

Interstate Home Slot Racers

By Jim Butt

Following some email conversation with our esteemed editor this past Christmas, I offered to write an article about our club here in the Mid-Atlantic region of the USA. I'd like to give a brief introduction to the club, explain a few of our practices and philosophies, and finish with a tour of our tracks. I would like to credit Todd Brace, the club's "founding father", for quite a bit of the following history.

Todd was thumbing through the August 1995 edition of the Vintage Slot Racing Newsletter after a two-decade absence from slot cars, and found a classified ad asking others in the area who would like to get together to race 1/32 slot cars to contact Bruce Strachan. Todd called Bruce, and arranged a visit. In that same issue of VSRN, the remarkable Monogram layout of Bob Ziegler of Harrisburg, Pa was featured. Todd contacted Bob, of course.

About the same time, at a local toy car show, I met Todd, and Joe Weinstein, an accomplished commercial slot racer who happened to be there. In the space of about a month, Bruce, Todd, Joe, Bob and myself were loosely meeting, in "groups" of three or four, to race slot cars. Through word of mouth, advertisements in the paper, and more networking at toy shows, Alan Schwartz, Rich Miller, Steve and Pierce York and others followed. The result was a solid group of racers who met regularly in the mid/late 1990s racing on our home tracks. At one race meet at Todd's house there were 22 racers present. It was Bruce who noted that because folks were coming from Pennsylvania, Virginia, New York, New Jersey, and of course Maryland we were truly an Interstate Home Slot Racers group.

Many other new racers were found through the "net", either connecting through web sites such as Old Weird Herald, Slot Car Illustrated, and Home Racing World, or by stumbling

across one another through eBay transactions. We now regularly have between 16 and 22 racers at our meets. Due to the widespread area of our group, it's not unusual for many of us to drive two to three hours each way to a race. The area we have participation from is about 150 miles north to south, and about the same east to west. Most of us can only dream of the types of club activities that seem to be prevalent in the UK, where race meets can be held every week on a weeknight. We're limited to weekend racing due to the distances involved.

Our basic club philosophy is to have close, competitive racing, but keep it friendly and fun. We strive very hard not to take ourselves too seriously here. At the core, we're a group of good friends, who enjoy taunting and racing each other in good fun. No attitudes allowed. After all, we're grown men playing with toy cars! There are no dues, the only "fee" imposed is a contribution to the pizza fund at each race. Hey, a racer's got to eat, right? We break for a pizza lunch between classes, and it would hardly be fair to ask the host to provide lunch for 20 hungry guys!

Generally, we race two classes of cars, with two sub groups, per season. One of the sub groups will be a mostly box stock one, for those who don't have the time or desire to build and modify cars. The other group will be more open, allowing many more modifications or scratch built cars. The classes this year are LMP from 1980 on and vintage sports cars up to 1970. The box stock LMP group is Slot.It only, and is allowed to carry the stock magnet. The open LMP group and both Vintage sports car groups are run without magnets.

The IHSR race series runs from early Fall until late Spring, making the rounds of those members with tracks who are willing to host a race. Our tracks are all three or four lanes with

computer controlled race management systems. We are truly fortunate to have such a great variety of tracks to race on, and it makes the racing that much more fun. What setup works perfectly on one track may be utter rubbish at the next venue, so the challenge is to set up a car that will perform well for the conditions.

And with that lead-in, let's take a brief tour of the tracks of the IHSR.

First, we'll look at Bruce Strachan's beautiful Ninco course. Bruce's track was featured in one of the early issues of Model Car Racing magazine. It's four lanes and about 55 feet in lap length. He has done a great job of incorporating the Ninco track into the scenery, for a flush surface and an interesting drive through the elevation changes and a combination of several tight corners and a big open right hand sweeper that really tests your ability to hang your car on the ragged edge and hold on. It's to the right of this picture, just after the underpass.



Here's the view of the south end of the track, showing the beginning of the long straight that runs right up the middle of the layout.



Next up is the incredible Monogram track of Bob Ziegler. Bob's track is a real speed monster, with a 24-foot long back straight, and then a serious technical section through the infield. Monogram was one of the best vintage tracks, being beautifully smooth and, with high downforce in the rails for the magnet cars, the speeds attainable are downright scary.



Sadly, Bob's track is currently taken apart, as he has recently moved house and has not yet had the time to rebuild. I'm sure the next version will be even better!

Staying in the north of our area, we next visit the beautiful three lane wood track of Nils Hagen-Frederiksen. Nils, with the help of his son Chris, have created one of the most photogenic tracks around, "The Frederikring", and it's a real pleasure to race on.



The track undulates up and down through the countryside with varying radius turns, two squeeze sections, and several places of different textured paint, just to keep you on your toes. Nils

has used “magnetic paint” on his track with great success. The paint contains iron filings, which both add a slight texture to the surface, and give the benefit of light magnetic downforce for magnet cars, which don’t break loose when the car drifts off line and the magnet gets away from the rails. Driving this track is always a pleasure. The landscaping and attention to detail make Nils’ track one of the club favourites for photo shoots of our cars.

Heading south, our next stop is at the legendary home of “Ecurie Martini”, otherwise known as Alan Schwartz. You may recognize Alan’s moniker from his many postings on the various message boards; he is a scratch builder extraordinaire, and his history of slot racing dates back to owning and racing the original Scalextric tinsplate cars in 1958. Alan’s track is another routed wood track with magnetic braid. The pictures here are just after routing, and the track has since had scenery added. It’s four lanes, about 50 feet in lap length, and is a treacherous combination of several varying radius turns, an uphill hairpin, then a long downhill “ess” curve sweeper, which changes radius several times on its way to the bottom. Pay attention, and you can really fly down that hill. Nod off, and you’ll be in the guardrail in a heartbeat.



After the sweeper, you come down the front straight, through a series of esses leading into the underpass, then the long straight ending in that dastardly uphill hairpin. Brakes really matter here!



We’ll head east from here, to Charlie Chase’s Aberdeen Proving Grounds Raceway. Charlie lives just off the Aberdeen military base, which is the home to many of the US armed forces development groups. There is a large test track for tanks, ordinance testing facilities, etc. So, it’s only natural that Charlie’s track carries through the military theme, with helicopters overhead and tanks in the infield. The track is a four lane Artin, super smooth, and quite interesting to drive.



From the start, you’re into a tight left hand turn, up the hill to the overpass, back down to a hairpin, then off down the long back straight which leads uphill to a tight right-hander with an ess turn at the exit. Then it’s back downhill, through an ess turn under the bridge, a short straight, and up the long front straight. You can really build up speed down those straights; this is another track where brakes really matter!

To the south we have the track of Keith Allen, which is another routed wood masterpiece. Keith has done a beautiful job with this track, the course winds its way through the landscape, with a couple of squeeze sections, and magnificent scenery. He also used magnetic braid to allow the use of magnets if desired. Keith has a real “home track advantage” when

we race here, it’s a really challenging course. You may not be able to tell from the photos, but nowhere on the track is there an actual “straightaway”. Even the sections that look straight have a slight curve, kink, or ess shape to them. It really keeps you focused the entire time. Of course, that beautiful scenery and landscaping make for beautiful race photos, as the below picture shows.



A bit further south is the track of Hayes Lewis. It’s another routed wood track, three lanes, with magnetic braid. Hayes created a real pretzel of switchbacks, straights, and overpasses that can make your head spin keeping track of where you’re headed next.

Just as this report is being written this track has been relocated to another club member’s home and Hayes has begun construction of a digital track. As I haven’t yet had the opportunity to try digital, I’m looking forward to giving it a go.





Larry and Brian are using magnetic paint, with copper tape. Having run that type surface at Nils' track, I think I can safely say that the speeds here will be beyond belief. We're really looking forward to "opening day".

Wrapping up our tour, we'll come "home" to my place, Flying Cow Raceway.

The Flying Cow is routed wood with magnetic braid, four lanes and about 87' lap length. It's based on a series of tracks I had done

Off to the west, a real monster of a track is taking shape. Larry and Brian Priore, the "Black Box Racing Team", have taken down their three lane routed wood track and are constructing "Hellanbach Speedway". Their creation has a 26' long front straight, lots of big sweeping turns, and looks like it's going to be an amazing place to race.





in the past, changing the details slightly with each rebuild until I got the design that really suited me. The track is a combination of long straights, sweeping turns and two hairpins that tighten in radius at the apex then open back out to the next straight. All the turns are balanced, so that for every left turn there is an equal radius and almost in length right turn. The lanes are no more than $\frac{1}{4}$ " different in length, and the fast lap times can come from any lane. The right hand hairpin leads into the uphill straight to the overpass, while the left hander is at the bottom of the short downhill straight. Once you get the feel for the turns, you can really get through them quickly.

Scenery, structures and landscaping have been kept to a minimum, so as not to distract the eye of the racers. You may notice in the photos the track lights surrounded by traffic cones. These lights function with the track power, going green when the power comes on, then yellow and red when the power shuts off. You may also

notice that the bridge side rail supports are aluminium bar. I had been wondering why my overpass had been sagging, since I thought it was well supported. My curiosity ended one day when I found Bear, our 27-pound housecat, napping contentedly in the centre of the span. No wonder it was drooping!

And so ends our IHSR tour. I hope that you've enjoyed the trip; we've covered about 300 miles today, and visited nine of the nicest places to race slot cars in the Mid-Atlantic area. If you're ever in the neighbourhood, please let us know. Visitors are always welcome here at IHSR. For more details I can be contacted at subdude17349@comcast.net or you can visit our website message boards at:

[http://p208.ezboard.com/
binterstatehomeslotracingclub](http://p208.ezboard.com/binterstatehomeslotracingclub)

You'll find much more information there, and many, many more photos. Please stop by to say hello, and let us know if you enjoyed the tour! ■

