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\$150,000 grant to Southland Stockcar Drivers Association

## **\$294,000 upgrade for Riverside Speedway**

A “massive overhaul” of Riverside Raceway will accelerate the Southland Stockcar Drivers Association’s aspirations of securing New Zealand championship events.

An extensive \$294,000 project to reconstruct the track walls, surface and safety fences will start next month to bring the track up to the standard required by the sport’s governing body, Speedway New Zealand.

Southland Stockcar Drivers Association past president Baron Kelman said after several years planning and fundraising, the club was “ecstatic” the upgrade was finally a reality.

“It’s the biggest single project the club will probably ever undertake – it’s a massive project,” he said.

“We’ve had a lot of very sore backs and broken fingers repairing this track over the years so we’re absolutely ecstatic it’s going ahead.”

Safety was paramount for the club and tragic accidents at events in other regions over the past couple of years had reinforced its decision to improve the Sandy Point facility.

“It was becoming a safety issue ... spectators are so close to the racing action, you just can’t afford any shortcuts with it,” Kelman said.

“We are constructing the cream of all walls in New Zealand – even Speedway New Zealand wants a copy of the final plans to use as the standard for other tracks looking to upgrade in the future.

“Once it’s completed I have no doubt it will still be standing in 50 years’ time.”

The ILT Foundation has approved funding of \$150,000 for the development, while the club itself has raised \$60,000.

To enable work to be completed by December, the club has asked Speedway New Zealand to delay the start of the season in Southland. As a division one track, Riverside Raceway is contractually required to host 10 meetings per season.

“They understand the scale of the job,” Kelman said.

He was confident high calibre events would be awarded to the club in future.

“We have been denied events in the past and there’s no doubt the condition of the wall was a contributing factor.”

Initial sights have been set on the New Zealand Stock Car Championships, which last year attracted 236 entries for just 30 qualifying spots.

“And every team has four or five pit crew who all need to eat and sleep somewhere – the potential economic benefits to Invercargill are huge,” Kelman said.

ILT Foundation chairman Alan Dennis said the focus on enhancing safety added to the importance of the redevelopment.

“There is simply no price you can put on safety,” he said.

“Riverside Raceway has hosted numerous events enjoyed by families for many years and this upgrade will ensure that continues long into the future.”