

Runoffs move to Road America in '09

SCCA STAFF

TOPEKA, Kan. — Sports Car Club of America, Inc. announced May 12 the results of a vote by its Board of Directors that will move the National Championship Runoffs to Road America in Elkhart Lake, Wis., in 2009. Road America will become the sixth venue to host the event, dating back to 1964.

The board directed its staff to move forward to negotiate a three-year agreement with Road America for SCCA Club Racing's signature event, which has averaged over 650 participants since 2000. The Runoffs is currently in the final year of a three-year agreement at Heartland Park Topeka, in Topeka, Kan.

"Given the deep history the track, the town of Elkhart Lake and SCCA enjoy, it only seems natural for the most prestigious club racing event in the world to be hosted by Road America," SCCA President and CEO Jim Julow said. "The board had a difficult decision, as we had an unprecedented number of outstanding potential hosts for the event, meaning the long-term future of club racing's national championship is very bright."

"The SCCA has been an integral part of our 53 year-history," Road America President and General Manager George Bruggenthies said. "The opportunity to showcase our facility and our community to a nation of SCCA racers and fans is a tremendous honor. On behalf of our board of directors and staff, my thanks to the SCCA for their confidence. We promise to build on the outstanding Runoffs tradition and exceed stakeholder expectations."

The first-ever "Interdivisional Championship," later referred to as the "Runoffs," was held at Riverside Raceway (Riverside, Calif.) in 1964, and alternated coasts with Daytona International Raceway (Daytona Beach, Fla.) through 1969. In 1970, the event began a 24-year run at Road Atlanta (Braselton, Ga.), before moving to Mid-Ohio Sports Car Course (Lexington, Ohio) in 1994. After 12 years in Ohio, the Runoffs moved to Heartland Park Topeka in 2006. The move after three years signifies a change in philosophy after such long runs at venues from the 1970s through the turn of the century.

"Club racing in the United States has evolved in the last decade, and rotating the Runoffs will do nothing but help the

event and the club racing program, overall," SCCA Chairman R.J. Gordy said.

"This is by no means a reflection on the job that Raymond Irwin and his staff have done at Heartland Park Topeka," Julow added. "In the last four years, they have met every challenge and request and built a tremendous facility that is worthy of potentially hosting not only the Runoffs, but other high-profile road racing events in the future. Additionally, the local community and business groups have been outstanding and we thank them for their continued support."

The event has grown in both size and stature over the years, with approximately 700 of the nation's best amateur race drivers from across the country making the annual trek for the event that spans an entire week, preceded by additional days of optional testing. The sheer number of competitors makes the Runoffs the largest annual amateur road-racing event in the world, and results in an average local economic impact approaching \$10 million each year.

The Runoffs annually crown the national champions of SCCA Club Racing's national level classes (currently 25) and has been called the "Olympics of motorsports." Drivers from across North America race locally to earn points, with the top-10 qualifying drivers from the nine SCCA Divisions in each class earning an invitation to compete in the event. The list of past Runoffs champions is a who's who in road racing history that includes Skip Barber, Michael Galati, Paul Newman, Bobby Rahal, Graham Rahal, Greg Ray, Boris Said and Scott Sharp.

Road America's history dates back to the early 1950s when public street races in the Elkhart Lake area were a part of the SCCA national championship series. When street racing became illegal in 1952, participants and supporters joined efforts and raised funds to develop Road America. The track held its first event, the SCCA National, on Sept. 10 and 11, 1955. Today, the 14-turn, 4.048-mile track holds its original configuration.

The date for the 2009 event has yet to be finalized, although it will move from October to September.

The 45th SCCA National Championship Runoffs will be held at Heartland Park Topeka Oct. 6-12. SCCA's Club Racing Department announced a host of changes and enhancements for the 2008 Runoffs, the last at Heartland Park Tope-

ka before the move to Road America.

The biggest change comes in the event schedule itself. Combined and split sessions are now a thing of the past, as all 25 classes will run three solo 22-minute qualifying sessions throughout four days (Monday through Thursday). Additionally, while the entire event will continue to span Monday through Sunday, no class will have more than six days from its first official session to race.

"Several key elements came out of the driver survey when you look at it as a whole. The event is long, costly and quality track time is at a premium," SCCA Club Racing Vice President Terry Ozment said. "The majority of our racers were combined or involved in a split session at some point in 2007, and the survey was clear that this was not acceptable for the time and financial investment in the event. We've been able to solve that issue and, at the same time, stagger the beginning of the week so that the Sunday race classes don't actually take to the track until Tuesday. For the first time in years, no one will need to be there for the entire seven days."

The individual race days were also laid out to begin a rotation in future years so that classes are not scheduled on the same day year after year. Some classes remain on their 2007 race day, but only to create a categorical (GT, SS, Formula, etc.) balance.

In addition to the change in schedule format, drivers will find that the walls at the exit of Turn Two and Turn Nine at Heartland Park Topeka have been moved back to allow greater runoff room.

Finally, drivers who competed in 2007 will have a hold on their number in the same class for the first two weeks of registration, similar to how most divisions handle permanent numbers. Registration opens at 9 a.m. (CT) July 8 and 2007 numbers will be held until 9 a.m. (CT) July 22.

Volunteers will see some changes based on survey feedback. Heartland Park has worked with SCCA to open up a camping area inside the paddock, which will include parking. Details on how to reserve a camping spot will be available soon. Additionally, there will be better access to work assignments with personal vehicles, with designated parking closer to specialties and the ability for F&C marshals to drive to their corner stations.

Volunteer online registration will open at 9 a.m. (CT) June 10.