

Good News Department

Toyota Pro/Celebrity Race Sparks Celebrity Interest In Racing

(NAPSA)—Roaring down a racetrack at lightning speeds while weaving through the competition in an adrenaline-pumped race to the finish line is a dream shared by race fans everywhere—and celebrities are no exception. For years, stars have tried their hands at careers other than acting, and professional racing is on top of the list among Hollywood stars, including Patrick Dempsey, Frankie Muniz, Jason Priestley, Lorenzo Lamas, Perry King, Alfonso Ribeiro, Sean Patrick Flanery, Mark-Paul Gossehaar, Donny Osmond, Robert Hays, Gene Hackman, Bruce Jenner, Josh Brolin, Paul Williams and Walter Payton.

Apparently, these entertainers-turned-racecar drivers caught the racing bug while participating in the annual Toyota Pro/Celebrity Race, which for the past 30 years has pitted celebrities from film, television, music and sports against each other in a heart-pounding, action-packed, 10-lap race through the streets of downtown Long Beach, Calif.

One of the six main attractions of the Toyota Grand Prix of Long Beach, the Toyota Pro/Celebrity Race gives stars a taste of real racing, starting with an intensive four-day training session teaching stars how to properly handle their vehicles and how to manage the complexities of the track. After completing training, they hit the street course in Long Beach for a weekend of practice and qualifying that's then followed by the actual race, which screams past a



A 10-lap race has turned entertainers into racecar drivers and raised millions for charity.

crowd of more than 50,000 cheering race fans and is broadcast nationally on the Speed Channel.

“Most of the celebrities that participate in our event are already fans of racing,” said Les Unger, national motorsports manager at Toyota Motor Sales, U.S.A. “After a taste of the weekend’s on-track excitement, these stars are ignited with a newfound passion and enthusiasm for the sport, and a select few want to pursue racing at the competitive level.”

Many Toyota Pro/Celebrity Race participants have such a great experience that they want to come back and race again. A perk to winning the race: The celebrity winner is invited back to race in the “pro” category the next year.

In addition to learning the basics of competitive racing and car control, the star-studded

group commits to eight days of charity involvement, car preparation and actual competition to raise money for Racing for Kids, a national organization benefiting children’s hospitals. Each year, the celebrities visit Miller Children’s Hospital in Long Beach to spend time with critically ill children, evoking smiles, laughter and inspiration. Since 1991, the race has raised close to \$1.5 million for charity. Donations are split equally between Miller Children’s Hospital and Children’s Hospital of Orange County, both of which are located in Southern California.

As the longest-running corporate-sponsored event of its kind, the 2007 Toyota Pro/Celebrity Race will take place on Saturday, April 14, through the streets of downtown Long Beach, Calif.