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Dr. Alan Blum
5510 Greenbriar
Houston, Texas 77005

- newspaper
magazine

Dear Dr. Blum:

- NHRA -
- IHRA -
- title rights
- Bud

Thank you very much for the copy of your article from "Sounding Board" in The New England Journal. I have no doubt that, despite all the "straight-faced denials," tobacco's involvement in motorsports is aimed squarely at encouraging young people to smoke and scarcely anything else. I assume that you have other fish to fry as well, such as the racing per se, aside from the involvement with tobacco. If so, that's where we diverge. I'm not against racing, but as far as I am concerned the dissociation from tobacco (and beer) cannot come soon enough.

What I'm doing is writing a history of drag racing from its inception 40 years ago; it will be published by Johns Hopkins. The party line has it that everything has just gotten better and better: bigger crowds, faster speeds, larger purses, more commercial sponsorship and television. My own view is that drag racing provided a worthy (if admittedly dangerous) avenue for technological enthusiasm at the outset, but that most of the last 20 years have been a slippery slope as the activity has been increasingly driven by commercial concerns, concerns increasingly dominated by tobacco and beer.

The turning point was the signing of the first Winston deals in the mid-1970s. If RJR and the breweries were to get kicked out, some people would consider it a disaster for the racing itself. My own view is that it would represent salvation--and I think that, deep down, some of drag racing's elder statesmen would agree. The activity would recede to an essentially amateur level, but one key gain would remain, the enhanced safety of the vehicles involved. The data is actually pretty good--the number of fatal accidents in the fastest classes in the 1970s and 80s was approximately 3-5 percent what it was in the 1960s.

favors
Wally
Parky

I'm with you all the way in your campaign against tobacco sponsorship. We diverge when you attempt to link "the disproportionately high level of motor vehicle-related deaths among teenagers" directly to racing. Causality there strikes me as very complex: If I were to single out just one factor, it would be the continual glorification of daredevil driving in the movies and on TV ("regular" TV fare, not televised races).

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Auto racing, at any level, at least instills in people a sense of goal-directed purposiveness. It may not be the best conceivable purpose, but it is infinitely preferable to the purposelessness that seems to infect today's youth.

- Gerbitz
- NBC
Wanda
Nikki
Clyde
Dory

In any event I congratulate you on your efforts to combat the tobacco epidemic. And thanks again for sending your article.

Sincerely,

Bob Post

Robert C. Post
Editor

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