

# ***RACE SCANNING TIPS & HINTS***

Courtesy of the Midwest Speedway Scanning Digest.



I've been scanning at the race tracks for almost 25 years. Long before programmable, hand-held scanners, my first scanning set up consisted of a big old Bearcat 250 mobile scanner duct-taped to a huge 12 volt lantern battery. The whole setup must have weighed 10 pounds and I had to lug it around in a big camera bag! I guarantee I was the only guy in the stands at The Milwaukee Mile listening to those USAC stock cars go round and round in 1980!

Things have changed a bit since then. Estimates are that there may be more than 10% of fans at a typical NASCAR event are "scanner equipped". Race track scanning has become so popular, it's expanded well beyond the NASCAR super speedways to the dirt tracks, drag strips, and even Saturday night at the local short tracks.

I've compiled a collection of tips and hints to help you gain the maximum enjoyment from you race scanning experience. If you have any others to add, please send them along to me so we can share them with others. Enjoy!

## ***Why bring a scanner to the races? What can I hear?***

Once you've experienced a race with a scanner, you'll be hooked forever. Scanning at the races adds that extra "dimension" or layer to the experience. You'll be able to listen to conversations between the driver, his crew, and the spotters. You'll hear the race officials and safety crews. You'll even be able to monitor the "behind-the-scenes" action of the TV and radio broadcast crews.

IMPORTANT! – One thing you may want to be aware of regarding listening in to race communications, it's not necessarily for children! Emotions can run high during racing action and quite frequently, the language can get a bit "colorful" to put it mildly. You may wish to consider this if you are easily offended by harsh language.

### ***What kind of equipment do I need at the races?***

The two major elements of a race scanning setup are the scanner itself as well as a noise-reducing headset.

First – The scanner. What kind of scanner will you need? It really depends on your needs or your budget. Almost any hand-held scanner made will work at the races. They are available with as few as 10 or as many as 5000 channels! Price wise, expect to spend anywhere from as little as \$75 to over \$400. The most popular frequency ranges are 150 – 174 Megahertz and 450 – 470 Megahertz. There is some, but not much racing activity in the 800 Megahertz band. Popular "racing" scanners are the Uniden Sportcat 200 and 230, Racing Electronics RE-2000, and the Radio Shack Pro 99. A couple of features that are really nice to have are alpha-displays, which allow you to program the driver name instead of just the frequency, and CTCSS or tone function, which allows you to program a certain tone code on a channel to help cut down on interference.

The second thing you'll need is a good quality, noise reducing headset. Racing is LOUD! Not only will a headset help protect your hearing, but it will help you be able to hear your scanner more clearly. They are available in several styles to suit your personal preference. You can also get the small, foam, in-ear type devices similar to what the drivers wear.

Some other accessories you might consider are a "racing" or stub antenna, which will help reduce local interference, a leg strap to help keep your scanner secure while watching the race, and a headset splitter or a "Boostaroo" unit so you can bring a second headset for your friend to listen in too. Don't forget extra batteries! Nothing worse than running out of "juice" halfway through the race.

### ***Where can I buy a race scanning setup?***

You can buy a complete setup as close as your local Radio Shack store. Some specialized vendors who sell race scanning equipment are;

Racing Electronics – <http://www.racingelectronics.com>

Racing Radios – <http://www.racingradios.com>

Race Scan – <http://www.racescan.com>

Frequency Fan Club – <http://www.racescanners.com>

If you're not sure if you're ready to buy a setup yet, most of these vendors offer rentals too. These vendors have trailers offering equipment at most of the larger races.

## ***OK, I've got my scanner and headset, now where do I find the frequencies?***

While you can find some information for free on the Internet, most of it is outdated, incomplete, or just plain wrong. I highly recommend purchasing up to date information from one of the above vendors. It is well worth the few dollars it costs. They have information on the national series such as NASCAR, IRL, and Champ Car. The new Uniden SC230 scanner comes with the frequencies for Nextel Cup, Busch Grand National, Craftsman Trucks, Champ Car, and IRL already programmed into it! Most of the newer scanners are computer programmable. You can even bring those to the vendor trailer at the track and get the latest frequencies loaded right into your radio while you wait.

For regional series, your options are more limited. For Midwest fans, we have put together the Midwest Speedway Scanning Digest. Besides the national touring series, it contains information for local tracks as well as regional touring series such as USAR-Hooters Pro Cup, CRA Super Series, and NASCAR Elite – Midwest. Information on the Midwest Speedway Scanning Digest can be found on our website;

<http://www.midwestracingfrequencies.com>

## ***At The Track Tips***

1 – Do as much as you can before you leave the house. If you can get a hold of frequency information before the race, you'll save a ton of time by pre-programming your scanner before you get to the track. Don't forget extra batteries, paper and pencil to take notes, and sunscreen. Packing a plastic bag to put your scanner into in case of a sudden rain shower is a good addition, too.

2 – Programming tip. One popular trick is to program the frequencies so the channel number is the same as the car number. For example, you would program Mark Martin, Car #6 into channel 6 on your scanner. That way during the race, if you want to quickly switch to a particular car, you can just manually switch to that channel. With the newer scanners with alpha displays, it's much easier to keep track of who's who.

3 – Don't try to listen to everything! At a big race, there's just way too much stuff going on. Pick the leaders or your favorites and lock everything else out. It helps to have race control in your scan list too. At the big races, you can also listen to the TV and radio broadcast feed (MRN broadcasts on 454.000 Mhz). Some tracks will rebroadcast the track PA on either a scanner frequency or a low power FM radio station. These broadcasts will "lock up" your scanner though, since they broadcast continuously. You will have to lock them out and switch to them manually if you want to listen in.

4 – Get to the track early. If there is a vendor selling race frequencies there, this will give you a good chance to check it out or get your scanner programmed for you. Buy a souvenir program. They will have the line ups so you'll know who to listen for.

5 – Practice and qualifying are a great time to verify frequencies. Taking notes now will help you during the race. Listen for the spotters and crew chiefs talking to the drivers. You may be able to tell “who's who” when passing or coming in to the pits.

6 – When the drivers are getting into their cars before the race is a good time to listen in for radio checks. Pace laps and caution periods are also the time when radio traffic increases.

7 – If you're using the search mode on your scanner to try and find new frequencies, narrow your search to smaller ranges at a time. The range of 450 to 470 Mhz will cover just about all race communications. Some racing officials will use frequencies in the 150 – 174 Mhz range. Even if you have an accurate list already, you can usually find some new stuff by using the search feature.

8 – Take good notes!

Using your scanner really adds a new dimension to the “racing experience” and besides that, it's just plain FUN! As you can tell, race scanning might seem like a bit of a challenge at first. The more you do it, the better you'll get at it. I have gone to a race with almost no information and, by using these techniques, have found more than 90% of the field by the time the race was over.

If you live in the Midwest, consider purchasing a copy of the Midwest Speedway Scanning Digest. In it, you'll find information that is just not available anywhere else. You can get more information by going to our website at;

<http://www.midwestracingfrequencies.com>