

Drag racing kicks into high gear this weekend

By Jarrett Smith, Special to The StarPhoenix May 28, 2010

For the racers, it's time to wipe the dust off the cars. For the fans, it's time to break out the bleacher cushions. Race season is officially here.

Provided that Mother Nature doesn't ruin the party, Saskatchewan International Raceway (SIR) has three action-packed days scheduled for the weekend.

The Street Legal program has shifted from Sunday afternoons to Friday evenings and will run deep into the evening for racers who want to get the most out of their cars in the cool air.

Saturday is scheduled to be the first test and tune event of the season. Races in test and tune allow the drivers to make shakedown runs in their cars to be sure the vehicle is working properly heading into the points racing Sunday. To add some fun, racers have the option to participate in jackpot racing. They can take home money for making consistent runs down the track.

Sunday is the day racers across the province have had marked on their calendars for months. It is the first points race of the season.

The first race of the season is and always will be named in honour of Erin Beck, a devoted racer and RCMP officer who lost her life while making a time trial pass in the season opener in 2002. Each year, SIR remembers Erin with a pre-race ceremony. She was passionate about racing and her career which included promoting the Street Legal program and keeping young people off drugs.

Last season, SIR crowned series champions in all categories, ranging from experienced veterans to young racers who were tasting victory for the first time.

Lee Lyons of Regina took the Super Pro championship riding a wave of consistency all season. Lyons's only first-round elimination of the season occurred June 27. He went deep into the later rounds at every other event.

Expect to see close racing in Super Pro again this year with a talented core of veterans as well as drivers making their first appearances in the category.

The Pro category is arguably the toughest at SIR given the number of cars in the field. Brian Hebert of Regina added another championship to his resume last season. Given how dominant he has been, expect to see him in the hunt for the championship again.

Hot on Hebert's heels will be Mike Cote of Vanscoy, who nearly completed the double last season by winning the Sportsman division and coming second in Pro. The Sportsman class is often as competitive as Pro and offers interesting racing.

Adam Knutsen of Regina won his first Sport Compact class title in 2009 with his Dodge SRT-4. He plans on running in both Sport Compact and Sportsman this season.

Street Legal was won by Chad Penner of Martensville. Given the success of the Street Legal racing program with new racers joining all the time, the possibility for a new champion is likely.

In Junior Dragster, Shelby Schultz added her name to the record books by taking the '09 championship by a close margin over Davis Roach.

Street Legal events start at 6 p.m. Friday nights and run until sundown. Gates open at 5:30 p.m.

On Saturdays, gates open at 9 a.m. for test and tune, with racing running from 11 a.m. to 5 p.m.

Sunday, the racer gates open at 8 a.m., with time trials starting at 9 a.m. Spectator gates open later in the morning, with eliminations starting at 1:30 p.m.

On a side note, the Centennial Plumbing and Heating/SIR barbeque plus show and shine that was scheduled for this weekend has been postponed until June 4 due to weather. More information will be provided prior to the event.

(Jarrett Smith is a Saskatoon freelance writer.)

© Copyright (c) The StarPhoenix