

Confessions of a Racing Addict

I confess, I am a racing addict.

There are no support groups for racing addicts; no clinics, no 28 day treatment programs and no medications to ease the withdrawal symptoms.

I have never been hooked on alcohol, nor have I done drugs. I smoked for a while but quit that. I am addicted to the sights, smells and emotions of racing. If the feeling that I got from photographing and watching racing came in powder form I would snort it. If it came in liquid form I would inject it. If it was a leafy substance I would roll it into a cigarette and smoke it. Instead, I take my drug one race lap at a time.

I have cheered, wept and cursed during races both attended and watched on TV. When I see fans of other sports giving strong reactions to their sport, I do not understand, why would they watch anything other than racing? Similarly, when non race fans look puzzled at my love for racing, I do not understand that either.

I have spent tens of thousands of hours at or travelling to or from races. I have spent hundreds of hours on racing-related message boards and websites like Speed51.com, Jayski.com, NASCAR.com and every other conceivable website having to do with racing. More than half of the websites bookmarked on my computer are racing-related.

I have spent thousands of hours editing, sorting and storing photos. The same goes for researching and writing magazine articles. Boxes of newspapers and magazines with my photos in them, along with boxes of photo CD's, prints and negatives occupy more than half of the floor space in my home office.

I confess to dreaming about racing and waking up the next morning in a very good mood. Several times I have dreamed about photographing races at tracks I have never been to. One time I had a dream that a race was held on my front lawn. It was a glorious event, at least in my dreams.

I have avoided paying bills to go to races instead. I have sometimes gone to races without enough money to make it home unless I got cash from selling photos. I have travelled to and from races with just barely enough sleep to stay on the road. I have missed time at work and with family so that I could go to the races.

No matter your involvement in the sport, racing provides all of the "benefits" of any addiction. Like gamblers, race fans gamble on whether or not a race will beat the weather odds or whether or not their favorite driver will win. Like drug addicts, race addicts are drawn to the thrill of speed, the danger of crashes and the incredible feeling that comes from a great race. Also like drug addicts, achieving the euphoria from a great race only insures that the addict will seek that feeling again. Not convinced? How many of us have (or know someone who has) left one race to go to another race in the same day. Maybe

you have even strung a series of race days together. I once attended races in four states and two countries over the course of eleven straight days.

I once asked a racer how he could walk away from racing “cold turkey” which is the same expression that is used when people are quitting drugs. He told me that he had risked his finances, his family, his health and his work in order to feed his addiction to racing. With young children to think about, he reasoned that his addiction was no longer worthy of all the risks that came with it. I remember thinking that he was making a very honorable and levelheaded decision. I also thought it was a decision that I was not willing to make for myself.

Few in the racing community dare talk about getting out. Those who beat the addiction usually go quietly into obscurity, sometimes heard about but rarely seen again at the racetrack. Some addicts who no longer go to the races or watch it on TV still ask their active race friends for the occasional update. Most who beat the racing addiction are not able to watch or attend even a single race without falling back into the addiction. Once a race addict, always a race addict.

For an addicted race fan, there is no worse feeling than missing a race. I have driven through torrential rains just to go to the track to see for myself that the race was not happening that day. I wait at the track until the race is officially cancelled. Several times I have travelled to races only to see race haulers passing me in the opposite direction. It is only after the fourth or fifth hauler passes me that I finally accept that the race has been cancelled. As long as there is a chance for a racing “fix” , no matter how slight that chance may be, I am willing to do what it takes to get what I crave.

I listen to the NASCAR channel on Sirius to and from races and often during the week. I once watched the Indianapolis 500 on a handheld television while also watching a race at Thunder Road. If I could have arranged to have audio of yet another race I would have done that, too. I have listened to delayed broadcasts of ACT races, ones I attended, on the way home from those very races.

My e-mail address and car license plate contain the word “racepix.” All of my passwords are race-related. I have considered getting a checkered-flag tattoo on my arm.

Even my friends and acquaintances who are not race fans are very aware that I am a race fan. Many people who have visited my website for landscape photos have commented that, while not race fans, they found the race photos interesting.

I am certainly not the most-addicted race fan in our sport. People called “race chasers” pride themselves on how many different race tracks they have attended. For a few, that number exceeds 1,000. Some racers race more than 100 times each year. Some race fans can count almost that many races attended each season.

My wife enables my addiction. In fact, it was with her knowledge that we picked our wedding day on a weekend without any major races. It was also on our honeymoon that she let me listen to the Sprint cup telecast on the way to the hotel and watch the finish on TV once we got to our hotel.

She knows that checking the internet message boards will be my last activity before my head touches my pillow. She also knows that I will at least linger on any television programming that involves any sort of motorsports activity. She does not complain that we should leave a racetrack even though it is raining steadily, she doesn't bat a beautiful eyelash when I present the complete 2009 racing schedule a full three months before the first event on the schedule and she never makes fun of my love of racing. I sometimes wonder if I am crazier for my addiction to racing or she is crazier for enabling it.

My addiction to racing has caused me to do countless things that defy any logic, common sense or maturity. Someone who doesn't share my addiction would never understand the insanity of this sport that we love. It is a time-consuming, money-eating, sometimes skin-melting, sometimes bone-chilling activity with no logical explanation to anyone who is not a fellow race addict.

All of my racing activities take considerable time and offer little to no financial compensation. I remember talking to my father just before starting my role as a race photographer. He asked how much it paid. I told him it didn't really pay and the activity would be a financial loss. He then asked me why I was doing it. I had no reasonable answer other than it was something I wanted to do, no matter how crazy it sounded. Nearly two decades later, I still have no reasonable explanation for the activity other than it is something I enjoy.

It is impossible to calculate the money or hours spent on my racing addiction. There is no telling what things I could have accomplished if I was not at a race or somehow involved in racing. And yet, despite whatever I have missed and despite whatever hardships I have been through, I wouldn't change a thing. I have made friends that I would not have made otherwise, been to places I wouldn't have otherwise visited and seen things I wouldn't have otherwise seen.

Since you are reading this confession in the pages of this wonderful racing publication, I suspect that you are a racing addict, too. Like me, you probably do not seek help for your addiction.

See you at the races!