



We sit down with World Racing League founder Joey Todd to discuss his new endurance racing venture. Joey just flew in from his home in Texas for the snowy Rocky Mountain launch of the WRL; meeting with 40 plus grassroots racers to discuss the upcoming inaugural season, cowboy boots and the love of race cars.

Connect First Foundation (CFF)
What are your expectations for this year's inaugural races?

Joey Todd (JT): I really want people to come out and have fun doing something that they love. That in and of itself makes it a worthwhile effort. That said, our goal in 2014 is to get the word out and to show everyone that we're real, we're here and we're all about racers and racing. Like any other relationship, people need to get to know us. There will be "early adopters" and there will be people content to ride the fence until they see what develops. Exposure is critical, and proving the substance behind the hype will tip the scales in

our favor for 2015. We've set the bar at only 6 races for the first year, and during those events we'll be evaluating our rules and how we do everything – from registration to awards – to make sure we're getting things right. There will be some bumps here and there but we'll get them ironed out quickly.

CFF: Can you tell us more about how you arrived at the notion that there should be multiple classes and they should be based around power to weight?

JT: We're running races open to generations of cars from almost every make sold in North America. There's no effective way of evening out that field within a single class. You're going to have a hard time getting an 80hp Honda to compete with a 200hp BMW unless you're willing to spend a lot of time and money in the garage. I think it's important that you provide an opportunity for people to race cars they have, or cars they are familiar with, as opposed to setting up a sys-

tem in which teams feel pressure to pick "the right car". Dividing the field into classes based on performance potential is an easy, tried and true method of providing equal opportunity to just about anyone who wants to race. You don't need to spend a lot of money or campaign a certain car to be competitive. You can show up with a bone stock 2002 Focus with the interior still in it, or a gutted and sorted e30 that's been racing in other series for years and in either case your chasing the trophy with other cars with a performance potential close to yours. We can't make you faster, but we can set it up so that you're competitive!

CFF: What do you love most about your race car?

JT: Right now I have 4 cars sitting in the garage at Texas World Speedway. The Celica is probably going to become a rally car, or perhaps a prize to some hapless winner of a giveaway at some point. The Neon is more of a village bicycle, it's

an old LeMons car with an automatic that I ended up with. Great little car with a very unfortunate slushbox option. But fun is where you find it. Or make it. And we have a race track at our disposal so the possibilities are endless. The green e36 is an on again off again partnership to turn it into a full-fledged race car. It's the only one without a full cage, and the owner and I need to come to terms on a few items so that at least one of us can have some fun with it. The problem is my superstition about the color green on race cars. But the one I can't let go of is my first race car, a 1975 Fiat 124 Spider that ran SCCA F-Production. It's a beautiful Pininfarina-designed car, one of the cars you see less and less of in Club racing because rules are not changing fast enough to allow cars like that to remain competitive – and perhaps that's by design. In race trim it weighs about 1800 lbs and we're finishing up a few upgrades for WRL: dual Weber 40 IDF carbs, a high-flow head, high compression pistons, 15" wheels, etc. Yes it will fall in the Unlimited class. Forever. We'll probably destroy the tranny an hour into the first race, but it will look good coming in on a tow strap.

CFF: How did you get into racing? What makes you such a car guy?

A love of airplanes and cars runs in the family, and I've been fascinated with cars and racing as far back as I can remember starting with a Fisher-Price racing toy I had as a wee lad. Hot Wheels were big when I was a kid, and



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I took a liking to Indy cars early on, to the point that I would try to fashion my own miniature Gurney Eagles out of modeling clay. The wheels always fell off. I drew cars all the time – race cars, coupes, roadsters... I would read Car Craft and Car & Driver cover to cover. When I was 15, I “inherited” my older brother's 1971 Javelin. It was bright red with a 330hp 401ci V8 that wasn't running and the car needed work. My dad gave me access to his tools and some money, and told me to get it running. It all went downhill from there. After that I was willing to hock anything I owned and half of what I didn't for cars. Racing, actual “legal” racing came later in life after establishing a career in the corporate world. One weekend, I popped in on an auto-cross to give it a try. I think I did three or four events before I decided that road racing was where I wanted to be. I bought a car, completed an SCCA license school, and won my first race all within a year.

CFF: You have a lot of experience in other endurance racing series. What makes WRL different from other experiences? How is WRL the natural progression from “crapcan” racing?

JT: We sought to change the tone

and perception of grassroots endurance racing, starting with the thing people see first – the name. When this was just a half-baked idea that I was kicking around in front of a small group of Facebook friends, one of the first requests thrown at me was to create a name that racers were proud to wear, something that made them feel a little closer to the pro racing that most of them follow. And I think we achieved that with World Racing League. Nothing at all against groups like 24 Hours of LeMons, I think the name is a brilliant play, I may actually be a little envious. But we're trying to cast a wider net than just the typical crapcan demographic while preserving some of the things about that genre of racing that people love so much. That said, I think the difference most will notice is that we stayed away from the \$500 budget. It was a novel approach to grassroots racing by LeMons when it debuted. Race what was literally a heap for hours, or until it exploded. What could possibly go wrong? It was the non-racer's race, and the racers non-race, and still real racing, all in one. But the cars you see dominating the crapcan series today aren't really \$500 cars. Part of the premise behind the budget series is to keep costs down, but the money/speed

escalation is just as real there as it is in any other series. There are other ways to control costs. Maybe better ways. We'll see.

CFF: North America is lacking a feeder series for international endurance racing, and WRL seems poised to fill that gap. Are you thinking big?

JT: There are various paths to professional endurance racing. There are some good drivers roaming around the paddock at amateur events who are working on sponsorships or other ways to get into a seat. Pros are crossing over from other forms of motorsports. The real value that WRL can offer in the way of development is experience. Endurance racing requires more than just skill at the wheel. Drivers absolutely must learn to be patient, smooth and consistent to save the car and stretch fuel. Teams have to strategize around even some of the most mundane activities. All sorts of unexpected setbacks have to be overcome. When you start pushing drivers, crew and cars for 12-24 hours, a lot of things change, this is the place to learn and understand what it takes. Don't be surprised if in the future you start seeing pro-level endurance drivers, crew and team managers with WRL on their resumes. Sure, if United SportsCar calls next week asking WRL to run a support race, you can bet we'll be there. But for now we're focused on developing WRL into North America's premier amateur endurance race series.

CFF: What is your favorite car you've ever wrenched on?

JT: Tough choice, I've owned at least 20 cars and trucks to date... there was a 79 Mustang Turbo I had in college, we wired the waste gate shut for "infinite power". And replaced the head gasket an infinite number of times. Good thing it was easy. But it could take an early C4 Vette in a straight line, at least until the little 2.3L started impersonating a steam engine. The Fiat 124 can be interesting at times, who would think to misalign the bore centers of the cylinders and combustion chambers? Those crazy Italians, that's who. But you only need 4 wrenches and a screw

driver to work on it. And sometimes, a hammer. I absolutely hated the 77 Trans Am for a lot of reasons, and I could never get the 280Z to stay cool in the summer. I had a Corvair convertible that was brilliantly easy to work on. But my all time fave has to be that 71 Javelin. It was my first car, the one I learned so many things on. Useful things, like how to work a dent out of a fender or oiling up the ring compressor and putting rubber hose over the rod studs to avoid scoring the crank when inserting a piston. Useless things too, like flipping the breather lid on the air cleaner to get that throaty sound when the secondaries opened up. For a kid growing up with Cordobas and Pacers, that was a cool thing. The Jav was fast and loud, easy to work on, and cheap, and I wish I'd never let it go.

CFF: How will you measure success for the inaugural year of the World Racing League?

JT: There are some metrics we're looking at. But because we launched the idea late in 2013 and we're playing from behind, we purposely reigned in the ambition for Year One and I think our goals are obtainable. Outside of pure numbers, the success of our first season depends largely on how effective we are at communicating what we're about and why we're the better racing series. Not just to the racers, but to sponsors, tracks, media outlets, etc. They all make up the racing eco-system, one big symbiotic circle of life. The series and the promoters are not the superstar at the center, we need support and participation across the board in order to get where we're going.

CFF: Can endurance racing make a good spectator sport?

I think it's possible, especially with advances in technology where you can "be" in the car no matter where you or the car happens to be at the moment. You'll have to have some of the same elements you find in other spectator sports – teams people love or love to hate, fast action, an understanding of rules and strategy, rivalries, a little drama... But I really believe that a major component is

accessibility. Grassroots endurance racing that's accessible to the average person develops interest and participation for that person, which in turn creates a small network of fans. Look at baseball as an example. Most die-hard baseball fans either played baseball at some level or had the love of the game passed on to them from a parent or relative. It may take a while to groom, but the potential is there.

CFF: Do you have a favorite racing format? Is there a magic number where true grit shows?

JT: I don't think that you can run less than 7 or 8 hours and consider it to be a true test of man and machine. Cars in general have become too reliable to really be tested by a shorter format. A lot of 4-hour enduros you see at the club level are set to fit into a weekend of sprints and/or time trials and for cars with 5-8 gallon tanks. You get the flavor of endurance racing but it's just not the real thing. Once you go past the 12 hour mark, psychological and physical fatigue really starts to mount, and anything in the pitch black of night is going to put your nerves, skills and preparation to the test. When the sun goes down, the world you knew disappears and a sort of surreal feel takes hold. Whether you're wrenching, driving or just watching laps, everything looks and feels totally different. There's no good sleep to be had with pit stops, driver changes, mechanical issues and monitoring your driver. Then you get to dawn and realize there are still a few hours to go and hope you get a second wind.

CFF: You call WRL "real, honest-to-goodness racing made cheap and easy." Which is really inviting. How do you plan to keep all the politics or BS out of the series

JT: Rules set the tone for a series. I think that when your rules are overly complex they create more issues than they solve. You can't manage a series by sheer legislation, you need good people that understand road racing and racers, and aren't afraid to enforce the rules. You'll notice that our rules are written so that the officials' authority actually matters, as

opposed to hiding behind pages of edicts. It goes to accountability, people holding each other to a standard. And that's not just from the officials down, we're set up where the racers can hold each other accountable peer-to-peer as well. We're also very grassroots about rules development. We'll be taking input on the initial rules set this year and those who can provide constructive feedback with solid rationale will get an ear. I think that as long as we play it straight with the racers and use people instead of pages, we're going to have good relationships with the teams. That may not keep all the BS out, but it will go a long way in making WRL races a desirable place to spend the weekend.

CFF: *Who are some of your favorite racers, and why?*

JT: I don't think I have a favorite. Growing up, I watched guys like AJ Foyt, Mario Andretti, Al Unser, Johnny Rutherford, Richard Petty and others in their prime, and back then racing was less... "polished" in a lot of ways. The technology was certainly not at the level we have now. There wasn't as much money involved. There were no CoolShirt systems or carbon fiber helmets. Those guys were pioneers. They were characters. And they achieved things using equipment that by comparison looks like stone-age technology. Jackie Stewart. His accent alone says "racing" to me, probably from falling asleep too many times while a race was on the telly. And I could never leave Dick Trickle off the list for obvious reasons.

CFF: *Can you heel-toe in those fancy Texas boots of yours?*

JT: It's really not as hard as you'd think, in a 70's era GM car where the pedals are spread out in a footwell the size of Kansas. In a Miata? It's like having whole sheets of plywood strapped to your feet. You're not always sure which pedal, or pedals, you're on. But the boots are all leather upper, which is naturally fire-resistant. They could get an SFI rating...

CFF: *Perhaps the most intriguing and potent idea about WRL is the power-to-weight element. Can you tell us more on what will really mean to the drivers?*

JT: It enables drivers to bring a car they already have, or know inside and out, and compete without having to dump buckets of money into it. That will be critical when you're prepping for the race, even more so when you're sitting in the paddock wrenching on the car to get it back on the track. Strategy becomes even more important to teams that might be also-rans in other series, as does preparation. When you're running against cars closer to the performance potential of your own, it can boil down to preparation and setup. Driving skill will also play a bigger role. In the end it our structure gives everyone a fair shot at landing at the top of their class no matter what car they drive or how little money they spend.

CFF: *What is some of your favorite racing to watch live? How about the on boob-tube?*

JT: I can't say I spend much time behind a TV anymore unless I'm catching up on Futurama or something on Netflix. But I will go to any race I have an opportunity to watch. Indy cars are literally a scream.

Trackside at any road race can get very interesting, especially if you can get close enough to see cars kicking up marbles going 2 or 3 wide into a turn. Drag races, motocross... even lawnmower racing has to be a blast if you are there in person. If you love cars you can't beat the smell of race fuel and brake dust. The sight of drivers walking around half-suited carrying a helmet by the chin strap, the sounds of engines revving, fans yelling, tires squealing. It's a visceral experience that defies description.

CFF: *You have been on the road quite a bit these past years running races – what are the common themes you see in racers that you love?*

JT: I spent 6 years in the Air Force, and the closest thing I have found to the camaraderie in the military is the closeness and friendliness of racers in the paddock. Watching someone lend a part to a team that's just a lap behind them, shorting their own team a spare to help a competitor, makes you forget all the divisiveness you see too much of these days. It's an unbeatable opportunity to get to talk to people from a lot of different backgrounds, from different regions of the country. You learn a lot about people and about things, and you make a lot of friends.

