



LAP 37—PIT ETIQUETTE

Sometimes we forget to be good neighbors, just when we think we're being hospitable, we find the opposite is true. Racing has its social norms and it's important to understand them to ensure your track experience is as pleasant as possible. In the pits, there are different considerations made between drivers, crew members and spectators. Understanding this is the difference between being welcomed and getting the cold shoulder.

Like it or not, drivers are at the top of the pecking order in the pits. The relationship between drivers is a special bond formed by the shared experience that racing is. When racing, you're placing your life in the hands of others and they are doing the same with you. For many drivers, the mental aspects of racing are far more challenging than the physical. On the track, every car demonstrates the traits of its driver and develops its own personality. Racing becomes a negotiation between cars as each attempts to gain an advantage over the other and this is where etiquette becomes important. It is considered poor form to make a series of defensive moves to keep a following car behind you. If a car is in your mirror for more than two laps, odds are it's faster and you're blocking. Keep an eye out on the third lap and you'll uncover where you're making yourself too wide and give the follower the room to attempt a pass. If he takes it, fine, try to keep up. If he doesn't take it, then pedal down for a few more laps and try to place some distance on him. In some races, it's common for me to be within a car length of another for more than five laps without passing. In those cases I find the best strategy is to stay up close, right in their mirror and just wait, ... until they spin. Doing this I've had drivers come up to me later and say they spun just because they couldn't take the pressure any longer. Had they used some etiquette and not made themselves so wide, the entire situation could have been avoided.

In the pits, crew members have rules to abide by, too. First, remember your car and driver are the top priority. This means nothing else matters when either the car or your driver need attention. Whether amateur or professional, it's your job to make sure the car is track ready and the driver attended to at all times. This means all social activities stop immediately when either the car or the driver need attention. Offering a helping hand to other teams is a good idea and should be done freely but never at the expense of your team. If your car needs fuel, oil, tires or water in preparation for the next race, get it done before helping others. The one exception is the case of a disabled car being returned to the pits from the track. If another team needs help moving their car into their pit after delivery by the recovery vehicle you should do so because it keeps the pit lanes clear. Another to be aware of when entering another team's pit location is wandering eyes.

As a crew member, it's poor form to gawk at the engine bay and ask questions without invitation. Have you ever noticed that most of the guys running up front keep the hood closed when not performing maintenance? Believe me, it's intentional, that engine compartment represents countless hours of work performed with hard fought knowledge that's simply too important to give away. If the hood is off, look but don't ask and certainly don't loiter.

Spectators come to the track for many reasons, the cars, the activity and the excitement. In the pits, understand as an observer you're a guest visiting someone else's home. The single most important thing to remember is race cars have the right of way, not pedestrians. Proper etiquette requires making sure a race car never has to slow or make a move

to avoid you when traveling about in the pits. Awareness is the key, pay attention and make sure to only cross pit lanes while allowing plenty of room for traveling race cars. It's a good idea to make sure the group you're with understands this by

explaining it to everyone before entering. Don't assume others in your group understand that race cars have the right of way. Inevitably, accidents occur, that's racing. But proper pit etiquette demands not rushing to inspect the damage as car(s) are returned to their pits. Later, there will be plenty of time to do that, after teams have had time to assess the situation and emotions calm. As a guest, understand teams are there to compete, not answer questions, so ask them sparingly and read the situation as you go. If things are going well it's easy to have a conversation, if they aren't, don't take it personal if the conversation isn't forthcoming.

One of the best places to be in the world is in the pits at a race track. The sights and sounds, combined with the smell of hot brakes and race fuel become much better when you demonstrate proper etiquette and are made to feel at home.

Next lap.

**"RACING HAS ITS SOCIAL
NORMS AND IT'S IMPORTANT
TO UNDERSTAND THEM..."**

Charlie Jones, a.k.a.

Roadracer

