



GETTIN' THE LEAD OUT
Steve Scofes makes tracks
in a helmet he received as
a gift from racing legend
Mario Andretti.

This Lansing lobbyist is the ultimate weekend warrior, whether running hot laps at Michigan International Speedway or racing at dozens of tracks across North America. By R.J. King | Photos by David Baditoi

A Day at the Racetrack

Every executive deals with stress, but few CEOs alleviate their anxiety battling for a checkered flag on a demanding road course dominated by hairpin and slalom turns. Yet for Lansing lobbyist Steve Scofes, a relaxing weekend is another day at the races where open-wheel speedsters can reach 150 mph. “I almost crashed three years ago at a race in Montreal when the car next to me lost control and

very fast speed,” he explains. “If you don’t constantly monitor your client’s position, you can easily get run over, hit the wall, or be passed by.” To that end, Scofes worked with New York real-estate mogul Donald Trump in an attempt to land one of Detroit’s three casino licenses that were put out for bid in the late 1990s. “We had the best plan, but the [selection] process was too political,” Scofes recalls. “You can’t win ‘em all.”

Despite some near misses, Scofes can boast of some notable wins. He lobbied state legislators to support the sale of



Feel the need for speed?

Michigan International Speedway offers several opportunities for those seeking to fulfill their Days of Thunder auto racing fantasies. Racing schools such as the **Skip Barber Racing School**, **FastTrack Driving School**, and **TrackTime** offer one-of-a-kind driving programs that put you in the driver’s seat of actual race cars for unforgettable racing experiences. Prices range from \$90 for a three-lap ride in a two-seater race car to \$2,599 for a full-day, 80-lap program that ends in a high-speed one-on-one finale. Sorry ... attractive, Nicole Kidman look-alike co-star not included.

—Alex Southern

skidded in front of me,” Scofes recalls. “I locked the brakes, downshifted, and turned the wheel. That gave me an extra second to avoid the crash.”

For the last 25 years, Scofes, CEO of Scofes Associates and Consulting Inc., has competed in open-wheel races throughout North America. While other executives counteract stress by practicing yoga or teeing up a golf ball, Scofes prefers to race at breakneck speed. “Racing relaxes me,” says Scofes, who often takes his Porsche 911 Turbo Carrera to the Michigan International Speedway. “I like the excitement, the speed, and the challenge.” While not everyone can race hot laps at MIS, Scofes has an inside track. A few months back, he lobbied the Michigan Department of Transportation to improve the surface roads around the 1,400-acre facility. “We’re grateful Steve was able to get those roads improved, because we’d been trying for years,” says MIS president Roger Curtis. “He’s helped on a number of other issues, as well.”

Scofes says that politics, like racing, is not for the weak of heart. “You must have good instincts, good reflexes, and anticipate what lies ahead, as things are always moving at a

public land for a new \$150-million research center in York Township, near Ann Arbor, for Toyota Technical Center USA; he worked with Detroit-based Compuware Corp. to tap brownfield grants for a \$325-million downtown Detroit headquarters; and he worked with racing legend Mario Andretti, who operates a winery in California’s Napa Valley. “Mario needed help getting his wine sold in grocery stores,” Scofes says, “so I helped arrange for Kroger to carry the wine.”

Hollywood has also been the beneficiary of Scofes’ communication skills. Family friend and Academy Award-nominated actor Robert Loggia, who has appeared in *Scarface*, *Officer and a Gentleman*, *Independence Day*, and *Big*, arranged for Scofes

to appear in the 2000 romantic comedy *Return to Me*. The film, which starred David Duchovny, Minnie Driver, Carroll O’Connor, and Loggia, enjoyed box-office success. “I used Robert’s trailer and got to practice my lines with Carroll O’Connor,” Scofes says. “I talk to Robert every three weeks or so, and my Dad and I get together with him twice a year.”

But racing is what really stokes Scofes’ adrenaline. “It isn’t something you jump into,” he said during a recent visit to MIS. “You really need to go to racing school and be certified. The trainers teach you how far to push a car, how to accelerate through turns, and how to be smooth on the wheel, and hard on the gas.” **db**