

Observer's Report

May 10-11, 2014

SARRC/MARRS CHALLENGE - VIR

Observations:

Facility: The newly repaved VIR course was in excellent condition. The old gravel paddock is now fully paved, eliminating a past complaint. While the paved paddock is an improvement, the drive aisles are noticeably narrower than in the past. At a well-attended event it is foreseeable that some competitors seeking to leave early on a Sunday might find egress to be difficult. It will also be more important than ever to keep the speed in the paddock under control.

The track is very protective of its new paving and this was reflected in a policy that prohibits jacking vehicles unless wood is under the jacks. This necessitated a RFA to amend the Supps which originally allowed metal under the jacks. This is only worth mentioning because, at registration, I observed that the organizers had pre-cut sheets of wood for the competitors' use. This is an example of the competitor-friendly atmosphere that drivers enjoy when racing with the NCR. It is also an example of how the region maintains a very strong working relationship with the track: they made it easy for racers to comply with track policy. Going forward, the region will want to modify their "baseline" supplementary regulations form with respect to jacking policies.

Conditions: Saturday was in the 70's with severe, schedule-altering thunderstorms in the afternoon. Sunday was in the 80's and clear.

Event Administration: The weather forced several changes to the schedule resulting in shortened races and qualifying, and the postponement of three races from Saturday to Sunday morning. This resulted in a very full Sunday that ran overtime, although the track was exceptionally flexible.

Ginny Condrey deserves special recognition for her work on the Sunday timeline. Also, when weather disrupted the schedule, Ginny's email blasts kept all competitors immediately informed about what was going on and when things would resume. Ginny's importance to the region goes far beyond that of chief registrar. From a competitor's point of view, the region's response to the weather left nothing to be desired.

It should be noted that all of the specialties within the NCR are staffed with very driver-friendly workers. Unfortunately, that cannot always be said about all of our tracks, but here at VIR every specialty is blessed with great ambassadors of the Club. That doesn't happen by accident and I commend the region for the culture that they have created.

Except for Sound (not staffed-see below), all specialties were operated well and all aspects of the event were covered and properly administrated.

SPECIALTY OBSERVATIONS:

Race Chairman: This was Eric Danielson's first event as race chair, but you would never have guessed it. It was a very well executed event. Due to budget constraints, the Saturday social was not as elaborate as it has been in the past.

Registration: Registration, led by Ginny Condrey, was once again outstanding. Registration opened in the Paddock at 9:30 AM – seven and a half hours ahead of schedule. Registration opened at its official location shortly after noon, with both locations overlapping for an hour. The service that the registrars provided exceeded all expectations.

Tech: Tech also opened early on Friday and ran smoothly all weekend.

F&C: F&C enjoyed a robust turnout with many Summit Point regulars turning out to join a stout NCR crew. The flaggers did an excellent job all weekend. At times the conditions were harsh, including one thunderstorm that popped up quickly. With very few exceptions, radio communications were solid and included the appropriate information. All incidents were handled extremely well. Chief Mark Biamonte emphasized crisp communications and proper net protocol at both of the F&C meetings. The F& C team should be commended for an excellent weekend under adverse conditions at times on Saturday and for the very long Sunday that they put in.

Tire wall repairs are handled by the track. When called upon, they arrive quickly with pre-bundled stacks on a flatbed and a loader to handle the placement. It is a very slick process.

Start: The new start stand was not in use at this event. Its structure was complete, but the flooring and siding were not yet in place. It is located drivers' right just past a bend to the right on the front straight. Several of the operating stewards expressed their concern that it might not cantilever out far enough to ensure adequate visibility to the drivers. This will be an evolving situation for the region for their next event.

Since the new start stand was not operational, Start operated out of the bed of a pickup truck in pit lane. They adapted well and performed admirably under the circumstances. The actual finish line was downstream from the Start location. This information was very clearly shared with the drivers by the Chief Steward at the drivers' meetings and no issues arose. The entire start team demonstrated excellent flexibility.

Grid: The grid team, led by Clayton Condrey, was solid all weekend. Grid here is staffed by a group of positive, driver friendly people. Once again, the team here did a good job of keeping things relaxed while staying on top of safety.

Pit: Staffing was adequate with five workers. The team performed admirably.

Black Flag Station: We had either one or two stewards at black flag all weekend.

T&S: Anna Chrissman is one of the best. It is a pleasure to work with her team. Everything is done promptly and accurately. Anna's team makes it look so easy that one has to wonder why results seem to take so long to get at some other places.

EV: EV is a mix of track personnel and SCCA volunteers who work as one cohesive unit. All responses were prompt. Their responses were efficient all weekend, including dealing with a tree blown down onto the guardrail during Saturday's storm.

Medical: This service is provided by the track.

Sound Control: The Chief Steward informed me that, by letter authorization from the Executive Steward, Sound is not required at VIR events. Given the location, that makes sense. However, the lack of a Sound person meant that lightning monitoring was not as active as it would be if that specialty were staffed. Accordingly, it is important for the region to utilize internet based lightning reporting resources.

Safety: During the weekend, five incident reports were written and three "green cards" were issued. A car in the Group 5 race on Sunday suffered a stuck throttle that resulted in a hard impact (see CSOM Ref #13 for details). All other incidents were minor in nature.

Stewards: Four CSAs and six RFAs were processed during the weekend. Additionally, two Chief Steward's Investigation Reports were filed with respect to car to car contact for purposes of building a record for those involved. One protest was filed.

I note that Saturday's first thunderstorm came upon us quickly and that the response from the operating team was immediate and appropriate. The weather forced lots of changes and challenges on the operating team. Sunday, which started with the last three races from Saturday, was destined to be a challenge. The Chief Steward and her operating team used everything at their disposal to push the schedule and balance the time allowed against their desire to give the drivers their money's worth. The entire volunteer team worked very hard to get Sunday in and to make the event a success.