

O.R.P. Food Services curiosity revealed.



Because food services at Oregon Raceway Park are intentionally a radical departure from ordinary race track fare, I am frequently asked the how and why regarding meals that we serve at our track.

Now that we are in the “off season” when family and traditional festivities temporarily take precedence over the usual race track activities, I can take this time to reveal the story behind some of the things that may seem out of place, and even out of time, in such an environment.

Flowers on the table: The vase sits on a lace paper doily on the black table cover. The purple blossom of our local wild Lupine is our flower of choice. It has a brief season of bloom, so when not available we substitute a red rose. Red and black are the O.R.P. colors and the black upholstery grade vinyl of the table cover is the same grade as used on many racing seats. The floral arrangement is usually accompanied by stalks of wheat, the wheat is a nod to the crop that we grow every other year to help pay our bills.

The cafeteria style “serve yourself” format is based on the probability that you are the best person to know what and how much you will eat. It is always gratifying when someone comes back for seconds and says “these are great... and I don’t even like green beans, cauliflower, broccoli etc”.

The long tables are to promote camaraderie between drivers. It is not unusual to have drivers miss track time because they are involved in a good conversation with a former stranger.

Hard plates and stainless are preferred over throw away paper and plastic. You can stack them high and they don’t fold in half and drop your lunch on your foot. We bring dessert around to the dining areas because it is hard to carry your plate, beverage cup and dessert too.

The meal selection is based on what looks the best and freshest at the market, generally it is hot food on cold days and cold food on hot days.

We use disposable cups because drivers like to take refills of their beverage selection with them back to the paddock.

When the crowd is large enough we serve salad from the hand carved mahogany boat.

The silver bowls that hold the condiments, the mahogany boat and the doilies all share a common history and have an interesting back story:

Years ago (1996) I purchased a 40 foot cargo container of galley equipment that had been removed from a ship which had berthed at the Portland dry dock for updating and refitting as a cruise ship.

It was the American passenger liner the S.S. Constitution; a ship from the early 50’s that had served the upscale passenger trade plowing the Atlantic on the New York to Genoa – Naples - Gibraltar route. Passenger service was in many ways a vestige at the end of its era; in only a few years the airline industry would completely take over the intercontinental travel business and the age of the Jet Set would be born.

In 1956 The U.S.S. Constitution was the boat that American Actress Grace Kelly took to Monaco when she married Prince Rainier. Walt Disney and his wife were regular passenger on vacation trips to the Mediterranean.

Besides carrying a posh clientele, the ship was featured in several 1955 episodes of the T.V. show “I Love Lucy”. It was the stage for the 1957 movie “An Affair to Remember” with Deborah Kerr and Cary Grant,

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also an episode of Naked City in 1963, and one Magnum P.I. in 1986, by which time the ship was owned by a cruise line.

By late 1996 the Cruise business had changed and the refit was considered to be too expensive, and the ship too small to turn a profit, so with millions already spent, they decided to quit the project. The ship was sold to a Taiwanese scrap firm. While being towed for dismantling it mysteriously sank, 700 nautical miles north of the Hawaiian Islands. (Some shipyard workers suspected that the insurance papers rubbed a hole in the hull).

That would be the end of the history.... except all the galley and serving wear had been off loaded and stored in a 40 ft. container in Portland. The New York office of the cruise line gave me an opportunity to bid on it. Upon inspection the container was stuffed so full of kitchen equipment I could not make out the contents. I took a chance, and had the winning bid on the lot. I sold most of it and made a killing.

A couple of years ago I found the salad boat, a whole case of lace paper doilies and a dozen of these silver bowls, which I thought were to cool to sell, still wrapped in their original boxes in a corner of my basement where, due to the indifference of a too busy life, they had been waiting for a reason to be put to good use.

The silver over stainless bowls are of Japanese manufacture. It was the kind of small product that the Japanese were able to produce following the devastation of World War II when Japan was still clawing its way back to become the industrial giant we know today.

I hope you enjoyed this minor piece of history and the (somewhat quirky) thinking that makes it fun to pursue our goal of helping our event presenters provide you the best track food in the Northwest.



Bill Murray

Executive Dish Washer

For more information on the S.S. Constitution:
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wajmQRQv8I>