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Through The Esses - Who Is Coming To NJMP In 2008?

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A few months back we interviewed two gentlemen by the name of Lee Brahin and Joe Savaro about a new Motorsports facility under construction in New Jersey. Called the New Jersey Motorsports Park (NJMP), this facility is slated to wave its first green flag in the spring of 2008. Recently, Grand-Am President Roger Edmondson made this comment at the annual season ending Annual Champions banquet in Las Vegas: "The series is also exploring a Labor Day event at a new venue being built between New York City and Philadelphia."



Ka-ching! That got our antennae up. Could he possibly be referring to NJMP? We wanted to learn more so we asked Harvey Siegel, the owner of NJMP and Virginia International Raceway (VIR) to let us in on the potential secret.

According to Siegel, the development of NJMP - located near an airfield outside of Millville, in southern New Jersey - is coming along nicely. Also according to Siegel, no announcements about Grand-Am or anyone else putting this new venue on their schedule is ready to be made public.

"We are not in a position today to make any specific announcements about which series or clubs will be racing at our facility in 2008. Those announcements will come from the respective sanctioning bodies at the appropriate time. I can tell you that we have had conversations with virtually every major sanctioning body – from Grand-Am to the ALMS, the SCCA, WERA, CCS and more – and with a great number of racing clubs and racing organizations. We are starting to fill in some dates on the calendar now, but again, we aren't in a position to make any specific announcements."

One well known racing icon, Cobra creator and racing legend Carroll Shelby, has at least some of the dates reserved for the Shelby American Club. Shelby himself was involved in some of the early design work of the facility.

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Here is a Siegel quote from a recent press release from NJMP:

<I>“Lee Brahin, the project co-developer, and RJ Valentine shared vision for the development of New Jersey Motorsports Park, and having Carroll Shelby’s collaboration on the layout and conceptual design of our Thunderbolt Raceway and Lightning Road courses is a new high-water mark for our team. In the American racing world, there isn’t another man who’s accomplished as much as Carroll and we’re honored to have his participation in our project. It’s unusual for new Motorsports facilities to have help from the get-go on track design, and I think this will give us a signature aspect to what we anticipate will be one of the marquee facilities in North America.”</I>

As he has done with the revitalization of VIR – the track property was used as farmland for many years when it ceased racing operations in the 1970s – Siegel is taking bold steps to provide racing enthusiasts with a facility that will give them an outstanding venue in which to enjoy themselves.

“Our business plan for NJMP is very similar to what we have done with Virginia International Raceway (VIR). That is, we intend to offer everyone who enjoys the racing lifestyle – and that’s what it has become over time, a lifestyle, not something you do on a whim or for temporary enjoyment – an opportunity to be a part of an entity that exists solely to provide a premier venue for living that lifestyle.”

From the website:

“Amenities on this circuit will include concession buildings, event garages, twenty (20) VIP Suites, banquet rooms, a covered false grid, and a three (3) story timing tower with media center and VIP facilities.

“The New Jersey Motorsports Park will also feature our members only Driver’s Club and our spacious and well appointed clubhouse facilities. Play on our tennis courts, take a dip in the pool or cozy up to the bar after dinner, all after a challenging day at the Motorsports Park.”

Siegel has the financial foundation in place to make his dream a reality. And given the location – 40 miles west of Atlantic City, 50 miles southeast of Philadelphia and 130 miles south of New York City - it would seem a sure thing that his dream will also provide many others with the fulfillment of their own dream to one day have a near-by premier racing facility at their disposal.

“A project of this size requires financial backing at a significant level and I am pleased to say we have that kind of support through Merrill Lynch. They understand what our business model is and they too recognize that a facility like NJMP will have a large audience or customer base. People who get into racing rarely drop out of the sport. It is truly a love affair that, once begun, often continues for many years. NJMP offers racing enthusiasts an outstanding venue in which to maximize their enjoyment. And our proximity to several major metropolitan areas further solidifies our belief that our facility will succeed.”

On the track web site (<http://www.njmotorsportspark.com/index.html>) several early photos of the ongoing construction are posted. We asked for an update on the progress being made.

“Construction is moving along well on both of our circuits. Unlike VIR where the circuits are layered inside one another and you simply change the configurations to suit, the two circuits are autonomous. We will have a 2.25 mile long Thunderbolt circuit and a 1.9 mile long circuit called The Lightning.

“We named the larger circuit Thunderbolt Raceway to honor the P-47 ‘Thunderbolt’ planes and the pilots who flew them during World War II out of the Millville Army Air Field which is located right next to our facility.”

In our prior interview with Lee Brahin, he outlined the past and future connection between NJMP and the air field.

Brahin: "We are trying to tie into the history of the airport. We took the name ‘Thunderbolt’ for our road course to honor that history. Training for World War II pilots took place at this airport and we intend to have an aviation and automotive theme throughout the facility. There is already an aviation museum on the grounds of the airport. Joe (Savaro) is on the board of directors of the Millville Municipal Army Airfield Museum and we will be staging some functions that tie in with them. For example, there is a large air show that is held here and they get quite a large number of spectators to turn out for that. We would like people to come out and watch the air show from our facility. We are so close to one another that you could actually fly into the airport and ride a golf cart onto our facility."

From what we have been told to date, plus Roger Edmondson’s comments noted earlier, we have to think professional sportscar racing will soon be available to east coast fans and enthusiasts alike at a brand new facility. And Siegel maintains that it won’t be just the pros that burn rubber at NJMP.

“We intend to offer a part of the racing lifestyle to as many individuals, teams, clubs and professional race sanctioning bodies as we can. We like to say that no one will have a banquet, but everyone will have a taste. We think our facility will also offer something for everyone and we expect that everyone who comes here will enjoy what we have to offer.”

We certainly look forward to what is to come. And we anticipate that NJMP will take a page out of Larry Miller and George Barber’s book concerning construction of a new racing facility. Miller Motorsports Park in Utah, and Barber Motorsports Park in Alabama, are both state of the art in terms of design and construction. Being residents of the northeast, we welcome the opportunity to see what a brand new, state of the art, first class racing venue will look like, without having to travel a thousand miles just to get there.

And we wouldn’t mind having another Grand-Am race up in our corner of the world. Imagine, Lime Rock, Watkins Glen and now (maybe) NJMP in the same season. We like that idea. Our thanks go out to Harvey Siegel and the other movers and shakers who are making this idea a real possibility. And we suspect we aren’t the only ones who feel this way.

Is it Spring yet?

