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## **Safety, Safety, Safety**

We, as racers, tend to spend our efforts, time, and our money in the manner we feel will help our performance the most. Sometimes, that comes at the expense of other areas. One area that should never be overlooked is the safety equipment we use on the racetrack. Rules for safety equipment are pretty cut and dry, no real mystery there. The 2008 WKA rules require a full face helmet with a Snell rating of Snell SA or M2000 or higher. Racers are also required to wear a neckbrace, gloves, and an abrasion resistant jacket or suit. It is not a requirement to spend a fortune on safety gear; however, in the interest of yourself, or your child, if they are the driver, I would hope this is not the area in which you choose to cut corners to save a few dollars.

Let's start with the helmet. Helmets come in a wide variety of styles and prices. There are quality helmets beginning at around a hundred dollars, and some that cost up to a thousand dollars. Before considering any helmet, check the Snell rating. Usually this can be found inside the helmet under the lining, and on some, it is a decal on the exterior. Make sure it carries a rating of SA or M2000 or higher, if not, it isn't approved for use. Just a note, a DOT rating is not acceptable. I personally believe a bucket with a chin strap will pass a DOT standard. Motorcross helmets and others with snap on chin guards and goggles are not acceptable and should not EVER be used. There are several reasons for the wide range in prices. Standard helmets are constructed mainly with fiberglass, mid range helmets are composed of a fiberglass and carbon fiber mixture, and others are strictly carbon fiber. Carbon fiber is stronger and lighter than fiberglass. Many high end helmets also have a nomex liner, as the intended usage is auto racing, which usually requires a fireproof interior. Consider the style, rating, and construction along with the price when choosing a helmet. Just a note, helmets on a closeout, usually means the end of the road for that model or brand, with replacement shields and other parts a near impossible find.

Neck braces. Pretty simple here, just a foam collar covered in fabric. The intention of this piece is to limit the range of movement of the neck in a crash or other collision. Sometimes it is necessary with a junior racer to trim the foam inside to give a bit of movement, or to allow them to move their chin down. It should still be firm enough to provide support.

Gloves are another requirement that needs little explanation. The main purpose of gloves are to provide abrasion resistance to the hands. Fit, style, and price are the main factors to consider here.

Racing jackets are also required. Full suits are acceptable, however, are not nearly as popular as jackets. Jackets along with full length jeans or pants are the most popular choice, especially with junior drivers who are still growing. Full or two piece fireproof suits are required in WKA events for all champ kart drivers and must meet a SFI rating of 3.2 A1 or better. Sprint kart drivers are not required to have a fireproof suit.

Shoes. Racing style shoes are a popular choice with a lot of racers, as they offer added comfort and feel over other types of footwear. The only rule requirement is not to have open shoes.

Junior drivers in the purple and blue plate classes are required to wear an approved chest protector meeting SFI specification 20.1 or higher. This is to protect the driver's sternum and rib area in the event of an impact. Check with your local shop to help make a good brand decision.

The point of this article is to shed a little light on the safety gear required, and to help you, the racer, to make a better decision. The main goal is to discourage a decision made strictly on price, but rather to put forth the same effort and thought into safety gear purchases that are put into other areas of your racing program.