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SPORT: FAKING IT - 'THE TRICK IS TO SOUND SURPRISED'

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'THE TRICK IS TO SOUND SURPRISED'

Sure, Speed's Formula 1 coverage is anchored from a studio in Charlotte, North Carolina, but it isn't the only racing series done by remote control. Boil down the hours of auto racing aired on Speed and several other ancillary networks, and you'd be surprised at how much of it is hosted by announcers who are nowhere near the racetrack.

The acknowledged master of make-it-sound-like-you're-there motorsports broadcasting is Rick Benjamin, 54, known previously as the host of *RaceDay*, the weekend motorsports news show that aired on TNN from 1995 until 2000, when the network gave up on racing.



Currently, Benjamin is the anchor broadcaster for the Champ Car World Series and Atlantic Championship, and he does attend those races. But after that: "I get home from those races on Monday afternoon" — home is Charlotte — "I'll see my family, get a night's sleep, then drive down to Atlanta to do some [USAR] Hooters Pro Cup races." Pro Cup is an oval-track series with graduates that include NASCAR Nextel Cup drivers Brian Vickers, Matt Kenseth, and Scott Wimmer. Benjamin will watch a Pro Cup race taped and edited over the weekend, make notes, then launch into it: The trick is to sound surprised by every crash and pass for the lead, while knowing who is crashing and passing, and make the viewer think Benjamin is right there in the announcer's booth.

But that's just the start of the week. "Tuesday night, I'll drive home, then on Wednesday, go to Syracuse, New York, for the DIRT series," Benjamin says. DIRT is the leading late-model and modified dirt-track series. "I'll try to stay over and do two or three shows and leave Thursday from Syracuse for the next Champ Car race. Then I'll get home Monday and start it all over again." Benjamin also heads a small production company that broadcasts ASA late-model races. — SCS

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