

# NASCAR's new setup helps Californians

**P**acific Coast Region competition is more appealing to geography majors this season because it is an all-California contest.

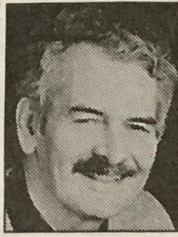
NASCAR has taken two Missouri tracks, one from Oregon and one from Washington, out of its Pacific Coast Region and replaced them with Sun Belt Region speedways while expanding from eight to 10 ovals.

Californians will compete at Altamont, Antioch, Cajon (El Cajon), Madera, Mesa Marin (Bakersfield), Orange Show (San Bernardino), San Jose, Shasta (Anderson), Stockton and Watsonville for points and a chance at the national championship.

Under the new alignment, the Californians aren't competing against **Larry Phillips**, who dominated the Missouri ovals, and **Greg Biffle**, who starred at Portland and Richland, Wash., last season to dominate the Pacific Coast Region.

The Missouri tracks have been assigned to the Heartland Region and the Pacific Northwest speedways are placed in the Great West Region.

Without Phillips, the eventual national champion, and Biffle scoring points in less-competitive situations, last year's Pacific Coast Regional leaders under the current setup would have been **Dave Byrd**



## MOTOR SPORTS

By Jerry Gandy  
Times staff writer

of Los Gatos, Martinez's **Scott Busby** and **Dave Philpott** of Tracy.

There are 10 10-track regions in the more-geographically correct arrangement.

"The new twist in the system will allow more drivers and tracks to be represented in the top 10 in regional standings and earn an invitation to the Winston Racing Series banquet in Nashville," said former El Sobrante resident **Dennis Huth**, NASCAR vice president for administration.

With points fund money surpassing \$800,000 this year, the national champion will collect more than \$110,000 at the November banquet at the Opryland Hotel.

**MILESTONES:** **Paul Gentilozzi** will become the fifth Trans-Am Tour driver to start 100 races if he is in the lineup for the April 14 Long Beach race. **R.J. Valentine** reached that milestone March 16, when he finished ninth at Homestead, Fla.

**Jim Derhaag** is the all-time Trans-Am leader with 147 career starts, followed by Alamo's **Greg**

**Pickett** with 129 and **Les Lindley** with 122.

Gentilozzi is chasing another milestone and will enter a Ferrari 333 SP in the 24 Hours of Le Mans on June 15-16.

"Le Mans is the third jewel in the triple crown of road racing and the only one that we've not won yet," said Gentilozzi, who triumphed in the 12 Hours of Sebring in 1992 and the 24 Hours of Daytona in 1994.

The 49-year-old Pickett, who has 15 Trans-Am victories among his 64 top-five finishes, will aim for some tour milestones this year, but his priority is a third championship for his teammate son-in-law **Scott Sharp** of Danville.

Pickett is chief executive officer of Champion Nutrition, so you know his teammate is using his products. Other users are **Mark McGwire** in baseball, **Chris Mullin** in basketball, **Jeremy McGrath** in supercross, **Dave Johnson** in decathlon and **Cliff Swain** in racquetball.

Third-year Winston Cup driver **Joe Nemechek** has reached a career earnings milestone by becoming the circuit's 56th millionaire.

**PIT STOPS:** Three graduates of the karting ranks are among the contenders for rookie-of-the-year honors in the American Cities Racing League, an honor captured in 1995 by Pleasanton's **Jeff Glenn** of

Team San Jose.

Moving up from the kart courses are **Bobby Dold** of San Leandro, **Marc Zurlinden** of Carmel Valley and **Dennis Pavlina** of Vancouver, Wash.

**Stan Wattles**, who was injured in an Indy Racing League accident during practice at Phoenix International Raceway, hopes to return to action in a Toyota Atlanta race on April 27 at Nazareth, Pa. He has been using taekwondo training to maintain physical strength and mental keenness during rehab.

Las Vegas Motor Speedway, opening in September with an IRL race, has a University of Motor Sports division. Among the operators of driving schools on the grounds are **Richard Petty**, **Roy Hill**, **Ivan Stewart**, **Derek Daly** and **Carroll Shelby**.

Former racers who have traded their firesuits for briefcases to work for the 107,000-seat facility are top fuel and funny car driver **Gordie Bonin** in marketing and retired midget and roadster pilot **Bill Hill** in the insurance department.

The next motorcycle marathon at Sand Hill Ranch, near Brentwood, will be April 14 at 9:30 a.m. Admission is \$25 to ride or \$8 to watch.

The March 30 sprint car opener at San Jose Speedway drew a total of 91 410's and 360's.