

[■] TECH STOP

IHRA RACECAR CREW & THEIR RESPONSIBILITIES

by Robert Szabo

Many IHRA racecars are surrounded by crew-members. They are of all appearances. Tall, medium, or short; young, middle age, or senior; guy or gal. What makes up this dedicated group of racing enthusiasts who work so hard to make a successful race team?

DRIVER'S VIEW OF CREW: To the driver, the crew-members are the arms and legs. They help make the vehicle start, idle, and rev, make a burnout, backup and stage, and they help to make it launch and get to the finish line. The crewmembers help to make the racecar powerful enough to compete and handle so it has a reasonable chance of staying on the racetrack. They pitch in to maintain the parachute and brakes so the racecar can be brought to a safe halt.

CREW'S VIEW OF DRIVER: To the crew, the racecar is ready, started and now in the sole hands of the driver. Burnout, backup and staging coaching are provided by some crewmembers in many of the classes. However, once that racecar is staged, it is in the hands of the driver. The crew can do nothing but watch a successful or aborted test run; a qualifying run or not; a win or not.

ALL POSITIONS ARE EXCITING: I have been the owner and driver of a racecar and a crewmember for others. The excitement of each can be equal. When you are part of a team, you are a participant in the event. You are one of the lucky few to be part of an excit-

proven skill like tuning.

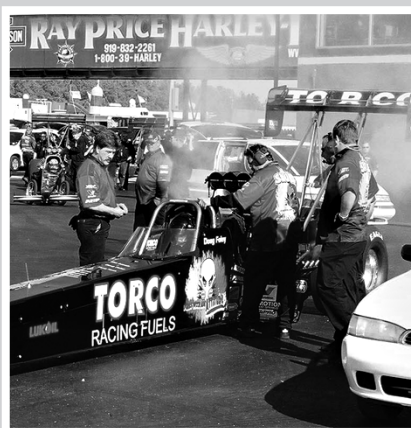
The crew can be the driver, owner, tuner, or maintainer. The crew can provide: services: food, snacks, beverages, running errands such as locating track personnel when needed; for example, arranging for safety inspections, unpacking & packing at the race track or the shop. Race car maintenance at the race track or the shop, race car repair at the race track or the shop, race car research & development at the race track or the shop.

The crew can be from a specialty such as: car builder, engine builder, trans or rear end builder, tuner: fuel system, clutch, chassis, overall setup.

The ideal behavior of crew: full support of race car activity, anticipate needs of racecar and driver for the next round, watchdog over driver, tuner, maintainer.

CREW CAN BRING SPECIALIZED KNOWLEDGE: A crew-member can become knowledgeable of some current or new aspects of race cars from outside sources and brings that knowledge to the team. Many car owners and builder egos inhibit this, however, I have been humbled many times by crewmembers who acquired outside knowledge and brought it to our team.

TEAM PLAYERS: The crewmember needs to be a team player -- usually it is better to get along with the team than to be right all the time. All members of a team bring some baggage. It is important for a crewmember to not dominate the team with that baggage: stub-



Crew readies Doug Foley's Torco Top Fueler.



Checker, Schuck's, Kragen Top Fuel FC crew working hard between rounds.



Bobby Lagana's Twilight Zone Top Fueler maintained by Sal, Don, Jay, Terry and Al.

ing and fulfilling sport. You get to walk up with that car as it approaches the starting line in front of the crowd of spectators who are there to watch your car accelerate from a dead stop to as fast as it can go in a measured distance.

Some team owners and drivers think it is all about the driver and the racecar and nothing else matters. To the crew, that racecar may be equally important. However, a crewmember's adjustment or repair is every bit as responsible for make a racing achievement as the owner's last parts purchase or the driving job.

DIFFICULTY OF COMBINED POSITIONS: I have also been both the driver and crew at the same time as is the case in many teams. It is difficult being both. Concentration on tuning detracts from driving and visa-versa. Having one or more crewmembers to do the setup and between round maintenance is a valuable alternative. I found that it helps to turn maintenance and tuning over to the crew so that driving and competing can be concentrated on.

CLASSES / CREW: The following classes have crewmember support:

Top Fuel surrounded by crewmembers all necessary for about five to eight man-hours of work between rounds (that is with no major problems such as a failed engine).

Top Alcohol, Top Sportsman, and Pro Stock again surrounded by crewmembers for about two to three man-hours of work between rounds (again that is with no major problems).

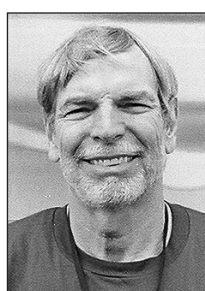
With problems, that number of crew man-hours between rounds can exceed the time before the next round time. Also keep in mind that these various man-hours need to be fit between rounds with a lot less time than that. As a result, the crewmembers have to work in parallel so that round time can be met. In many of the Sportsman, Bracket and Stock classes, power levels are more conservative. That fact together with smart car and engine builders make setups with fewer between round man-hours. As a result, fewer crewmembers often accompany these classes.

CREW CHARACTERISTICS: Wife or husband, relative, neighbor, old school friend, friend of a friend, passer by, volunteer, or from another competitors team lending a hand, extreme interest in drag racing, mechanically inclined, occasionally crew for hire, usually with some

bornness, temper, drug abuse, excessive drinking, poor hygiene or poor behavior.

CREW COSTS: Most crewmembers pay their own way. Out of town costs can be hundreds of dollars for an event. Crewmembers are usually burdened with race car maintenance and not able to watch the rest of the race. Yes, they often pay their way into an event to serve the driver or owner and miss much of the other spectacular IHRA racing.

CREW PERKS: Various team owners are good at crew rewards. They help with expenses or purchase services from crewmembers who have service provision capabilities whether it is carpet cleaning, auto repair, home repairs, maintenance, etc. Treatment of crewmembers as VIP's is important. Introductions of crewmembers to fans, names on race car or trailer, recognition for successes, thanks and appreciation for help are all important. Introductions are often done in the Pro ranks on TV coverage. Others use the crew to ride in the race car during towing to the staging lanes. That can be the highlight of a young adult's life. Others use crew to warm up the racecar where racing license requirements do not interfere and still others use crew to drive in test outings. One local team has a second bracket car. They arranged for their crew chief to get licensed in that car to show appreciation. With our team, our crew chief got licensed in our racecar, and every crewmember sat in it while it was running or towed or drove it around the pits. •



About the Author

Bob Szabo is an owner / driver of a blown alcohol drag racecar and author of the technical book: "Fuel Injection Racing Secrets." The author's next book is on methanol racing fuel that will be out shortly. Check the DRM Yellow Pages for Szabo Publishing or look on the Internet at <http://www.racecarbook.com> or call (707) 446 2917. If you have any comments about this article or any previous articles by the author, feel free to e-mail directly to the author at bob@racecarbook.com or to the DRM staff: pamelamarchyshyn@livenation.com or michaelperry@livenation.com NOTE: If you have spam controls and you Email any of us & want a response, please enter our Email address to clear your spam blocker. Time may not permit us to register to your spam blocker.