

Insurance guidelines fuel price increases

The current insurance crisis is forcing race tracks throughout the country to re-examine and overhaul their operations. Insurance companies are issuing stricter guidelines to their policy holders, and thus have a larger say as to how the facilities are to be run.

Locally, promoters and track personnel are hurrying to get into compliance before their scheduled openers — Penn-Can Speedway in Susquehanna, Pa., opens at 8 o'clock tonight, and Shangri-La Motor Speedway in Owego opens at 7 p.m., tomorrow.

This development also translates into higher ticket prices for fans and competitors alike. At Shangri-La and Penn-Can, ticket prices will increase from \$6 to \$7 for regular shows.

At Shangri-La's weekly Tuesday meeting, promoter Dale Campfield told his staff that coverage for this year's 22 scheduled events would cost \$18,000 more than his 1985 figures.

Penn-Can is facing a 50 percent increase in insurance, the promoters say. Rates for Oswego Speedway have also doubled, track spokesmen say. Meanwhile, tracks such as Jennerstown, Pa., Speedway will not open due to an inability to either obtain or afford



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By Michael J. Marrer

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adequate coverage.

Nearby promoters said their problems can be traced to the sue-happy legal environment we live in.

Both Shangri-La and Oswego are considered higher risks because their pits are located in the infield. They were informed that additional guardrails have to be added along the backstretch. Shangri-La was also told it needed protection around the scales at the east end of the track, and along the entrance to the pits in turn one.

Using the current industry terminology,

Oswego has divided its infield into "hot pits" and "cold pits." Only those persons actually participating in a racing event will be allowed in the pit lane, or "hot" area. All other spectators will be restricted to the grassy part of the infield. Different colored passes will be used for easy identification.

At many tracks, media members, especially photographers, may discover that areas to which they used to have free access are now off limits.

Competitors will also be finding themselves under close scrutiny. Campfield said insurance companies will be sending field representatives into the pits to monitor the drivers and their crews.

Only helmets carrying a Snell 80 or newer rating will be allowed at Shangri-La. Next year, the requirement will be upgraded to Snell 85. In addition, drivers with beards and mustaches must wear fireproof balaclavas (hoods) under their helmets in 1987.

Also under examination will be the condition of the welds in the roll cage. Additional tubing will be required next year to give even more protection from objects that may enter the driver's compartment.

Strangely, Penn-Can found its insurance company backing off from one of its origi-

nal requirements. K & K Insurance, in a five-page memo to all of its policyholders dated Feb. 3, 1986, dictated that all classes of race cars (especially those known as street, hobby stock and enduro) must now be equipped with a roll bar.

When K & K heard about the low turnout of cars (low 20s) for last weekend's enduro at Five Mile Point Speedway, it informed new Penn-Can promoter Charlie Bray that the roll-bar rule would be relaxed for his enduro scheduled on Mother's Day.

In addition to ticket-price increases, Oswego has been forced to eliminate the discount pit passes available to crews.

Tracks faced with insurance increases and required renovations may be financially strapped. Their short seasons and dependency on the weather makes their existence all the more difficult.

With the continued growth of cities, many tracks now find themselves located on highly desired pieces of property. If the situation doesn't improve, don't be surprised if many owners throughout the country just shrug their shoulders, lock the gates and call their local real-estate agent.

(Michael J. Marrer is a freelance writer whose motor sports notes column will appear weekly in the Press & Sun-Bulletin).