

Road Racing Seminar



Aero Numbers Now in NASCAR Hands

By Team Ford Racing Correspondent

Daytona Beach, Fla. (Jan.18, 2001) — Following the second session test at Daytona International Speedway it is clear that the Ford cars have got an aerodynamic handicap at the venue that will host the opening event of the 2002 season. The problem is so pervasive that even one Pontiac engineer commented, “The Fords sure got a problem don’t they.”

As far as understatement go, this fits. However, what doesn’t fit is taking a knife to a gunfight, which is surely what the Ford teams are armed with heading into the biggest race of the NASCAR Winston Cup season.

The problem shows up clearly when the Chevy cars not only pop-off a lap that’s about eight-tenths better than the best Ford car is capable of running, but the Chevy then stays there for the duration of the practice session. Next session rewind and repeat. Bam! A big number from a Chevrolets then they just plant it there – right at eight-tenths better than the best Taurus.

The frustration was not only there, it started to come out in the Ford camp on the final day of testing – albeit taking the form of quiet teeth gnashing. The strongest comment that is wise to share came from a frustrated Doug Yates who, in a moment of emotion, said, “We’re just too draggy to keep up.”

Validating such comments from the two test sessions was Winston Cup director John Darby who said, “If you take everything to this point from the second session and lay it over the days from last session, it’s pretty much like looking in a mirror as far as overall speeds, as far as the sorting out of the manufacturers and day-to-day improvement. Pretty much all of it just lays over each other almost like a perfect graph.”

The only blip on that graph came on the first day of the rain delayed second session when Bill Elliott ran a lap in his Dodge that was 4 mph faster than anything that’d been on the track prior to him posting his time. That run got those in the garage in a dither as there is a strong suspicion that run was a true representation of what an Intrepid is capable of running.

That lap, according to Ray Evernham, Elliott’s car owner, was due to an over-sized plate (15/16th’s verses 7/8th’s) on Elliott’s car. That explanation satisfied NASCAR, but not many others in the garage. According to the running rumor Elliott forgot to “segment” drive, the art of lifting the throttle for a moment as a lap is run thereby making a lap measure slower than the car is capable of running.

At the end of session two NASCAR ran some tests with different spoiler sizes on the No. 28 and the No. 2 Ford cars of Robert Yates and Penske Racing, respectively. In theory the shorter blade would bring a Taurus into the ballpark come pole day for the Daytona 500.

John Darby was asked if there could be some rules relief for the Fords prior to the 500 and he answered, “Oh yeah – that’s unquestionable.”

Darby added, “[NASCAR’s] job is to, to the best of our ability, to come back here to where everybody that enters the Daytona 500 feels like they’ve got an opportunity to win the Daytona 500. What that does is it puts on a heck of a show for the people that we need to come and watch. Yeah, we can tweak and fine tune and change really at any time and we will.”

As things stand right now the Ford teams believe that opportunity is out of their grasp. Let’s hope that after NASCAR crunches the numbers the Ford teams needn’t stretch their arms as far, but according to Doug Yates a quarter-inch off the spoiler “aint gunna get it.”



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