

State affair

The new American Touring Car Championship (ATCC) wants to introduce interstate competition

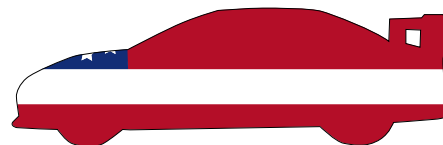
WORDS BY JONATHAN LAWSON

➔ Ken Grammer is a man with a plan. He wants to create a new race series that offers the excitement of professional racing without the huge expense. Grammer, head of race organizers United States Endurance Racing Association (USERA), says, "The American Touring Car Championship (ATCC) will be cheaper to compete in than other pro race series because of the preparation levels of the cars. We know budgets for race teams are tight at the moment, so we have approved a wide field of out-of-the-showroom cars – over 40 models – with minor modifications to the suspension and mildly tuned engines."

Grammer's idea to keep costs low means that as well as a 30 thou overbore, all the tuning to the engine must be in line with what an enthusiast could do at home with a street car. He continues, "Filters are free, there can be aftermarket electronics, but we are not using sequential gearboxes as they are too expensive. The philosophy is to create an environment in which a privateer can be as competitive as a manufacturer-backed team. We want a level playing field." Interiors are to be stripped, although the dash must remain. Fire safety systems and roll cages are allowed, as is a fuel cell.

The target figure in Grammer's mind is a total cost of US\$5,000 per race, and that is to be competitive, not just a back marker. Vehicles from the SCCA's (Sports Car Club of America) Touring 3, Koni Challenge, and FIA S2000-based series are also eligible to race in ATCC with minor modifications.

Grammer has considered the business model carefully, especially from the sponsorship point of view. "It's the US\$64,000 question: how do you make the series attractive without going to the expense of television? Even top-level series



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in the USA are struggling to hold on to their broadcast packages. It can be US\$30,000-40,000 just to record a race, before it even gets onto TV. We are therefore investigating some exciting opportunities to broadcast on the internet, and we are looking at cheaper alternatives to actually film the race and do the post-production. It's early days, but I feel there has been a fundamental shift in the way fans follow motorsport – I want them to be able to follow the races with their schedules, not ours."

Another unusual aspect of the series is identifying teams by state. Grammer got this idea after examining the appeal of F1. "I'm a big F1 fan and I noticed the great national pride taken by fans. The Italians are mad about Ferrari, for example, and I wanted to capture this dynamic. It's almost like football, with a whole area rooting for its team. I think from the team standpoint this could help with the sponsorship, maybe by attracting state institutions such as tourist boards." Further European influence comes in the form of standing starts using the full FIA rules for starting lights.

The first ATCC race is on May 8-9, 2009, at Road Atlanta, Georgia, and shares the same bill as a drift weekend. ❧

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