

Family touches bring fans, cars to Portsmouth Raceway Park

PORTSMOUTH, Ohio - In less than four years, a plan to build a small practice track has turned out to be the premier small dirt track within a 100-mile radius.

Portsmouth Raceway Park grew out of an idea to Boone Coleman's son, starting to Max Warnock, PFP promoter.

The Coleman family started racing mini-sprint and headed Boone Coleman decided to stretch out a little place to practice, Warnock explained.

The practice track plan quickly developed into a full 1/4 mile track. "He Boone Coleman said, 'If you'll run it, I'll build a race track,'" Warnock said.

At first Warnock was not certain Coleman would build the track, but shortly after the green to operate the facility, Coleman's construction crew started work on the track.

Coleman developed the track in a bottom where the Scioto River dumps into the Ohio River, but due to flooding, the bottom had been of little value.

While the bottom still floods in the spring, the waters are back in the banks by racing season. In addition to providing an area for the track, the bottom also provided level parking and more space than has ever been there.

Since the track opened in the middle of the 1990 racing season, it has grown by leaps and bounds. During the 1992 season, the track attracted over 100 race cars for the first time. In the 1993 season, there have been at least 100 cars for every date with a track record of over 140 cars during the 4th of July.

These numbers dwarf all the other tracks within the area. Most tracks, consider 70 to 80 cars to be a big show and on an average night the number is under 60.

Warnock recalls it also hasn't been all that long ago, Portsmouth was struggling for cars. "The first night, we had seven modifieds," Warnock noted.

These numbers began to pick up as more local residents began building cars.

In 1991, Warnock started a point system to determine a track champion in each of its four divisions of cars, modified, mini-sprint, street stock and bomber.

Along with the cars have come drivers of fans. Attendance in the 2,000 to 4,000 range is common place with special attractions drawing even more.

Warnock credits several factors with attracting the cars and fans to PFP. Primary among the factors is a family atmosphere. "We work at making this a family track," Warnock said. "We want

people to come here and enjoy what they see."

In addition to having attractions for children such as the Showy's show and Wendy's Miss Wendy.

Warnock pointed out there has been an effort to keep admissions as low as possible to enable the family to attend.

Coleman and Warnock made a decision before the track opened to keep the family image by holding alcoholic beverages at the track.

In addition, "We don't sell any alcohol," Warnock explained. "We choose not to."

The development of the Coleman family in the operation of the track is another positive factor. "We have a family atmosphere," Coleman helps prepare the food and the concession stand. "The last thing she does before the track opens each week is inspect the bathrooms."

Warnock cites parents and the rules as the main factors in bringing drivers to the track.

"We establish a course so there's money down through the field," Warnock said.

The promoter explained some of the drivers make a living just driving a race car. "It's a hobby, every one's hobby," he said.

By placing more money for the drivers in the middle of the pack, more drivers can afford to continue their hobby.

The other big factor is the enforcement of rules. As in any sport not everybody is happy all the time with the decisions made by those enforcing the rules, but generally things work out.

"We try to be consistent and fair in how we interpret the rules," Warnock said.

Boone Coleman pointed to a large amount of the track's success coming across the Carl Perkins Bridge from Kentucky. He said the track draws heavy fan support from Greensup, Lewis, and Carter counties.

"That's where the biggest part of the crowd comes from," Coleman said.

The track and its employees have developed a good relation with the fans and drivers. Last summer, a vandal did major damage to the track which threatened the season.

Fans and drivers helped Coleman and his construction people to make the needed repairs and get the track open.

Warnock is pleased with the quality of drivers coming to the track, particularly among the modifieds. "They can go race and be competitive anywhere in the United States," Warnock said. "They've got good equipment and a high level of skill."

Following a successful first two seasons, the track was ex-



Max Steele of Catonsburg has demonstrated action in the super stock division at Portsmouth Raceway Park. Steele has captured two feature wins in less than two months.



Racing driver Tony Ruby (33) slides under another driver during a recent race at Portsmouth Raceway Park. Ruby posted his first feature victory at the 1/4 mile track last month.



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The Gammon Family prepares their car for a recent race. Working on the car are: from left Frandy, Brian, Dale and Herb are among five brothers making up the racing team.

Gammon Brothers work together to form area's newest racing team

SOUTH SHORE - Racing is truly a family affair with the Gammon family in the center.

The five brothers formed a racing team, built a modified car and have been racing the past month.

Unlike most cars at the track, the Gammons, Dale, Herb, Brian, Craig and Keith, own the car, but none of them drive. Instead, they give the ride to Beach Dowdy.

"None of us could afford it on our own," Dale said. However, by pooling their resources they were able to come up with the modified car.

The Gammon Brothers have long been interested in racing. Their father, Lloyd Gammon, owned a car. "Dewey Lewis drove," Dale said. "They won some races. He had a pretty decent car."

He added, "that was in 1968." Their father used to own a car and the brothers now have 68 on their car.

The brothers have depended on Herb, owner of South Shore Auto Parts, in the construction and operation of the car. "If he says do something, we don't question it, we just do it," Dale said.

The move to car owners is not as drastic as one might think, according to Dale. "We're just paying \$5 extra to get in the pits," he said.

Herb has been involved in racing since he became owner of the auto parts two years ago. He sponsored eight or nine cars, primarily bombers last season and continued to help others this season.

Herb designed and built the family car from the ground up and sees the car as a source of a new business, car building.

While many people are in the chassis or engine business, the Gammons will be one of the few that can construct all phases of the car.

"He noted an 'in-hous' car was needed to learn what we need to change." He said their current reason is more of a re-usable and development car.

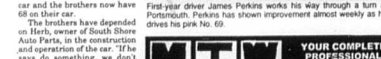
He explained Dowdy is an important part of the group's plan. "He's a good driver," Herb said. "He can tell you what it needs."

Herb said, "We're going to

start a program as soon as the season is over to build cars." He said four orders have already been received.

While Herb's auto parts store is based on parts for the modified car, he noted, "we're going to pick up more and more into the high performance."

With the popularity of both round track and drag racing, Herb pointed out, "it's hard not to get more involved in high performance parts."



Year one driver James Perkins works his way through a turn at Portsmouth. Perkins has shown improvement almost weekly as he drives his pole No. 60.

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