

For Immediate Release

## **Downing: ‘Closed Cockpit Not The Cure For IndyCars’**

Atlanta, Ga. (Dec. 2, 2011) – This week, HANS Performance Products is marking the 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the first use of the HANS Device in competition. In the following Q. & A., Jim Downing talks about his role in the development of one of the most significant safety devices in motor racing and comments on current safety issues such as enclosing cockpits for open wheel series like IndyCar, F1 or the NHRA.

Dr. Robert Hubbard, inventor of the HANS Device, and Downing are the co-founders of HPP, which has overseen sales of more than 130,000 HANS Devices since Downing wore one for the first time in the IMSA season finale in 1986. Downing is a five-time IMSA driving champion and was recently selected for the Sebring 12-hour race’s Hall of Fame. Still competing regularly, Downing scored a podium finish at this year’s SCCA National Championship Runoffs in C Sports Racing.

Q: When you look back on the weekend you wore the HANS Device in competition at Daytona for the first time 25 years ago, what comes to mind?

Downing: "It was a bit awkward. I looked a lot different than the rest of the drivers and they must have been wondering 'What in the world is Downing up to now?' The Model 1 HANS was a bit bulky and wrapped around the sides of the helmet. So it really stood out."

Q: It took 15 years from the time you first wore the HANS Device at Daytona for drivers to begin to accept it. Did you feel like some of the early resistance to the HANS Device resulted from drivers preferring to be macho types and not wanting to look like sissies?

Downing: "I think that’s true. Drivers don't want to stand out for something that could be construed as overly safe or makes it look like they're worried about getting hurt. Part of that is just human nature – not wanting to stand out from your peers."

Q: A lot of people remember how the use of the HANS Device was influenced by the fatal crash of Dale Earnhardt. What role has the development of the Specification 38.1 established by the SFI Foundation played when it comes to the use of head and neck restraints in the U.S.?

Downing: "When we first started talking to NASCAR drivers, John Andretti said to me, ‘People run so many strange things by me that it’s difficult to separate the wheat from the chaff.’ He was really trying to give a proper explanation for being hesitant about it, rather than just shrugging it off.

“When the SFI came along, it really helped clarify this type of problem for drivers. There was one other company’s device in use, for instance, that was dropped by sanctioning bodies when the SFI established Specification 38.1 in 2004. We’re thankful for the SFI. Drivers are less tempted to try things that have not been tested for racing. There are some devices that have patents, but will not work in the real world of racing. There are some strange things out there.”

Q. In light of the fatal crash of Dan Wheldon, do you think there are other improvements that can be made when it comes to driver safety in the cockpit? Formula 1 and NHRA drag racers, for example, both already had projects underway for enclosing the cockpits before Wheldon’s fatal

crash in Las Vegas.

Downing: “I don’t think enclosing the cockpits in forms of racing where they have always been open is going to ever be accepted. That’s not the cure. Part of the draw for spectators is to see the drivers. I’m not sure an enclosed cockpit would have saved Dan Wheldon. I think there are a number of other things they can do. They include what tracks you race at, the best safety barriers possible and strong cockpits where the driver sits in a relatively low position. Getting the driver lower can be difficult because the upright seating position is actually the safest in racing.”

Q: The evidence is clear that the HANS Device saves lives in many different types of impacts. Why do you think drivers still resist the idea of a head and neck restraint, especially on Saturday night short tracks and drag strips?

Downing: “I think there’s a poor understanding of what really happens in a wreck. I think the only solution is for those who promote racing to force the drivers to absorb some information about what happens in wrecks and how people get hurt.

“Educating drivers at all levels is one of the things that the International Council of Motorsports Sciences is focused on. The drivers at the high end of motorsports regularly have this information available. The Saturday night racers don’t have time to get it on their own. They’ll have to have some help from established authorities like the ICMS, the medical community and promoters. As time goes on, more and more people are realizing that others are using the HANS Device and the resistance does begin to drop.”

Q: What sort of technical developments do you expect in the future for the HANS Device?

Downing: “You’ll see an effort from HPP to make the HANS Device more universal and easier to use for drivers in all forms of racing, no matter how big or small they are, what type of vehicle they drive or what form of competition they participate in.”

Note: This week HPP has released a [Safety Timeline](#), an online graphic outlining the significant chapters in the history of the HANS Device.

Contact:

Gary Milgrom

Vice President

HANS Performance Products

5096 Peachtree Road

Atlanta GA 30341

Tel: 1-888-HANS-999 or 770-457-1046

gmilgrom@hansdevice.com

www.hansdevice.com