Improvements Continue on Plastic Impact Safety Systems Barriers


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PLASTIC, RATHER THAN CONCRETE or steel now can be an option for barriers around race tracks. They've been popular at road courses, protecting areas well off the racing surface.

The Sportscar Vintage Racing Association (SVRA) takes extra safety precautions by deploying Impact Safety Systems Prolink Barriers made of plastic to protect drivers, vehicles, and spectators at a road course they make up at an active airport.

SVRA, a national vintage racing association with over 2500 licensed members and over 5000 racers, recently launched its biggest project to date–The Amelia Island Vintage Gran Prix in March 2016. Unlike their other events held at existing tracks, SVRA will produce its first turnkey event and construct the entire course from scratch at Fernandina Beach Airport on Amelia Island.

Plans have been rolled out for a 2.1-mile airport road course where historical cars and motorcycles will race wheel-to-wheel. However with an active runway on site, protecting drivers and spectators during the event is paramount. SVRA chose a proven interlocking barrier product to separate the racetrack from the fans, as well as to keep racers safe by holding them on the track, while minimizing potential damage to their vintage vehicles.

"After doing our homework, we chose Impact Safety Systems (ISS) Prolink barriers," said Tony Parella, President/ CEO of SVRA. "There were alternatives, including using cement, renting or buying analogous interlocking barriers from other domestic or international sources, but they simply didn't meet our safety standards. And when we factored in delivery, cost and deployment time, ISS Prolink was far and away the smartest choice."

Because the Amelia Island agreement only allows one day for setup and one day for take down, the fact that ISS Prolink barriers can be quickly and easily installed by just two crewmembers was key. SVRA decided to purchase 1200 linear feet of barriers to cover 99% of the circuit and plans to reuse them over the next 5 years.

Parella explained, "Because we own the barriers, it puts us in a position to look for other types of street race or airport events. Where a racetrack doesn't exist. But even if we use the barriers for nothing other than the Amelia Island Gran Prix, it was a smart investment."

Impact Safety Systems Founder Richard "RJ" Valentine celebrates winning the Grand-Am 24 Hours of Daytona with his teammates in 2009.

Coincidentally, the barriers SVRA selected happened to be invented by veteran professional driver Richard "RJ" Valentine, who will also be racing at Amelia Island.

Valentine said, "We're honored that our safer barriers were chosen for such an incredible racing event. For years I've been a serious advocate of track safety. I trust my life and my vintage Porsche to our ISS barrier system."

Over the course of Valentine's long career, he has placed in or won over 50 races, including the Daytona 24 Hour Endurance. While racing, RJ witnessed hundreds of crashes, causing drastic damage to vehicles and, sometimes, human tragedy. Upon analysis, he realized there were no truly safe track barrier options available, so he made it his mission todevelop a better crash barrier that would protect both cars and drivers. Hence, the birth of Impact Safety Systems (ISS) safer barriers for clubs, tracks and karting leagues. ISS has been very successful and just installed its millionth barrier. But there's still a long road ahead in making tracks safer.

Although there are more deaths in pro racing than in the NFL, players garner higher safety measures than drivers.

Many racetracks still rely on antiquated tire walls, immovable cement or dangerous guardrails. Through the years, other aspects of driver safety have improved dramatically, but safer barrier installations are still way behind.

Valentine believes tracks should be required to add "crush space" or a buffer, especially in high-impact areas, to slow vehicles down before hitting immovable concrete, tires or twisted metal.

Yet the problem persists and tracks remain resistant to investing in additional racer protection. Consequently, Valentine has now taken on the role of driver advocate on behalf of all racers in an effort to convince tracks of the need for higher safety precautions. Valentine is very passionate about evoking change in the track world.

"It's only a matter of time until a racer hits something," said Valentine. "If a track ever complains that adding ISS barriers isn't in their budget, I say, 'What's a life worth?'"

So what makes ISS better than any other barrier options? Here are the top three reasons.

First and foremost, they're safer. ISS' proprietary barrier technology was designed to give upon impact, progressively retarding the vehicle and creating a softer landing. They're constructed from strong composite plastic with an exclusive linking system that holds them in place when hit.

ISS Barriers are shorter and twice as thick as other plastic versions, with ribbed sidewalls that lower ricochets into traffic. They offer customizable water ballast cushioning for varying levels of speed. And ISS Barriers have proven their durability on track tests—no warping, bowing, cracking, breaking or shattering–reducing hazardous debris.

Secondly, they're just plain easier. ISS Barriers are extremely portable, lightweight when empty, with quick-release PVC anchoring pins, all of which makes deploying fast and simple. The flexible tongue and grove design allows for any configuration, including curves and 90-degree angles, as well as stacking. And because ISS Barriers are so easy, they reduce delays during crash cleanup–one worker can replace a barrier in less than 10 minutes.

Third, they make tracks more profitable. ISS Barriers save time and money by dramatically reducing the cost of labor. Simultaneously, they create a highly professional experience, which improves the track appearance and attracts more spectators.

The barriers also easily accommodate banners or signage for safety directions and can be customized with graphics or logos to generate advertising income.

When it comes to cost, it all boils down to the barrier price and the man hours it takes to set-up and maintain them. When compared to Jersey or Armco barriers, ISS costs about 80% less when you calculate the immense amount of labor involved in concrete or guardrail installation, plus materials.

As for tire walls, even if the track gets the tires for free, ISS barriers are still about half the cost compared to the time it takes to put in and maintain tire walls.

But let's not forget the bigger issue–safety. Concrete crushes. Guardrails have been known to impale. Tires cause bounce-back, then become hard and brittle over time, on top of scattering when struck, creating even more damage as well as massive delays mid-race.

> **"My body and my bike were saved by a type of plastic barrier I had never seen before. I asked around and found Impact Safety Systems"**

Ken Murphy, COO of ISS said, "Our barriers are tried and true. Superior quality tracks such as The Thermal Club, Inde Motorsports Ranch, MB2 Raceway, Gateway Motorsports, New Jersey Motorsports Park, Thompson Motor Speedway and many other customers expect an equally superior quality barrier system. We get a call about once a month from one of our tracks saying 'you saved someone else today.'"

Recently, Inde Motorsports Ranch (IMR) Director of Operations John Mabry made it his personal mission to find the safest track barriers on the market. IMR, a first-class members only raceway, decided it was time to break away from antiquated standards and move towards the future of barrier technology.

But everything he researched fell short including fixed barriers and guardrails. Then one day, while racing his motorcycle at New Jersey Motorsports Park, Mabry hit the perfect solution–literally.

"My body and my bike were saved by a type of plastic barrier I had never seen before. I asked around and found Impact Safety Systems," said Mabry.

"After further investigation it became clear that, not only were these barriers more cost effective, easier and better looking but, above all, they delivered the maximum level of safety possible. I should know … I tested them with my own life!"

What's more, due to the versatility of the ISS Barriers, IMR is now one of the only tracks in the country where members can request to change the course direction and are equally safe both ways.

MB2 Raceway has four booming karting tracks around California and Iowa with three new locations planned over the next year. Last year, MB2 leadership launched an intensive search to find a better plastic barrier solution. One of the top contenders that emerged was ISS and their KISS kart barriers. MB2 felt confident enough in ISS to make an experimental purchase in order to put them through months of grueling track tests.

Karts race at speeds up to 45 miles per hour and high-impact crashes are relentless. The results proved that ISS barriers could take a beating and remain dependably durable–no warping, cracking, breaking or shattering. Because the KISS barrier sidewalls are shorter in length and twice as thick as the competition, it prevented bowing and they pushed in instead of popping up.

"KISS by ISS is a superior barrier system," said Chris Browning, General Manager of MB2 Raceway. "They have been tested and proven with our tracks to be easier and safer overall for our customers."

In the next few months, ISS will introduce a new foam filled barrier system that will deliver even higher levels of safety. Prototypes are being tested extensively before being released commercially. They will be available in both soft and hard versions. According to Valentine, "Hitting these new barriers will be like hitting a pillow!"

– Impact Safety Systems (ISS) was founded in 2000 in Braintree, Massachusetts for the express purpose of setting new standards in the barrier industry. Award-winning professional driver Richard "RJ" Valentine designed a unique barrier system for car racing and karting, as well as athletic sports and traffic safety. ISS is dedicated to providing barrier systems that are safer than any other barrier available, as well as more durable, easier to install, faster to repair and more economical, while also being aesthetic. ISS' revolutionary barriers were born out of industry-leading R&D and technology from the highest levels of Motorsports and are proven effective under the most demanding conditions. ISS has become the safety barrier system of choice for both permanent and temporary tracks nationwide.


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AN INNOVATION IN SAFETY is 1) the Thermal ISS Pro Link Barrier; 2) Connecticut's thompson Speedway Motorsports Park has the ISS Barrier; 3) The new ISS Foam Filled Barrier is illustrated with this cutaway version.