

Guerrero's accident proves need to

A very talented young athlete is lying unconscious in a hospital bed in Indianapolis, Ind.

Roberto Guerrero's injuries occurred on, of all things, the cooldown lap after a testing session at the Brickyard. Reportedly the front wheel sheared off his March Indy car in the crash, striking him in the head.

The doctors have done all they can, and Guerrero's future now lies in the hands of a Higher Power.

Right now I cannot help but be disappointed in USAC and CART. I truly believe this accident was inexcusable and could have been prevented.

While the overall safety record in motor sports has improved tremendously in the past two decades, this accident is another example of how sanctioning bodies, manufacturers and competitors sometimes turn a blind eye to potential problems.

I have a hard time understanding how open cockpit cars have been allowed to exist for so long with little or no protection for the upperpart of the driver's body. Es-



pecially when people such as Pancho Carter have given such graphic examples of the inadequacies of the vehicles.

Carter, as you may recall, was practicing for this year's Indy 500 when he was unexpectedly cleared for takeoff while speeding down the backstretch in excess of 230 mph. Whether it was a problem with the car itself, or a gust of wind, Carter suddenly found himself flying upside down only a few feet above the track.

When the car came back down on solid ground, the roll bar — the only protection

in case of a roll over — broke off. Carter had to rely on his helmet as the only thing between his scalp and the asphalt. In the process of being dragged across the pavement the helmet had a hole worn down to the inner liner.

That Carter wasn't killed was more a matter of good luck than good planning. Yet neither USAC, CART, nor the manufacturers chose to act on this issue at meetings held on July 15 and August 17 to iron out the 1988 rules.

Their meeting was devoted to safety, but most of their attention centered on the area in front of the front axle. New construction techniques and extensive lab testing are now mandated to protect the driver's feet in the event of a head-on crash.

A ball impact test also is required to assure that the roll-over bars do not break off, as was the case in Carter's accident. But that does not address the problem of objects getting into the cockpit.

Whether anyone likes it or not, a complete roll cage structure should be built around the driver. Put another roll bar in

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front of the driver, then one or two bars connecting the two. However, that may require an extensive redesign of the cars, something the group was trying to avoid.

You would think that a driver's life would be worth more than the price of a car.

This is no different than what Boy Scouts have been taught for years - Be Prepared. The smart person spots potential problems and learns from the mistakes of others, than acts accordingly.

Tracy Read was a crewman for the Cale Yarborough Winston Cup team who was killed while competing in an ARCA race at Talladega in July. Although it was a difficult and painful task, crew chief Cliff Champion took the time to thoroughly examine the car to find any structural weakness that may have led to Read's death.

It was determined that the shear force of the impact caused Read to die instantly. But Champion felt that improvements could be made in the loop that secures the safety belts and the way the steering column is installed, and has passed these find-

ings on to NASCAR.

How many people in short track racing today would take the time to seriously examine a car after a crash? Heck, you can't even get some of them to wear fire resistant gloves.

And can track owners and promoters around the country honestly say they have made a close examination of their tracks' safety fences recently?

Talladega has to be considered one of the best facilities in the country. Yet had they not added new fencing and reinforcements this year, Bobby Allison's car might well have landed in the laps of several hundred fans instead of bouncing back onto the track as it did.

All it takes to improve the sport is a little common sense and sometimes a little extra effort. Unfortunately, some people in racing are like ostriches.

And it's hard to see the light when you have your head in the sand.

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