



The Arnold Sentinel

“Serving the South Loup River Valley”

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BUCKLE UP!

For the seat belt crew,
it’s all about safety

Editor’s note: This week, over 100 high performance cars from all over the U.S. will arrive in Arnold for the 24th Annual Sandhills Open Road Challenge. The list of the people who make this event possible each year is long. In this story, we’ll focus on “the seat belt crew” – three SORC veterans who have a combined 31 years of experience.

By Janet Larreau

Carly Bates has traveled all over the place to compete in racing events. The Eagle Mountain, Utah, resident and auto racing enthusiast says there’s one thing that is absolutely unique to SORC and that’s the seat belt check. “None of the other races like Texas and Bonneville Hillclimbs offer this. You have to bring a crew member with you to the start line if you want that,” said Bates. “I have more confidence as a driver by having the belt girls at SORC to make sure that I have done everything right. I can’t get them snug as a

“This race has become an integral part of our community. It’s almost like an annual family reunion. It takes an entire community to make the race successful year after year, and the race gives back to the community abundantly.”

-Melissa Smith
SORC seat belt
tech volunteer

bug in a rug, but these ladies do. As someone who drives solo, I don’t have another person to notice if I’ve missed anything on my neck device. There’s so many benefits to have them there.” The ladies that Bates is referring to are Arnold’s own Renee Corbin, Melissa Smith, and Kristi Dvorak.

Corbin has the most years under her belt. She started working on the tech crew in 2011, so this is her 14th year.

“My volunteer work began checking tires on the line at the shoot-out, but somewhere in that task I was told to help with seat belts on the navigator side. I had no idea what I was doing. It was hot out, and I struggled. As I now know, navigators are notoriously the best at basket weaving their seat belts and forgetting their gear,” said Corbin.

The next year, Corbin was left solo on seat belts by her predecessor, and she needed to recruit new help. That’s when Smith stepped in at her panicked sister’s request. She said she was hooked after that first year.

“Renee needed help, and I needed a day or two away from my toddlers. I fell in love with the race and the cars and the people, so I kept coming back. My daughters are now involved, too, as much as they can be, and my oldest can’t wait to be old enough to help with belts,” said Smith.

The day before the shoot-out of 2020, Corbin asked Dvorak to help with belts, and she’s been doing it ever since.

“This volunteer work is a team effort for sure. The tech team is necessary for the volume of cars that we go through. Everyone seems to work together and fill the gaps seamlessly.”

-Renee Corbin,
SORC seat belt
tech volunteer

“At that time it was just (Renee) and Melissa doing it all,” said Dvorak. “Having a third person really helps out. I used to be a member of the Capitol City Ford & Mustang Club when I lived in Lincoln, so it’s fun being back in with the car crowd. And I enjoy interacting with the drivers and navigators; I try to provide them with a positive experience while they’re here.”

So exactly what does the belt crew do? Their job is to make sure the seat belts or racing harnesses are threaded and fitted properly for the driver and navigator. On race day, they make sure the driver and navigator’s belts are secure and tight, helmets and/or Hans devices are secure, check that everyone is wearing required racing gear, and there are no loose items in the car.

This crew works five days, starting with tech inspections on Tuesday/Wednesday, L2L on Thursday, shoot-out on Friday, and SORC on Saturday. They also attend some of the drivers meetings. Every year is different, but Dvorak said it’s in the ballpark of 35 hours, not including travel time. The crew pulls roughly 1,500



(From left) Melissa Smith, Renee Corbin, and Kristi Dvorak are familiar faces in the world of SORC racing. Known as the “seat belt crew,” they love their job and take the safety of drivers very seriously. - Courtesy photo

belts during SORC week. “Not to mention the conversations and planning done outside of race week. I have no idea how many hours, I only know it’s usually sweltering,” said Smith.

“Over the years, I’ve learned from the other tech crew members, drivers, and reading the rule book, so I know what I need to know for the work I do,” said Corbin. Smith talked about how its taken teamwork to meet challenges and change things up over the years to keep the cars running smoothly.

“We have a great team and have learned over the years how to get cars through their final tech inspection with as much efficiency as possible. Many years ago, we checked belts and tires at the same station. We were tripping over each other, and if there were tangles in the belts or other prob-

lems discovered, it was common to have to pull a car over to the side. The start line was sometimes delayed or cars would have to change grid slots.”

Dustin Gronseth of Sioux Falls, South Dakota, has been working as a tech volunteer since 2013, when he and his wife, Shanda, decided to take the year off from the SORC race, but came down to hang out and help out. What Dustin does is primarily focused on the tech side of car mechanics for driver and navigator safety, but he also steps in to help with the interior and knows the belt crew well.

“Me personally, I am a recognizable face, but that’s about it. The people that everyone remembers are Kristi, Melissa, and Renee. They are a great group to work with, and I look forward to seeing them every year,” he said. All three ladies agreed

“I believe the belt crew is unique to SORC. This is a step the SORC board takes to ensure all the proper safety precautions possible have been completed. Most of the drivers love having us there and appreciate the additional safety check.”

-Kristi Dvorak,
SORC seat belt
tech volunteer

that they are pretty well known. If drivers are running in all three events, by the end of the weekend, they’ve seen the crew eight different times. The crew enjoys the hellos, hugs, hi-fives, and maybe a little bit of teasing from returning racers. And they don’t want anyone to

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4-Hers Show Results

(Above) A good crowd surrounds the show ring, as freshman Delanie Weinman gets her steer Pistachio set for judging in the Bred & Fed Class at last week’s Custer County Fair. Delanie, who has been in 4-H for 6 years, competed in the Junior division.

(Right) Clover Kid Rickey Viter spent so much time working with his bucket calf, Lemon Lime, that by fair time, he was riding him around.

Complete fair results for the South Loup 4-H Club will appear in *The Sentinel* in the next couple of weeks. - Courtesy photos

