



George Horsford / Daily Sun

Sixty-three members of The Villages Motor Racing Fan Club prepare to board a bus to New Smyrna Speedway.

MORE THAN A RACE

Villages Motor Racing Fan Club sponsors car for Sunoco Sunbelt event

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By Katie Evans

Gerry Hafer watched the No. 92 car race around the track at New Smyrna Speedway, noting that it was different from any other auto race he'd ever watched.

Hafer, along with 65 other members of The Villages Motor Racing Fan Club, was sponsoring the car for the Sunoco Sunbelt Super Late Models race Saturday in New Smyrna Beach.

Hafer said sponsoring a car changed the importance of the race.

"It certainly did make it more than just a race," said the club's newsletter editor. "It was our race, it was our car, it was our driver."

"It makes the race a whole lot more interesting when you've got some skin in the game."

The sponsorship resulted from the club's relationship with Dick Anderson, a retired racer who built and owns the car.

Anderson spoke at the club's first meeting, and the club members decided they should team up with Anderson in some way.



Anderson thought a sponsorship for a race was a great option. “It was a win-win situation,” he said.

As part of the sponsorship, the members got to sign the hood of the car and the club’s logo was displayed on the hood as well.

On the day of the race, 66 club members piled onto a bus for the trip to New Smyrna Beach – most were clad in the club’s yellow shirt.

Once at the speedway, the members were “treated like royalty,” Hafer said, as they

were given a tour of the track.

“We had a tour of the whole place,” said club member Michael Touchette. “It was a fantastic time.”

As race time approached, a sea of yellow formed in the stands. The members were completely surprised when the club was named grand marshal for the race – meaning the members got to yell out, “Gentlemen, start your engines.”

“That was a surprise,” Hafer said. “We didn’t know they were going to do that.”

Touchette joked that the club’s cheering was almost as loud as the race itself. “We had a pretty boisterous crowd,” he said.

Hafer agreed.

“I think we were kind of infectious,” Hafer said with a laugh. “People around the end of the race were starting to cheer with us.”

“It’s like they became temporary Villagers.”

As the club members held their breath on the last lap of the race, cheers erupted when No. 92, driven by Jeff Choquette, crossed the finish line first.

To complete the club’s day of royalty, the members were all invited down to the winner’s circle with Choquette and Anderson.

“You can’t even describe the feeling,” Touchette said. “It was great.”

Hafer thinks the sponsorship helped the club in several ways.

“I think it showed our members that we’re really doing some exciting things,” he said.

He also thinks it may have helped solidify some of the members’ passion for racing.

“Those who were borderline fans, I think we may have swung them over,” he said.



The Associated Press
Members of The Villages Motor Racing Fan Club were invited to the winner's circle following a successful race for the car they sponsored, No. 92, driven by Jeff Choquette.