

THE NEXT STEP MAILBAG

BY AARON POVOLEDO



FROM THE EDITOR:

Aaron Povoledo's column, *The Next Step*, exists to provide advice to readers looking to make the transition from motoring/motorsports enthusiast to participant. With his years of experience as a professional driver and driving instructor

in North America and Britain, Povoledo is an authority within the world of motorsports and advanced driver training.

Send your racing questions and comments to aaron@prnmag.com.

EPISODE 12: CLEAN VS. DIRTY RACECRAFT - PART 2

A few issues back I wrote in response to a reader's question regarding the difference between clean vs. dirty racecraft (Episode 9). The column was written last spring just as the 2010 racing season was getting started and, coincidentally, the subject became a big talking point throughout the top levels of Motorsport in 2010. NASCAR generated a lot of controversy (and media coverage) when league officials opened up the rule book to allow drivers to police themselves, particularly in the top level Sprint Cup Series. In Formula One, Michael Schumacher did his part to create column inches by pulling another classic out of his box of tricks when he nearly drove his old buddy Rubens Barrichello into the pit wall at the Hungarian Grand Prix.



The debate around proper racecraft has by no means been limited to the press and the general public – it has also been at the centre of much discussion amongst professional drivers as well. Recently I received two letters from fellow professional drivers that felt strongly about the subject and wanted to add their voices to the conversation.

The first letter is from Randy Pobst. With 10 professional sports car championships to his credit (including the 2010 World Challenge GT title – Congrats, Randy!), 2 wins in the in the 24 Hours of Daytona and more than 70 pro level victories. He is also a great writer, penning his own column in SCCA's SportsCar Magazine, one of my favorite reads – check it out by visiting www.randypobst.com and looking under "Randy's Writings."

Aaron, I really enjoyed your column "Episode Nine" on dirty vs. clean racecraft. I agree with most of what you say, and learned from your perspective. I have one point of contention to discuss, however. Your comment on closing the door, which is who has the right to a corner at turn-in in the midst of battle. Your first remark is "When I first started racing, I was told that if someone had their

front wheel up to your rear wheel you had to make racing room." And, "...how far alongside was your competitor?" This is the critical point here, and I believe this is very naturally determined by vision. In other words, the passing car must get into your peripheral vision at or soon after the turn-in point. This means the passer's nose must be to about the steering wheel of the car he's overtaking. If he is only at the rear wheel, he cannot be seen without the mirror, and no one should be looking in the rear-view mirror at turn-in. When the passing car comes into vision, he is far enough alongside to now take the line away, without contact.

Thus, if the passing car can only make the rear wheel of the car in front, the driver of the trailing car must continue braking and allow the lead car room to take the line. Because he did not get there in time, the trailing driver did not take possession of the line – he is still behind and should stay there! The overtaking car must earn the pass by taking the line away, which means getting far enough in to reach the line first in order to take the lead.

It's all about vision, just like all driving. Don't hit what you can see. At the rear wheel, you can see him, but he cannot see you. Near the front wheel, he can see you, and all you see is the apex.

Aaron, I'm really glad you got the ball rolling on this conversation. It's something that needs to be talked about more – racing in this country needs this training and standardization.

Your brother-in-racing,

Randy Pobst
Gainesville, Georgia



PHOTO BY MARK WEBER/SCCA



PHOTO BY LEE BAILIE

Hi Randy, thanks for taking the time to write. I think you make a great point and it has given me good cause to analyze my original rule. In doing so, I think I have stumbled upon another little interesting footnote to the discussion. I grew up racing karts and Formula cars and it makes sense that the rule you teach a beginning driver is to give racing room once the front wheels of the overtaking car are in line with the rear wheels of the car being passed – because more so than in a sedan, when open wheels start touching or interlocking it gets dangerous really fast! Sedans can lean on each other to some degree where as exposed wheels making contact often leads to vehicles getting airborne which, general speaking, is the opposite of good! I think you are 100% right in your explanation that it should be "naturally determined by vision – the passing car must get into your peripheral vision at or soon after the turn-in point."

The big question is how would you enforce such a rule?

The best idea I've heard comes from another extremely well-respected and highly decorated pro driver, Peter Schwartzott. Mr. Schwartzott has been semi-retired for the past few years, but his involvement in the sport spans more than 40 years. Deemed the "Grand Master of Endurance Racing", his resume boasts wins and championships in World

AARON POVOLEDO: CREDENTIALS AND CAREER BIO

- » Regular winner in regional and national level karting
- » Canadian Regional F2000 Champion
- » World Scholarship winner from Jim Russell Racing UK
- » Voted by Autosport Magazine as one of the top 5 up and coming drivers in the UK in 1997
- » Player's Racing team driver 1998 – 2000
- » Winner of Canadian Grand Prix F.Ford race
- » Pole position at Molson Indy, F.Ford
- » Record number of Poles in Canadian Champ Car Lights
- » 5 wins, 3 seconds and 2 thirds in CCL
- » ALMS with Carsport America in the Viper GTSR
- » Victory, pole and fastest lap in touring car debut
- » Pole Position at Trois-Riviers in Hankook Touring car series
- » Lap record holder at Mosport since 2000
- » Pole Position at 2005 BMW CCA O'Fest feature race.
- » Podium finish in first Grand-Am cup race
- » Top ten finish (7th) in Rolex series debut, - 9hr Sun Chaser, MMP
- » 5 race wins and 7 lap records (including out right record at Watkins Glen and Tremblant) in BMW Club racing series
- » Qualified no lower than 4th in 2007 KONI Challenge ST
- » Led every race entered in 2007 KONI Challenge season
- » Pole + most laps led, Koni Challenge 2008 Watkins Glen



PHOTO BY PETER SCHWARTZOTT COLLECTION

Challenge, Grand-Am, Motorola Cup, IMSA and Firehawk Series as well as a record number of wins at the 24 Hours of the Glen. During his career, he has been a driver, team owner and driver manager.

Aaron, I recently read your column on racecraft and I think you painted a very good picture of the subject – I also read our friend Randy's response and I think he is right on: I can't be looking in my mirror while in the middle of a drift! The onus of a good pass is always on the overtaking car.

Now a point that you folks didn't cover loudly enough: IT IS THE RESPONSIBILITY OF THE GOVERNING BODY TO MAINTAIN SAFE AND FAIR SPORT.

Obviously NASCAR has no interest in fair play; it officially supports "action", which is good for the bottom line. There was a Firestone Firehawk series steward named Charlie Earwood – he was the best. He used a system I would agree with: if you hit a car in the rear quarter causing that car to spin or move off track, or his line – you would come in for a stop and go. Period. Why can't Grand Am, NASCAR, F1, ALMS, etc. see the need for this. Look at the awful crash damage costs – it's ridiculous!

If drivers knew that rule existed and that it would be ENFORCED they would act accordingly.

Peter Schwartzott
Ithaca, NY

I agree, Peter. I think the whole problem could be easily solved by a sanctioning body creating a clear rule and enforcing it. Back in 2006, Grand-Am had an "un-necessary contact" punishment which resulted in a drive through penalty, and I remember it being used quite a lot. I have not seen it used in recent years, though

– it might be worth raising my hand at the next drivers meeting and asking about it.

F1 has made a small step in the right direction by employing former drivers as race stewards at each Grand Prix, but how much authority these new stewards actually have has already been called into question. Derek Warwick, who was the serving steward at this year's Hungarian GP was quoted as saying that he, "wanted to disqualify Michael Schumacher". Schumacher was effectively given a slap on the wrist with a 10 spot grid penalty for the next race.

The IZOD IndyCar series is attempting to eradicate unfair driving and increase overtaking with the creation of its no blocking rule. Series chief steward Brian Barnhart explains: "On road courses and some ovals, we divide the track in half. On the road courses, from the braking point to the entry, [drivers] are told you can only be on the inside half if you are attempting to overtake someone. If you are on the inside half while someone is trying to overtake you, it's blocking."

The rule caused intense controversy at this year's Edmonton Indy when Helio Castroneves was stripped of his victory after being judged to have blocked teammate Will Power while fighting for the lead going into an extremely wide turn one. I think it was a very bad call, but look up "Edmonton Indy 2010" on YouTube and decide for yourself.

To me, there is a massive difference between blocking and defending. Defending falls into the category of racecraft and is a skill. When done correctly it sets the stage for thrilling side by side racing, which is exactly what happened at Edmonton. Fans love seeing the passing car go around the outside to make a pass – it's the type of thing that creates heroes and sells t-shirts!

I'm with Peter on this one: make a simple rule and enforce it. End of story.

Now if we could only convince Mr. Schwartzott to leave his comfortable estate in upstate New York to come give lessons to all the world's chief stewards.

What do you say, Pete?

Aaron