

TRACTION CONTROL: CONTROL:

Revisited



Bob Appleget

BY BOB APPLEGET

In the March 2005 issue of *Dirt Late Model Magazine*, we ran a cover story entitled “Traction Control – What is the big deal with this little thing?” The story was very popular and stirred a lot of interest. So we decided to revisit traction control and see what has happened in the last seven-plus years since we did the first story.

Instead of titling this piece “Traction Control Revisited” it should be titled “The More Things Change, the More They Stay the Same”. Although not the hot button issue it was seven years ago, traction control is still a subject of discussion and sanctioning bodies, series and

racers are still aware of it.

In the seven years since the first test, there have been a number of advances in traction control in general, and the Davis devices in particular. One of the purposes of the test was to compare the unit we tested in 2005 and the newest device that is out there today.

“If we had a complaint about the original units, it was that when activated it was sometimes not as smooth as we would have liked,” said Shannon Davis of Davis Technologies. “It could be jerky (depending on adjustments), and was described by one driver as feeling like you were towing a car on a rope.”

The old unit was working once every one or two tenths of a second. We could make it go faster, but you lost sensitivity. With the new chip technology that is available today, the unit works every cylinder and is a lot smoother without losing any sensitivity.”

“The drivability is a big deal. You win races with a fast car that is drivable and is easy to get around the track and through traffic.”

THE TEST

For the 2005 article, we used Davis Technologies 5000-SL unit. In this test, we used the Davis Technologies TMS-9500-Short, which is the

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latest from Davis and also the old 5000-SL unit like the one used in the 2005 test. We had no shortage of drivers that were willing to do the test, but ran into a problem of putting them and a race track together.

As Blount Motorsports also has an interest in Smoky Mountain Speedway, we contacted Larry Garner and Tommy Kerr at Blount Motorsports to see if we could put it all together. We were able to hook up with them when they were doing their own test sessions at Smoky Mountain Speedway, so we could do the traction control test in conjunction with their testing. A big advantage of using Smoky Mountain for the test is that the track is well-prepped by David Bryant for testing.

The first test was held on March 21 and was cut short due to drive shaft problems in the primary car, as well as some problems with data acquisition. It was decided to call it a wasted day and the test was reschedule for May 17. The car used in the test was a Rocket Chassis with a 450 CI Chevrolet from Custom Race Engines.



Bob Applegat

Above photo: Before the traction control test, the car was set-up like it would before a race at Smoky Mountain Speedway. Billy Ogle, Jr. talks with David Bryant while B.J. Hilman makes a right front shock change.

Top right photo: The data from the test.
Right photo: The in-car video from the test session.

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For the test, Shannon Davis wired the car with data acquisition equipment, a Racepak V300SD, and cameras to show the driver's hands, feet and gauges. There was also a light that came on every time the traction control unit was engaged, which showed up in the videos.

First they ran 12 laps with traction control, the new unit. Then they ran 10 laps with no traction control engaged. Then they ran seven laps with the new unit, switched over to the old unit and ran six laps.

Shannon Davis goes a mile a minute and, as you would think, is very high on and excited about his products. With that said, he is actually pretty down to earth with his claims of what his traction control will do.

"Number one, you are not going to install one of my traction control units and go out on the track, mash the gas and not have any wheel spin," Davis said. "The traction control device is not the only tool, but rather another one of the many tools that can help make a successful race program."

"One of the most important things that the device does is make the available traction more manageable and assists the driver in getting as much as he can out of the car. This, plus smoothing the car out and getting the car where it is more comfortable and easier to deal with, are the strong points of these units."

"In the test, we showed that you can pick up time, a tenth of a second or more per lap, using traction control, but that is not the real benefit. Having a better handling car, a car that will help you not make



After making a run, team owner Larry Garner (left), Davis Technologies' Shannon Davis (middle) and Billy Ogle, Jr. download the information to determine exactly what the car and driver are doing.

some of those little mistakes, is where the real benefit of our traction control comes in."

"If a driver bobbles and has to get out of the throttle, it isn't going to cost him tenths of a second, it

could cost him a lot of time and positions on the race track. By giving him a better, smoother and faster race car, traction control gives the driver the ability to make fewer bobbles, and/or mistakes."

THE PARTICIPANTS:

Blount Motorsports Crew Chief David Bryant thought the tests were constructive and gave him a better idea of exactly what needed to be done in order for a traction control device to be useful and productive.

"This is not the first time I have been around traction control, but it is the first time I have been around it in a test environment," Bryant allowed. "I learned a number of things from the test and from Shannon Davis at the test."

"First, after seeing what it does and basically how it works, I learned that traction control is definitely out there. We have been to several races since we did the test and it is definitely out there. People are using it."

"Second, I learned that there is a lot of education that goes with it. You just don't hook it up and put the pedal to the floor. Davis showed us that you have to learn how to work with it. That all drivers, cars and tracks are not the same, and you are going to get out of it what

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you put into it.”

“The better the driver, the more he will be able to accomplish using the device. If you have a track that is blown off and you can’t get any more traction out of the car, then traction control, when used properly, can assist the driver in getting more out of the car. It won’t fix things 100%, but it can assist in making things better.”

Bryant went on to say that the test confirmed what he had thought about traction control all along. That if you know and understand it, then it can be a help to your program. It is not going to take a mid-pack driver and put him in Victory Lane, but it can be a small positive part of your program.

When asked what was the biggest thing he took away from the traction control test, Blount Motorsports Crew Chief B. J. Hillman replied, “How much more consistent you can be with the unit than without it. He (Ogle), with the traction control on, was more than he was when it wasn’t on. Because of that, his times were better when it was on.”

He reiterated what Davis and Bryant had said. That it was not a cure all and it took time for a driver, who had ability and an open mind, to get dialed in where the device would be beneficial.

“You are not going to take a 10th-place driver and turn him into a winner,” said Hillman. “If the driver doesn’t have some experience and a decent feel for the car, it won’t help as much as it would for someone who does. It will help smooth out a driver and, if he is patient and understands what is going on, it is going to be a big help.”

“The most important thing is that everyone needs to understand it is not a cure all; it is just another fix for the race car. The driver still needs to get seat time, work on his race car and to learn his trade.”

“If used as part of a racing program it will help, but if you think that traction control by itself is going to replace seat time, learning the car and how to race, forget it.”

Blount Motorsports driver Billy Ogle, Jr. was behind the wheel for the test and he liked what the unit did, but as with Bryant and Hillman, he realizes that there is more to it than meets the eye.

“I think that it works and can be a help,” said Ogle. “We had both units on for the test. They both worked good during the test, with the newer unit being much smoother. It helped me to be a smoother driver, and I think that it is something that could be useful under certain situations. You have to work with the unit. You have to work with it and, if you help it, it can help you. It can be a plus.”

“It isn’t like you go put it on the floor and the traction control takes the wheel spin out. There is more to it than that. You have to be smooth with it. It will help some drivers more than other drivers.”

SANCTIONS AND PROMOTERS:

We solicited input from a number of sanctions, and/or series to see what their take was on traction control.

(Continued on pg. 83)



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Traction Control: Revisited (Cont. from pg. 65)

We talked with Southern Nationals promoter Ray Cook, Lucas Oil Series Director Ritchie Lewis and Series Director for the Southern All Star Series, Lynn Acklin.

The Lucas Oil Series and the Southern Nationals Series have it in their rules that all traction control devices are illegal. At one time, the Southern All Star Series had something similar in their rules, but currently there is nothing about traction control we could find on the Internet version of their rules.

For the most part, all three were in agreement that the biggest problem with traction control was the cost. And, these days, there were a lot bigger problem areas out there where competitors are trying to circumvent the rules.

When we asked Ray Cook about his opinion of traction control he replied, "I really haven't thought that much about it. Over the years, the whole traction control deal has sort of died down and went away."

"Dirt Late Model racing goes through phases. Back when we had the cubic inch rules, you had engine builders that made their name by building motors over 362 CI and getting by with it. We went through that spell and then traction control came along. Once they got a unit themselves, the ones that complained the most saw there wasn't much to it and then that died down. I can't remember what was next, but today it seems that tire prep is the biggie. Should be interesting to see what's next."

Ritchie Lewis echoed Cook. Lewis thinks with the advanced strides that have been made with shocks, springs, suspension and aerodynamic innovations, that today's Dirt Late Model has all the traction it needs.

"In today's world, there is a lot of super tech stuff out there," said Lewis. "We have not had anyone make any real claims about traction control. When the shock behind really became the dominant set-up, it built a lot of traction into these cars. Then the tire companies started building more traction into the tires, and all of a sudden we had a bunch of traction. So basically, traction control died out."

Lynn Acklin's take on traction control is that there are a lot more important things out there to worry about. Things that are going to have a lot more affect on today's racing than traction control.

"It is really hard to get excited about trying to police traction control for a number of reasons," said Acklin. "First, it is hard, if not impossible, to find. Second, compared to other things out there that can make a huge difference in the outcome of a race, like tires, traction control is not the big deal it once was. We really don't have the time to devote to something that is not that big a deal when it comes right down to it."


All involved felt that traction control seemed to be a bigger deal with asphalt racing than dirt racing.


"I think it is more important in asphalt racing than it does dirt," said Cook. "The asphalt guys don't like any wheel spin at all. Whereas on the dirt, there are places you can't race without wheel spin. Over half the places we race now, you are not going to be any good without some wheel spin."

And all agreed that there is no substitute for seat time. Lewis compared using traction control to skipping a grade in school. "Traction control allows you to skip a grade in school, but it is not going to get you up there with the big boys," he said. "It's not going to make you competitive with the upper-level drivers in the sport."

"Seat time is the most important way to improve your driving skills," continued Cook. "If you spent the time effort and money on driving schools, renting tracks, racing and all the things that gave you more time to learn and understanding the car and how to drive it, you would be better served than going out and purchasing traction control or any other supposed short cut."


So at the end of day, when it comes to traction control, other than new technology that has made the units smoother, better and faster and the fact that when someone looses it isn't because the winner had traction control, things are pretty much the same as they were seven years ago. Series and sanctioning bodies, for the most part, still do not like or want traction control. Some drivers like traction control, some, not so much and some hate it. It continues to be part of the puzzle, another tool in the tool box, but not a cure all. And the individual driver, and/or team are still deciding whether it is worth the cost.

SPECIAL THANKS TO: Davis Technologies www.MoreTraction.com for videos from the test | **Blount Motorsports** www.BlountMotorsports.com | **Billy Ogle Jr.** www.BillyOgleJr.com | **Smoky Mountain Speedway** www.SmokyMountainSpeedway.com 




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