

Local motor notes: Rookie driver looks forward to Touring Car championship at Sonoma

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[Percy Howard](#) is a psychotherapist working in the Sacramento area for the California Institute for [Mental Health](#). He's heard all the jokes about his racing "addiction." But if he's hooked, as his friends' jibes suggest, at least he's going full throttle.

Howard, 51, will compete in the United States Touring Car Championships this weekend in Sonoma. The U.S. version is a lower division to the World Touring Car Championships, which makes its North America debut this weekend at the raceway in Sonoma.

The World Touring Car Championships event is the ninth race on the series' 12-race schedule for 2012. The tour includes stops in Morocco, Italy, Brazil, Japan and Macao.

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"Some of those guys used to race on the old Busch Series circuit, and a lot of other drivers have national and international experience," said Howard, who's major sponsor is Evil Genius Racing of West Sacramento. "The competition will be at a high level."

Howard said racing will always be a hobby. He does it for fun and to assuage his competitive desires. In his only touring car race this season, he finished 10th. That's good enough to put him sixth in the Rookie of the Year standings.

Both touring car championships will use the entire 12-turn, 2.50-mile road course in Sonoma for two, 13-lap races with standing starts. That's something Howard is still getting used to.

In his first touring race three weeks ago at Thunderhill Raceway Park in Willows, Howard finished fifth in the first race. As he battled for the fourth position in the second race, he went off the track.

"That was ill-advised," said Howard, who failed to finish the second 13-lap race.

Howard said there will be wrecks Sunday, that the Sonoma track "eats cars" because of its off-camber turns and blind corners with plenty of elevation changes.

"Everyone says Sonoma is one of the most technically challenging race courses in North America – that and Watkins Glen," Howard said. "Even the IndyCar guys don't run the full track like we will."