



Introduction

NASCAR's next lap

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I have thoroughly enjoyed editing this special issue of the *Journal*. The authors were a pleasure to work with and the quality of their work is self-evident. I would also like to thank the reviewers for their considerable contribution to the articles.

Taken together, the papers highlight a number of marketing issues underpinning NASCAR and motorsport in general. From a commercial standpoint, motorsport is the conduit between commercial organisations and consumers. Within this, there is the complexity of how fans connect to the different types of motorsport, the individual teams and, perhaps more importantly, the drivers. How do fans reconcile a decision by a favoured driver to drive in a non-preferred motorsport event in a non-preferred brand of motor vehicle? Throw into the mix a non-preferred brand of beer as the new sponsor and it seems evident a fan will need to change the contents of both their garage and their fridge. And they might just have to get that tattoo changed to another driver's name.

NASCAR has broadened its market in a number of ways. Women are more likely than ever to be seen on the race track, in grandstands and in front of the television. In a sport where grid girls, pit babes and paddock chicks continue to be part of the marketing handbook, this is no small achievement.

Both NASCAR and motorsport events are seeking to increase their appeal and physical presence in less-developed geographical markets, a search which highlights the unequal distribution of motorsport codes in the world. Neither Formula 1 nor the World Rally Championship has events in the United States, the world's largest market for automobiles. So much for Americanisation being the same as globalisation.

Both within and beyond NASCAR, motorsport has ridden the 'sport event as economic saviour for a host community' wave for 20 years. As the evidence supporting this argument continues to be criticised,

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the potential for motorsport to extract funding and other concessions from host communities – especially those with street circuits – is likely to be reduced. Motorsport be warned: not every taxpayer is a motorsport fan and events are not seen as the 'must have' they once were. Events will need to highlight their ability to develop social capital within host communities, and the brand community concept is well placed to guide research and practice in this.

NASCAR and much of motorsport is thriving, while the planet is literally running out of fuel. In a sport where image is nearly as important as speed, the concern is that motorsport's move towards sustainable technologies is dominated by a superficial need to conform to societal expectations (and pressures) rather than a genuine embracing of the green movement.

NASCAR sponsors will drive the sport into a more sustainable future. However, it is not the carbon footprint of motorsport that is the fundamental concern; rather the sport's symbolic impact. No matter what type of fuel is used or how many tyres are recycled into surfaces for children's playgrounds, a sport that promotes private motor vehicle usage has fundamental issues to overcome. This is motorsport's inconvenient truth.

Together these marketing issues signal an uncertain future. There will always be motorsport, but perhaps not as we know it. Sixty laps down and 40 more to go – NASCAR will see its 100th birthday.