

MotoRacing

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track can pay on its existing debt. How should it choose to do so. Spearheading the

many previous decisions.

ACRL matures into its 10th season with strong field

By Roger Diez

The American City Racing League starts its 10th season with possibly the strongest lineup in the series' history.

The series is for Sports 2000 cars, but with a difference. Called Super Sports 2000s, the ACRL machines boast a Cosworth twincam head and have a 40+ horsepower advantage (185 vs. 142) over their single cam brethren. There is also a "B" division of standard S2000 cars that run for their own drivers' championship.

Bolstered by strong sponsors and good TV exposure in 1996, the ACRL looks to round out its first decade with more TV coverage, bigger fields, and more prestige than ever.

Unique to its concept, the league emphasis team rather than individual driver results, and attempts to capitalize on the American penchant to root for the home team. A case in point was the very popular win by Team Reno in the 1996 season finale on the team's home track.

For 1997, Team Reno will be a threat for the Blackaller Cup perpetual team trophy. Fielding only one car for Rick Lee in 1996, this year will see three Team Reno entries: Lee, Edd Ozard, and Gary Hewett. Lee, who finished second in the drivers' championship last year, will be shooting for the crown in 1997. Veteran club racer Ozard is a past Formula Atlantic Regional Champion, and Formula 5000 and Can-Am competitor who will drive a Swift DB-2. Hewett also has Formula 5000 and five-liter Can-Am experience. Both Team Reno newcomers are in the running for rookie of the year honors.

Possibly the strongest contender to knock off 1996 City Team Champion San Diego will be Team Las Vegas, 1996 second place finisher. The team of Peter Zarcades, Leo Sismani, and Chris Ronson will remain intact, and carries a lot of momentum from 1996, with all three in the top 10 in drivers' points. Zarcades scored two poles last season and is long overdue for the drivers' championship. Sismani and Ronson both improved throughout the year and both scored podium finishes. Sismani was voted Most Improved Driver on the strength of his strong performance in the second half of the season.

Defending Champion Team San Diego will also be tough, especially if 1996 Driver Champion Bob Schader returns after his dominating season of five wins and four poles. Schader is working on a Van Diemen ACRL ride to complement his North American Touring Car Series commitment. Veteran Margie Smith Haas, 1994 Driver Champ, will be joined by newcomer Bob Young with a freshly rebuilt Lola/Cosworth. Young has lots of Formula Ford, Formula Atlantic, and Shelby Can-Am experience under his belt. Returning S2000 driver Ian Wood will again run with San Diego, coming off five podium finishes in class for last year, and a strong contender in the "B" championship. Gary Green, 1993 S2000 champion, will also run a limited season with the team.

Team Fresno's John Ostlund, who posted a S2000 win and a pair of thirds in 1996, moves up to Cosworth power with Schader's championship-winning Lola. He will be joined by rookie contender Steve Romak for 1997. Romak took second in his only S2000 appearance last year,

and will also have Cosworth power for 1997.

Four-time City Champion Team San Jose could win it all in 1997. Jeff Glenn (1995 ACRL rookie of the year) will drive the new Carbir chassis that stunned the field by qualifying on the pole at Reno last year. Glenn had the Sears Point pole and a Portland win for 1996, finishing third in drivers' points. This year Glenn has already notched one club race victory with the Carbir in S2000 trim, and is looking to win the SCCA Runoffs in the class. He will be joined by rookie Ori Della Penna, whose experience in karts and as a mechanic for F-Atlantic drivers Willy T. Ribbs, Juan Fangio, and John Della Penna will serve him well. San Jose team regulars Lee Lucas (1993 Driver Champion), Joe Casanova, and Dennis Reed will also run selected races as San Jose tries for a fifth team title.

Team Portland also has a good shot at both driver and team titles, with ACRL veteran Larry Vollum (1994 Rookie of the Year) joined by rookie Dennis Pavlina, who has a couple of IKF kart championships and a pair of S2000 wins to his credit. John Brewer, a paraplegic driver who runs a hand-control-equipped S2000, will also be driving for Portland.

Team Woodland finished third in points in 1996 with two S2000 cars, and defending S2000 Champion Joe Giroski is upgrading to Cosworth power this year. Giroski won six of eight S2000 races in 1996, and may well be an overall contender in 1997. Joe's father Leo Giroski (second in S2000 for 1996) is mum on the subject of a second Cosworth car for the team. Brad Arntson will be Woodland's third driver in 1997.

Several more of last year's S2000 drivers have upgraded to the twincam powerplant for 1997. Bill Bachofner (Team Wilsonville) and Jacek Mucha (Team Montreal) are planning to run the twincam. Mucha will run for rookie honors in his Van Diemen. John Bachofner will stay with the S2000 class, shooting for the class championship.

Although Team Vancouver has not committed to the whole season, they have a strong driver lineup in Tom Kreger, Bill King, Jeff Clegg, and Mike Wright. There are more than a few potential finishes in this group. Other city teams expected to make appearances are Santa Barbara, Long Beach, Los Angeles, and Anaheim.

The ACRL cars will run on Hoosier spec tires, as they did last season. Hoosier and Cosworth Engineering have again signed on as associate sponsors. The schedule will consist of eight races, kicking off with Portland on May 3-4. The ACRL cars will run at Mesa Marin in Bakersfield for one oval track race in conjunction with NASCAR's Southwest Tour and Winston West divisions on May 24-25. The series returns to Portland for the Rose Cup June 13-15, and will run at Sears Point July 11-13 along with the IMSA show. Also on the schedule are Laguna Seca, July 26-27; Vancouver with the CART show Aug. 29-31 (tentative); and the new Pikes Peak International with Trans-Am, Sept. 6-8; Buttonwillow, Sept. 20-21; and Reno with Trans-Am, Oct. 17-19. The 10th anniversary year schedule will be one of ACRL's best ever.