

# INDYCAR SERIES FUELS CONSUMER INTEREST IN ETHANOL

by Dean Broadhead, Broadhead+Co.

On the morning of January 31, 2007, the IndyCar Series held its first Open Test of the season at Daytona International Speedway, an annual rite of passage for drivers, pit crews and racing fans.

In previous years, the testing of these high performance racing machines in preparation for a long season would receive a modest mention in the racing press. But the first hint that the 2007 IndyCar Series season was like no other was the arrival of a small city of reporters and photographers from the non-sports outlets.

The media horde was there to witness a groundbreaking technological achievement in the racing community: the use of 100% fuel-grade ethanol to power all the vehicles in the IndyCar Series.

"This has been the first time in 40 years that a new fuel grade has been incorporated into open wheel racing," said Les Mactaggart, Sr Tech Dir for the IndyCar Series. "The results have been impressive. Backed by an experienced group of engineers and technicians, the transition has been flawless."

The move to ethanol follows in the Indy Racing League's (IRL) long tradition of technological and safety innovations. Many of the league's safety innovations are incorporated into passenger vehicle designs.

## UNIQUE PARTNERSHIP

This unique partnership between the ethanol industry and a racing league that features one of the premier sporting events in the world, the Indianapolis 500, began in 2005, and has advanced from ethanol being a team sponsor to working with the series to introduce an ethanol-methanol blend in 2006.

The relationship has proven to be a stroke of marketing genius for the IndyCar Series and the Ethanol Promotion and Information Council (EPIC). Formed in 2005, the

Omaha-based group is a non-profit alliance of ethanol industry leaders whose mission is to grow consumer demand for ethanol energy through targeted marketing.

The IndyCar Series has once again aggressively grabbed the mantle of pioneer in the racing industry: the first in motorsports to embrace a renewable and environmentally responsible fuel source.

One cannot argue the patriotic element involved in the fuel switch will be a benefit to the racing league: a renewable, home-grown energy resource developed in rural America through the hard work and ingenuity of farmers.

## MADE IN THE U.S.A.

The IndyCar Series is now capitalizing on a nationwide movement toward renewable fuels, a drive toward energy independence.

"Our partnership with the ethanol industry is a natural fit," said Brian Barnhart, IRL's Pres/COO, the sanctioning body of the IndyCar Series. "We are proud to share the track with a cleaner-burning renewable fuel, cultivated in the fields of America, that holds promise for our country's energy future."

At EPIC, the performance message to consumers is a powerful one. If a 650-horsepower IndyCar Series vehicle can run safely and effectively at 220 miles per hour on 100% ethanol, so can a passenger vehicle on E10 or a flexible fuel vehicle on E85.

"Ethanol is not only an ideal solution for high performance IndyCar Series cars, but consumers can expect improved performance and environmental benefits as well with ethanol-enriched fuel," said Tom Slunecka,



IndyCar series media kit

EPIC's Exec Dir. "From the speedway to Main Street, the partnership between the ethanol industry and the Indy Racing League has delivered impressive results."

## STRAIGHT FOR THE TOP

EPIC set their sights on this goal almost immediately after its formation. They went straight for the top, the pinnacle of high performance racing. They were not content to be bit players in a third rate show.

"Our affiliation with the IndyCar Series has really provided an issue that our members can rally around," said Reece Nanfito, EPIC's Sr. Dir of Mktg. "It's made ethanol relevant and hip. More importantly, it's put a spotlight on the performance attributes of the fuel."

Nanfito believes that the marketing and selling of fuel are inextricably linked to the racing world. In addition to the strong performance element, the IndyCar Series offers a significant platform for brand exposure: television, print and signage.

EPIC found the motorsports world provided a strong learning



Slunecka

platform for race fans, who are critical influencers. In addition, there was the opportunity to build relationships with the automotive industry, business leaders and fuel retailers.

The 2006 season was an opportunity for EPIC to fine tune their marketing machine. The organization came upon the idea of holding pump promotions the weekend of a race at a local fuel retailer. During a time of soaring gas prices, ethanol-enriched fuel was advertised for \$2.20 a gallon (the average speed of an IndyCar) for a period of 90 minutes.

Cars were lined up hours before the promotion began. A captive audience was provided with t-shirts and brochures on ethanol. Several of the drivers in the IndyCar Series manned the pumps.

## CLEAR SUCCESS

The events were a clear success. In Ypsilanti, MI, just down the road from the Michigan International Speedway, over 3,200 gallons of ethanol-enriched fuel was sold in 90 minutes. The promotion was all over the local news, as many media outlets used their traffic helicopters to film the scene unfolding. Even the Michigan governor, in the midst of a battle for re-election, stopped by to fill up.

"These were difficult promotions," said Nanfito. "Often in the grueling mid-day summer heat, we coordinated with local police to help in what could have been a traffic nightmare. But the response was tremendous."

EPIC developed a Team Ethanol show car program in which four race vehicles were available for member events and trade shows, offering fans the opportunity to sit in an official IndyCar vehicle powered by ethanol. The show cars logged many miles in 2006, making over 120 appearances across the country.

Team Ethanol driver **Jeff Simmons** was in his rookie year in the IndyCar Series in 2006. Yet much of EPIC's success can be attributed to Simmons' tireless efforts as an ethanol advocate.

"Jeff is an incredibly talented driver, but even more, he's a tremendous person and I couldn't be more pleased with his efforts as a spokesperson for renewable energy," said Slunicka.

## CRISSCROSSING THE COUNTRY

Simmons has crisscrossed the country, pressing the flesh, and speaking before groups large and small, touting the performance and environmental benefits of ethanol.

"I'm honored to drive for a team with such an important message," said Simmons. "Ethanol not only provides better performance, but provides our communities with cleaner air and an option for American energy independence."

In preparation for the 2007 season, EPIC and the IndyCar Series developed a clever media kit that almost stole the show at the Daytona Open Test.

"This was the first time in my years of interaction with the media that I observed photographers and camera people crowded around a

to target a wide range of media: agriculture, environmental, energy, health, local, and national. There are more than enough story angles to keep ethanol in the public arena.

## PARTICIPANTS, NOT SPECTATORS

For EPIC members, the partnerships allow them to be participants and not spectators in the movement to drive consumers to the pumps. Member plants can use the logos and show cars at trade shows and promotions.

Renova Energy's Torrington, WY, facility was contracted by EPIC to supply approximately 120,000 gallons of the fuel to the IndyCar Series.

"I'm proud to be a part of the most significant fuel change in open wheel racing in 40 years," said **Dan Schwartzkopf**, Renova's Sr VP. "This is a proud moment for us."



Jeff Simmons ethanol car from this winter's ethanol trials in Daytona.

table shooting footage of our media kits," said **Joanna Schroeder**, EPIC's Dir of Comms.

"There's a bushel of news about the 2007 IndyCar Series" is the message on the front of an environmentally-friendly box. Open the lid, and a sound card blares the familiar tones of a race car speeding around the track. If that wasn't enough, a bushel basket is found inside, filled to the brim with a stylish t-shirt, a diecast IndyCar Series car, a CD with photos and logos, a schedule, an IndyCar Series and Ethanol media kit, vial of corn, and a "green" racing flag.

The media kit offers EPIC and the IndyCar Series the opportunity

It promises to be an exciting season for both EPIC and the IndyCar Series, which kicks off its 17th race schedule March 24 under the lights at Homestead-Miami Speedway. On May 27, an estimated 300 million people will watch ethanol emerge as a winner at the 91st running of the Indianapolis 500.

"This is not mere marketing hype. This is true performance at the highest levels of competition," said EPIC's Slunicka says. "It's been the result of a vision shared by many in the ethanol and racing communities. This partnership exemplifies the spirit of energy independence, American ingenuity and innovation." **AM**