the increased number of stops.

I'm running out of space but I want to make a special mention of Mark Webber.

Mark has worked incredibly hard and for a very long time. I dip my hat to him for his recent maiden F1 victory in Germany. There's 20 F1 drivers in a global population of 6 billion. Mark has made it into the final 20 drivers in the world and could make a position in the final 3 at the end of the year. Now that's an achievement.

In fact, how good is the Australian racing system? Mark is a World Championship contender. Marcos Ambrose is a heartbeat from winning a major Sprint Cup race in NASCAR and Ryan Briscoe is a huge chance to win the Indy Racing League Series this year for Penske.

Maybe Aussies OS is a topic for my next column...



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