

The next few articles examine a race session from the driver's point of view. We shall look at everything that affects your session: rules and procedures, things that are happening in the background, and what to do in various situations.

The team in Race Control (Control) includes the operating steward, who runs the session, a backup steward, a communicator and a recorder from Flagging & Communications (F&C), and, at some tracks, an Emergency Services (ES) dispatcher. They control operations using one or more networks (usually radio, sometimes landline).

The operating steward has two imperatives: to fulfill the day's schedule, and to do it with reasonable safety. The trick is to strike a good balance between the two.

Race organizers try to maximize track time for drivers. This means keeping the gaps between sessions as short as possible.

What follows is a typical session. I shall describe a race, and explain the differences for a qualifying session when necessary. There may be local variations, especially at speedway tracks, but the essentials will be constant.

Going to the Grid

You should be on the grid before the previous session ends. Many events these days do not have a fixed schedule; they simply specify the start time for the day and the order in which groups will run. It is up to you to be there for your session. Therefore, you have to be aware of which group is currently on track. You may not hear any PA announcement calling your group to the grid.

As the checker falls on a group, the team in Control will start preparing for the next group. The biggest variable is how much incident cleanup remains from the session just ending. Control will dispatch ES teams to retrieve broken cars or deal with oil on the track. More and more regions are adopting a practice of 'burying' cars between sessions: leaving cars in non-impact zones for a session or two in order to minimize downtime.

Once the track is close to being clear and Timing & Scoring (T&S) is ready, Control will give the 5-minute warning.

5 Minutes

The GCR requires warnings at five minutes and at one minute. Some regions also give a warning somewhere between. The Grid team will make sure that cars are in their assigned grid positions and that drivers have done up their safety gear. Grid will also check tech stickers and helmet stickers.

Be aware that Control will often give the 5-minute warning before the track is fully clear and all specialties ready to go. Sometimes there is a last-minute glitch and the five minutes stretches out. On the other hand, Control will seldom shorten the five minutes since many drivers - myself included - have routines that start with the 5-minute warning. Therefore, you will sometimes experience 'long fives' but seldom 'short fives'.

As the clock winds down to one minute, Control will do a course check, confirming that each flag station has clear track in its sector and is displaying the correct flag(s), Start is ready, the pace car is in position, and ES is ready. Once the course is clear, Control is ready to give the 1-minute warning.

1 Minute

At the 1-minute warning, all crew must clear the grid. Cars not in position forfeit their position and must start from the back.

Once the 1-minute warning is given, Grid will release cars at their discretion, and cars start rolling off the grid to start the pace lap.

Pace Lap

As you leave the grid for the pace lap(s), a Grid worker will 'split' the field, directing cars into alternate left and right lanes or columns behind the pace car. If there is not a pace car, the pole sitter will act as pace car.

If you spin, or otherwise fall out of the pack, you cannot resume your original position. You must rejoin at the rear of the field, and all cars behind yours in that column move up one position to fill the space you left.

If you encounter a mechanical problem and cannot keep up with the pack, pull to one side of the track and raise an arm to signal the cars behind to pass. This is the **only** circumstance in which cars may pass on the pace lap.

As the pack gets close to the start, cars form up in two columns behind the pace car. The pace car will turn its lights out before coming into the pits. As the pace car enters the pits, the pole sitter brings the field to the start.

Start

The standard SCCA rolling start is not a racing start. The pack proceeds at pace car speed until the Starter shows the green flag.

The Starter will wait until most of the field is visible. The field must be proceeding at pace car speed, correctly formed in line, and most drivers able to see the Starter. When the Starter shows the green flag, racing starts immediately throughout the field.

The Starter may wave off the start if the field is poorly formed. The Starter does not show any flag and instead shakes his or her head from side to side. Drivers should raise one arm to signal a waved-off start. The field proceeds around for another pace lap under the control of the pole sitter. This lap counts as a race lap.

Waving off a start carries its own set of risks, so starters exercise judgment when deciding whether to do this. Drivers who improve their position before the start by moving forward or out of line before the green not only add to the inherent dangers of the start, but are also subject to penalty for a false start.

We frequently employ start judges for races. They observe the start and report any infractions, which are subject to penalty. A start judge's rulings are not protestable.