

KNOW YOUR HELMETS

Auto racing is a dangerous sport. Always has been. The challenge of mitigating the potential for injury—or worse—has resulted in technological advances in every aspect of racing, from the driver's personal gear to vehicle structure and even the construction of the race venue.

Nearly 60 years ago, the topic of driver safety was important enough that *Hot Rod* magazine devoted three pages of its November 1958 issue to a story called "Know Your Helmets," written by Managing Editor Bob Greene. Far from a simple buyer's guide, it was a comprehensive look at helmet design and construction, inside and out, and how those factors protected the driver from a number of different kinds of head injuries.

The story's opening photo showed Greene (at left) and fellow *Hot Rod* staffer LeRoi "Tex" Smith examining several helmets as they posed in front of photographer Eric Rickman's souped-up Corvette. Many of the helmet brands mentioned in the story—McHal, Shoec-Shell, Anderson—have since disappeared. Bell continues to thrive in the segment, and today's German Romer helmets look nothing like the leather-strappped, equestrian-style helmet shown in the photo (far left).

Though it wasn't mentioned in Greene's story, the Snell Memorial Foundation, which is dedicated to setting independent standards for helmet safety, got its start in 1957 after the racing death of namesake Pete Snell.

Another organization dedicated to racer safety, the SFI Foundation, has its roots in SEMA. When it was founded as the Speed Equipment Manufacturer's Association in 1963, one of SEMA's chief goals was to establish product performance specifications that would improve and maintain aftermarket product quality and, as a result, make those products safer. Fifteen years later, those efforts in getting products to "meet SEMA specs" evolved into an organization called the SEMA Foundation Inc., or SFI for short. Since then, SFI has become independent of SEMA but carries on the important work of setting standards for performance equipment and keeping racers safe. 

