



## Through The Esses

### Lime Rock's Road to 60 - A conversation with Rick Roso

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What began in a gravel pit back in 1957 would go on to become one of America's most beautiful racing venues. Nestled amongst the Berkshire Mountains of Connecticut, Lime Rock Park has long been home to spirited auto racing, set upon a vast canvas of rolling green hillsides and bordered by slow-flowing waters. Waters that once ran through the gravel pit before Jim Vaill fired up his bulldozer and moved the streams to the outside of what was to become 1.5 miles of high speed race track.

From humble beginnings the grounds have seen many improvements over the last 57 years and yet there was always a yearning, by fans and

competitors alike, to take this beautiful park-like setting and raise the standards ever higher. With this coming race season, track owner Skip Barber has determined the more recent changes - such as the complete repaving of the entire circuit in 2008 and new viewing areas and circuit configuration options - were just the first steps in a journey to make Lime Rock Park transition from "pre-historic to be perhaps the most fan friendly road course in North America,"

Barber has budgeted \$3.5 million towards making what many will recognize as the most significant changes in the park's history. The entire project is being called the "Lime Rock Road to 60" meaning an end-date to this reconstruction effort of 2017, the 60th anniversary of the first racing season held here.

In the official press release, it was noted that "some of those projects will be complete in time for Lime Rock's season-opener - the Memorial Day Weekend Trans Am Series, and Royals Sunday Car Show, May 22-24 - and many more in time for the IMSA TUDOR United SportsCar weekend July 24-25."

"We're doing what we need to do - what we want to do - to ensure the track's professional racing future," Barber says. "Major sports car races have defined Lime Rock since the day it opened, and I'm making sure that continues well into the future."

We visited the track the weekend of May 2nd to see first-hand what some of the construction activity looked like and we can report that the fans and the competitors will be very pleased with the changes on tap.

To get an update on all this activity, we spoke with Rick Roso, the Press, Public Relations & Editorial Director.



"Skip did this truly as a two-pronged improvement for the spectators and competitors." Roso said. "He decided to take the approach that both groups wanted to see changes and so his plan for the 'Lime Rock Road to 60' effort is geared towards serving both groups."

For the hillside area overlooking the Esses - what is considered the premier viewing area at Lime Rock - significant revisions are under way to improve the sightlines beyond the current area of view.

Roso: "We have completely reshaped the hillside to make it even more comfortable for the fans and to expand the track area visible from that vantage point. We literally moved over a 100,000 square yards of earth to create the new contours. At first view, long-time fans may not immediately see the changes as they approach the hillside but once they go up there they will now be able to see 44% of the track, just by turning your head. Before the changes, you could see the cars leaving the Righthander out of the Esses getting onto No Name Straight. Now, when one car is chasing another, looking to get through that turn quicker, with the speed multiplying exponentially as they head up No Name toward the Uphill corner, fans will now be able to see if the guy behind left the corner in better shape than the guy he was chasing.



"In addition, the spectator area now curls around the inside of the right hand turn whereas before there was all shrubbery and a steep bank. Now it has all been configured so you can actually sit in an area now that is actually inside the Righthander and look up and see the uphill. Before, the only way to see cars on No Name straight and the Uphill was to stand along the fence in front of the camping area. The new area will now be all grassy hillside with a much better view."

Hospitality is important at Lime Rock Park, and not just for the fans and racers. Sponsors and other organizations like to entertain clients and friends with a day at the races and Roso told us several improvements are in the works to promote and support such efforts.



"We are building a third new hospitality area just at the top of the hillside above the Righthander and the way we will fence it off, fans on the hillside will still have full views of the track action. We are setting this up so the big fancy hospitality tents you see at many race tracks can be set up to maximize the enjoyment of everyone using that area. We expect this particular area will become the most popular choice for organizations to want to rent. "Our traditional hospitality area, located between the two Infield chalets, is being lengthened and widened considerably as well as being graded so it will no longer collect any water. It will be much nicer and even if it rains, water won't collect there.

"Our third existing hospitality area is located on the outside hill viewing area and we aren't making any changes to that as it works well as is."





For the competitors, both the A and B paddocks are being significantly upgraded. Both will be completely paved with drainage issues addressed to eliminate puddles, lakes and streams from again being a part of the Lime Rock experience.

Roso: "The changes we are making in the paddocks are to benefit both the competitors and the fans. It's a two-for-one approach. We've made it much wider and longer. Skip wanted to be able to park two tractor trailer rigs, nose to nose, with both rigs being able to offload at the back. There will also be a 10 foot walkway, for the fans, running between the noses of the trucks. Prior to this we

could only park rigs side by side but now we can park two, all the way from big bend up to almost the victory circle area. There will be a lot more elbow room for the competitors. They can unload their cars and set up their canopies and just enjoy more convenience than before.

"There will also be defined walkways and driveways, if you will. The whole idea is, if you have been here before you know that the fans walking the paddock always have to be on the lookout for cars moving around. The entire area will be wider and it will be easier for the fans to get to the paddock and move within these areas making it a bit safer for everyone."

Ensuring the paddock remains dry meant a retention pond was needed and one now exists inside of Big Bend (first turn), at the east end of the A paddock. A similar area is being created on the west end of the B paddock, near the downhill.

Roso: "The ponds will collect the water that drains off the new surfaces. We had to design a whole new drainage system for both paddocks and both required a retention pond be built. We want those paddocks to be perfect. "

When you enter the park, you drive - or walk - across the Bailey Bridge that goes over the track near the top of the Downhill. In 2008, a new viewing area was created to the right side of the bridge, overlooking West Bend. The current plan is to create more viewing area on the other side - left or west side - of the bridge, right next to the Downhill corner.

Roso: "That area will be awesome. There will be picnic tables towards the top and we are landscaping that area to create a great viewing location. We think this area will go about half way down the hill. Fans can hear and watch the cars as they come under the bridge. It will be a great area for spectators and photographers alike."



Well, no matter who you are, fan, racer, mechanic, vendor, circus clown, whatever, you will at some point need to use the restrooms. Needless to say, the facilities were overdue for an upgrade and Roso is only too happy to tell us they are going to be improved.

Roso: "We are rebuilding the men's room and refurbishing the ladies room in the A Paddock. Technically, the paddock is in an EPA recognized 'flood zone' and the laws won't let you build something brand new. If the footprint remains the same you can make improve-

ments and that is why we have taken down the old men's room and are rebuilding a modern one in its place. The ladies room is being redone with new fixtures and everything and we are adding a handicap access ramp in addition to the existing stairs. We are pretty sure the ladies room improvements will be completed in time for the Trans-Am weekend but the Men's room construction will take a bit longer. We will use those fancy temporary trailer rest rooms in the interim."

Other changes include new Armco barriers in place around the inside of Big Bend and outside the Esses. The track will reinstall the spectator fencing as close as is FIA-legal for all the reconfigured spectator areas. In the pit lane area, the staging area for the EMS crew will move from the west side of the Medical building to the east side. That will open up an extension of pit lane for one more pit box. The pit access road - where the teams set up their tents and equipment during the races - is also being widened to make traffic flow more smoothly and to provide more working room for the teams.

Additional changes include an improved PA system; expanded and robust Wi-Fi service and improved cellular service. Also, the area just over the Bailey Bridge, as you enter the track, is being widened to accommodate both specialty parking and a new walkway for people coming into the Infield on foot. Also, for fans walking down the roadway that splits the A- and B-Paddocks, toward the bottom, where it turns right along the hillside into the A Paddock, another pedestrian walkway is being built.

We finished up our talk with Roso telling us the new and improved Lime Rock Park is coming soon. Some of the changes will be done in time for the Memorial Day Trans-Am weekend (a huge field of cars is expected) - about 70% of the updates will be ready for that first race weekend - with 95% done in time for the Tudor United Sports Car series weekend in July, and 100% ready when the Historics Labor Day weekend arrives.

Roso and Barber are both confident that anyone who has been here before will enjoy the new and improved Lime Rock Park.

Roso: "We fixed the track itself for the competitors in 2008. Skip knew, however, that our infrastructure supporting the race track itself was pre-historic and he has set out to make real improvements as well as making our paddock world-class. We have cobblestone curbing and landscaping going in and that will all add to making Lime Rock an even nicer place to be for everyone."

Skip Barber agreed when he said, "Road to 60 accomplishes many things for Lime Rock's future, both short term and long. For each project, I asked myself, 'What's the best way to do this to make the Lime Rock experience better for the fan?' While not forgetting the competitors, sanctioning bodies, the car makers, hospitality clients, the Lime Rock Drivers Club and all the driving and racing organizations, I'm pretty sure we've made good decisions."

***More ashautophotos of the ongoing construction are posted at:  
[http://ashautophotos.smugmug.com/Cars/Lime-Rocks-Road-to-60/49077442\\_TTCgB3](http://ashautophotos.smugmug.com/Cars/Lime-Rocks-Road-to-60/49077442_TTCgB3)***

