

# A New Option For Sprint Car Racers

By **BILL WRIGHT**

Spec engines have long been a form of many facets of motorsports landscape, but they are still a relatively rare in sprint car racing. Numerous examples can be found in entry-level divisions and the latest has hit the Sprint Car Capital of the World — Iowa's Knoxville Raceway.

The Pace Performance Knoxville Evolution CT525 engine is being run by a couple of drivers in the 305 class and had racked up two wins as of this writing.

The \$15,950 price tag may seem steep, but consider the engine has lasted up to 100 races in the late model world with limited maintenance. Don Blackshear, Pace Performance's circle track director, explained, "With this program, we have a spec engine with limited RPMs. We seal the timing box that controls the ignition box and the RPM timing limit. You're looking at an 80- to 100-race cycle. That could be three to five seasons of racing depending on what length of a season you have."

And what happens when 100 races are spent?

"At that point, I recommend buying a sealed base engine from us," Blackshear said. "That is \$7,500. You remove your accessories off of your engine, your carburetor, water pump and things of that nature. You transfer them over to the new engine and you race it again. In 80 to 100 races, you are talking 4,000 to 5,000 laps. A rebuild would probably cost you more than what the base engine does, so that's my recommendation."

Blackshear says almost everything is included in that \$15,950 investment.

"It includes the fuel pump and headers. The only thing you have to supply is the radiator and the power steering pump," he said. "Everything else comes with the kit down to the bolts to put it in the car. There's no modification to the driveline that needs to be done. The only thing that you have to have is your motor plate must accept a raised cam block, which most of the new motor plates have the extra set of holes for that. Outside of that, you don't modify any of your throttle linkage. It all hooks right to the bell crank on your chassis. It's pretty much a plug-and-play operation."

In addition, the maintenance is minimal.

"We recommend oil changes every 150 laps and service the air filter nightly," Blackshear said. "There's no valve adjustment. This thing has a hydraulic roller camshaft in it. So there's no maintenance required internally. I have late model racers that have had over 100 nights on the engine and have never had the valve covers off of it."

Through July, veteran sprint car racer Chris Walraven had three Knoxville victories using the CT525 engine.

"I'm very happy with it," he said. "I think it's the future for entry-level racing. We've tried the other deal for three years and beat our heads against the wall. We had a lot more money in our other motors. The bad thing about this 305 class, and they've done it with the 360s, too, is they let the rules package get away. Engine builders can make more power than the engine can handle. We're down a lot of horsepower to some of the other engines running here. But we've got a better midrange. So we're playing to the strengths of our engines and we hide the weaknesses. It's been pretty even on most nights here. It depends on the track conditions, but this has been a really good decision for us."

Walraven was at a crossroads at the end of last season when he saw the CT525 engine tested during the Knoxville Raceway season finale.

"We were really down to two choices," he said. "Did we want to build one that would be at the back of the pack and live, or did we want to build one that ran up front and was basically a bomb that would cost over \$20,000? They'll live a little while, but not very long. No one can afford to race like that for \$400 to win. We didn't really decide until March to do it. We mullied it over all winter. Our biggest fear was that it was restricted too far. What they told me was they would re-evaluate taking the restrictor off at the midway point of the season. We went out and won the season opener and then winning in May pretty much killed the chance of that happening. Personally, I'd love to take it off and see what it could do somewhere."

The restrictor is used in the 305 class but can be taken off for more horsepower.

"The Knoxville program runs a restrictor plate under the carburetor to pull the horsepower back on it," Blackshear explained. "This engine package is the most unique and blendable as far as sealed-engine programs go. We can take it from as little as 475 horsepower to as much as 600. It's all in the changing of the restrictor plate."

That has gotten some 360 drivers' attention as well.

"The sprint car program is pretty much a new development because of the Knoxville package," said Blackshear. "We have the Upper Midwest Sprint Car Series that has adopted it as well and we've run one with their 360 class with an open restrictor on it. The Patriot 360 Series has allowed us to test with them as well."

John McCoy, race director at Knoxville, is impressed with the early returns.

"This is a good thing happening here," McCoy said. "We'll see how long these motors last. We'll put them through their paces. This is an engine that can last multiple seasons without having to work on them. The late model guys have had success with them. If that's true, what better product can we have?"

The IMCA Racesaver



engine is also popular in the Midwest, but Knoxville officials haven't decided to go that way.

"A few things have turned us off of the Racesavers here," said McCoy. "I saw a guy win a track championship not far from here and advertise his motor for \$24,000. How can that be? Then, I had a team that wanted to buy a 305 from a high-dollar motor builder. They told him they wanted an engine for Knoxville. He thought we ran Racesavers. He sent them back an estimate at \$20,000. When they told him they didn't need a Racesaver, but a regular Knoxville engine, he told them it would be about \$22,000."

And then there is the tech side of things.

"The Racesaver folks preach about their light valve

spring," said McCoy. "It's just another tech thing that's inside. Anytime we can avoid tech things on the inside that's better, that's a headache. We like the tech side of the CT525. Everything can be tech-able from your phone. We're on the 525 setting — 525 horsepower, a hair under 500 pounds of torque. That's ideal for Knoxville. The worst thing for us in tech at Knoxville is the 305s. This takes that out of it and makes it easier for everyone."

The ease of maintenance is one of the biggest positives for Walraven.

"Between Brent (Geetings) and I, we have seven kids. We have so many things going on all the time," he said. "This has let us race and still be able to do all those things. We change the oil every 100 laps and that's about it. We tried all those years to do all these things to make those other motors live and they still didn't have the longevity. We spent so many hours under the hood doing everything possible. This thing is just the opposite."

"This whole program is designed for entry-level racing," Blackshear said. "This isn't an attack on the World of Outlaws or anything of that nature. This is for the weekly Saturday night programs across the country. We all know the purse structure doesn't justify the costs. This is an affordable sealed engine program." ■



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