



Winning the west Can a racing future be maintained?

Racing is a funny business, unless perhaps you're actually in the racing business.

As usual, The Parts Canada Superbike Championship stop at Calgary's Race City Motorsport Park in late June was a good one. A local morning TV show did a remote from the track, the place looked good, the fans came out, the weather co-operated – it was hard not to feel upbeat about the sport.

Of course, there was one caveat. Race City Motorsport Park is due to close down at the end of the 2011 racing season, so all the good intentions were really misplaced. For the next year and a bit you might as well rename the place 'Dead Race Track Walking.'

The demise of Race City has been well documented over the past couple of years. The City of Calgary wants the land the track resides on for a storm water retention pond and got into a real brouhaha with Art Mackenzie, who owns the lease for the property, over the validity of his lease agreement. After a lot of back and forth the two parties came to an agreement. The city would lay off and let the track run as normal through the 2011 season, at which point it would be shut down.

Presumably the grace period was designed to let those who use Race City make alternative arrangements for their activities, but the reality is there are no alternatives. No one is lining up to build a new race track in the area and there are no places already in existence for a major national series like the Parts Canada Superbike Championship to go. Although I have not been there, Stratotech Park in Edmonton is probably too small. I understand overtures were made to the folks that run in the IndyCar race in Edmonton but those went nowhere. Mission Raceway, near Vancouver is a possibility, but that doesn't really solve the problem. There should be races in both BC and Alberta.

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What makes the Race City situation all the more frustrating is that western Canada is currently in a boom period for motorcycle road racing right now. Saskatoon's Brett McCormick was just the first one of a wave of talented young guns coming out of the prairie provinces and BC. Cody Matechuk of Cochrane, AB controls the HJC Pro Rookie of the Year race on the national tour, Bodhi Edie of Warman, SK is a frontrunner in the Amateur Sport Bike class in the Parts Canada Superbike Championship and Quesnel, BC's Ryan Appenrodt has been almost unbeatable in the national Honda CBR125R Challenge Series.

As mentioned in this space before, a lot of the credit for the western road racing boom goes to Jay Fox of the Alberta Mini RoadRacing Association, based in Calgary. Essentially headquartered out of the Varsity Chrysler Speed Park, the kart track adjacent to the Race City road course, Fox has steadily built his championship into a hotbed for grooming racing talent.

His masterstroke has been hooking up with Professional Motorsports Productions, operators of the Parts Canada tour, and using the AMRA as a stepping stone to the Honda CBR125R series. Now in its third year of existence the CBR125R Challenge boasts a geographically diverse field of teenage riders. The entry list for July's Honda series tripleheader at Mosport International Raceway featured 12 competitors from west of Ontario in a field of 28. What national competition wouldn't kill for that sort of regional diversity?

Of course, if Race City goes, so too does Fox's home track.

Fox has a keen sense of promotion and doesn't miss an opportunity to publicize his series. He emphasizes its significance as an Amateur sport and highlights the family aspect of it. Indeed, many AMRA grids feature sisters, brothers, mothers and fathers. The most prominent this season has been the Hamm family from Saskatchewan – three sisters (two of them twins!) plus the mother and father, all mini roadracing.

Fox's daughter Allyssa is a mini road-racer and this year graduated to the Honda CBR125R Challenge.

In June Jay Fox took his talents a step further and promoted the Parts Canada Superbike event in Calgary. Last year's event was

run by longtime Calgary Motorcycle Road-racing Association executive members Tim Johnson and Kel Davidsen and was extremely well produced.

Fox carried on the positive vibe. He introduced a pair of Collosovision Jumbotrons to allow fans in the main grandstand and competitors in the pits to see the action around the track. There is talk of trying to make the big screens a touring feature of the national Superbike series next year.

The 'kid factor' was enhanced with a clown roaming the stands and face painting on Sunday. The clown was actually Fox's sister, Brenda. Wife Bernedette, who also works for the national series, Allyssa and son Matt were also part of the organizing crew. The enterprise promoting the Calgary event was named 'Fox Family Roadracing Ltd.' for a reason!

Again, it all seems like a lot of effort for an event that should be on its last legs. But there may have been a little method to Fox's madness too. There will be a municipal election in Calgary this Fall and the incumbent Mayor, Dave Broconnier is not running for re-election.

Among those who had declared their intention to run for the top job, as of July 12, were Aldermen Joe Connelly and Ric McIver. Connelly is said to be a supporter of Race City, and McIver was the most vocal in his backing of the track when the lease dispute was at its height.

Should either of them get the Mayor's post it is unclear how much they can, or would be willing, to undo the current plan for Race City. We may already be too far past that point.

But as he has demonstrated, Jay Fox is not an individual to give up too easily and as long as there is a sliver of light at the end of the tunnel he will continue moving in that direction. Yes, there are business reasons for him to persevere, but there is also a genuine passion as well, and he knows as well as anybody the value of having a sporting facility that allows youngsters and teenagers to compete, learn and grow.

His daughter Allyssa is proof of that.

"I think my biggest accomplishment this year has been establishing a link with my daughter," he says. "We have a bond now that never existed before."