

How an Idea Becomes a Rule- The SCCA Solo Rules Process

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You frequently see comments on internet forums like “The SCCA classed my car there? Are they crazy?” or “I talked to the SCCA rules guy and he said...”

The problem with those comments is that they mostly show a lack of understanding about how rules actually happen in SCCA Solo / Autocross. So I thought I’d try and shed a little light on that.

Let’s talk about the people that are involved first. And because it’s the SCCA, there are a lot of them.

First up and with the highest authority is the **Board of Directors** (BOD) for the club. These are thirteen people, each elected from a different Area by the SCCA members of that Area. They serve three year terms. You can see a map of the Divisions here (each Division can include more than one Area and each area can include multiple Regions. Yes, this is a little complicated.): <http://www.scca.com/divisions.aspx>

Here’s the thing with the BOD though... While they have the ultimate authority on rules for Solo (and the rest of the club’s programs), they very rarely get involved with it. The real day-to-day work is done by...

The **Solo Events Board** (SEB). These seven folks are appointed by the BOD (usually at the recommendation of the existing SEB members) and are the folks charged with the solo rules directly. They have monthly SEB meetings where they vote on rules to propose to the membership, and rules to propose the BOD for the coming year. More on that in a minute.

As you might imagine, the SEB has a lot of work to do with our big rulebook. Helping them are the **Advisory Committees** (ACs). There are currently ten advisory committees, each with five to ten people on it. There’s an advisory committee for each category (Stock, Street Touring, Street Prepared, Prepared, Modified, and Kart), plus some for Solo Trials, Solo Safety, Solo Sites, and Event Operations. Except for Safety, these committees can be created/destroyed as needed, but the category committees are pretty much permanent. Members of each committee are appointed by the SEB, usually with some input from the existing committee members.

ACs meet monthly or bi-monthly, and make recommendations to the SEB as to what rules to change, what rules need clarification, etc. AC members are where the nitty-gritty work happens for rules language, exactly what to allow and how to allow it, what impacts changes in allowances or car classifications might have, etc. Then, after they’ve done all that work, they make a recommendation to the SEB and hope like hell the SEB doesn’t screw it up. Usually at AC meetings there are a couple of SEB liaisons attending, to help with this.

None of these board/committee members are paid. They're all volunteers donating their time (most of it on irritating conference calls in the middle of the night) for the betterment of the club. So when you run into someone that seems to get sorta grumpy when you're bitching about how the SCCA is screwing you, you may have just met one of the people that was involved in the process. In my time with the SCCA I've met a lot of different people with a lot of different motivations, but I've never yet met a board/committee member that didn't think they were doing the best thing for the club.

I have however, met a few that were wrong. 😬

Now it's time to talk about one last group of people... The National Office. These folks actually get paid, and it's their job to go to work everyday and deal with irritating people like us. The national office is like a small business office, and it reports to the President of SCCA, who reports to the BOD. They deal with the day-to-day management of the SCCA... Making sure someone answers the phone when you call in with a question about a license, that there's someone to approve sanction and insurance requests from regions for events, handle / direct email, etc. Generally speaking when someone says "I talked to the SCCA", this is who they're talking about.

Here's the interesting thing though... Even though the national office currently employs four people as "Technical Services" and that's who you'll be transferred to if you call with a rules question... Those people don't actually have any authority to make the rules or clarify the rules. Crazy, right? And yeah, it's confusing.

Part of why it's confusing is that they're pretty smart folks who they know the rulebook inside out and sideways. So if you're calling with a typical question, they very likely know the answer. And they're helpful, so they'll answer the question for you. And 99% of the time, that's it. You've asked your question, it's a pretty straightforward one, and you got the answer. Everyone's happy.

It's that other 1% of the time that's an issue. Every now and then a question about the rules doesn't have a clear-cut answer. The nature of the game is that competitors are always trying to find a way to make their car better and the rules are trying to rein that in. Sometimes competitors are smarter than the rules or the rules were written with a particular goal in mind but the actual wording didn't quite say that exactly. In those cases, where the rule can be read more than one way, technical services shouldn't give you a yes or no answer. Instead, they should direct you to "write a letter" to get your answer.

So we're at "write a letter". You don't need to be involved very long before some grumpy SCCA member answers your bitching about some dumb-ass rule with a gruff "**write a letter** then" statement. So what are they talking about?

Here's how a rule is supposed to get changed... It starts with you and me. That's right, regular SCCA members. We decide that a rule should be added, changed, removed, a car should be classed somewhere else, or whatever. We organize our thoughts, write them down, and submit them to the SCCA (for Solo stuff, you use the SEB Letter Submission Form here: <http://www.sebscca.com/> . It hasn't actually been a real letter for quite a while, though if you're Amish I guess you can still do it that way if you want.)

The "letter" goes to the National Office's Technical service department. There, it gets distributed to the appropriate AC or perhaps directly to the SEB, for discussion. At the next meeting for the AC hopefully they have time to get to your letter. They discuss it, and eventually (it could take longer than one meeting) decide what to do. Their meeting minutes, including the recommendation regarding your letter, get sent to the SEB. The recommendation may be to say "no", it may be a direct copy of the rules language you suggested (you did suggest actual wording for your change, right?), or something in between. It can even be two versions of a possible rule change.

Remember though, the ACs don't actually have any power to do anything. Their meeting minutes aren't even public, they go directly to the SEB. At the next SEB meeting hopefully they have time for the AC's recommendation regarding your letter. They discuss it (hopefully in a much shorter time period), and decide what to do. They may decide to accept the AC's recommendation or reject it. If they reject it, usually it will get kicked back to the AC for more work.

If they accept it, a **proposal goes out for member comment**, and the next part of the process kicks off. Rules changes are proposed in Fastrack. This is currently on the web here: <http://www.scca.com/contentpage.aspx?content=78> . In Fastrack there will be meeting minutes from the SEB, including any solo rules proposals out for member comment that month. You, as good SCCA members, have been eagerly awaiting Fastrack and will see the rules proposal and **write in with your feedback** (aka “Write a(nother) letter”). You’ll do this using the letter submission form above, just like the original person did to propose the change. These feedback letters get distributed to the AC/SEB and the AC/SEB will discuss the feedback appropriately. Note that feedback like “you are all a bunch of morons” isn’t very helpful. Please additionally explain why they are morons. Also note that just because a proposal has been published doesn’t mean it will become a rule. If you like a proposal, you need to write in and let folks know that too. In this case it would normally be perfectly acceptable to say “you are all a bunch of geniuses”, but they’re not used to hearing that and may take it as sarcasm. Probably best to explain why you like it and avoid confusion.

After a while (and this time period can vary) reviewing feedback and possibly revising the proposal, the AC will make a final recommendation to the SEB. The SEB will then decide to either reject that recommendation (and usually send it back to the AC for more work) or will accept that recommendation.

Here’s the interesting part (I know, it’s hard to pick out the most interesting part, isn’t it?)... **The SEB doesn’t have the authority to actually change the rules.** Crazy, right? In reality, only the BOD has that authority. So what the SEB does is gather up all the stuff they want to change in the rules over the year, and then they give it to the BOD in one big package towards the end of the year (usually just after Nationals). This is done in their official minutes, which is also published in Fastrack. The BOD, usually, says “thank you!” and then approves the proposed changes at their next meeting. With the changes finally approved by the people with the actual authority, they then **get included in next year’s rulebook.**

And that is how a rule gets created for SCCA Solo.

I bet you’re thinking that this sounds like it could take a long time. You’d be right. Normally all changes for the coming year are supposed to go out for member comment in Fastrack by June of the current year. This **Rules Season** is setup to allow members to have enough time to provide feedback.

I bet you’re also thinking that searching through a bunch of Fastracks to figure out what change proposals have come out this year wouldn’t be too much fun. You’d be right on that one too! Luckily there’s now a handy section on the SCCA’s website that has sections detailing the **current year’s tech bulletins and proposals.** See it here: <http://www.scca.com/contentpage.aspx?content=61>. You can also download a copy of the current solo rules and check out a description of the process for rules changes in flowchart form.

A few caveats... It’s the SCCA after all, there have to be caveats.

New car classifications can be created by the SEB at any time with no BOD involvement. The SEB is empowered to directly class a new car in a category by itself. You’ll see this in the SEB minutes in Fastrack. Everything else stays the same (i.e. a member writes requesting a classification for the car, the AC talks about it, recommends to the SEB, etc.), but there’s no BOD involvement and no rules season requirements.

Clarifications can also be issued by the SEB directly. Usually these are used to fix typos in the rulebook or inadvertent omissions from what the AC proposed and what actually made it into the rulebook. However they can also be used to clarify rules wording that inadvertently didn’t say what they meant it to say. Either way, the clarifications will also be published in the SEB minutes in Fastrack. Note that the nature of the beast here is that a clarification is really a rules change for someone... Someone saw the way the rule was written, decided it allowed something (that presumably wasn’t intended), and then either made that modification and got protested, wrote in saying “hey, is this really legal?”, or something like that. Then the SEB will modify the rules wording to make it clear what they really meant. Bitter people call these “Clarifichanges”, but the SEB is usually quite careful about how they do this so as to not upset a large portion of the membership.

Finally... **Protests** are how we resolve disagreements with the rules. Let's say you decide that the induction allowances in Street Prepared really allow you to bolt a turbocharger to the intake on your Miata. After all, it's really just a fancy air cleaner, right?

Chances are that at your next event, someone might notice your new air cleaner and say something like "Hey, that looks an awful lot like a turbo. That's illegal". You, being the clever person you are, continue to define it as an air cleaner. After a friendly discussion, it's clear that the two of you aren't going to agree.

At the typical regional event, you probably bring this up to the Solo Chair, the solo chair sighs, and then says that no, really, that's a turbo and puts you in SSM where you belong (and then goes off to look for another sucker to do the job next year). At the divisional and higher level however, it's a little more official. Sections 8, 9, and 10 of the rulebook talk about what happens next, but the short version is that someone fills out a protest form and protests you. Then a **Protest Committee** (PC) is formed (you didn't think we were done with committees did you?), and they debate the situation at the event. They then issue a ruling, again at the event. Might be a time penalty, might be disqualification, might be something else. At this point you can either accept the ruling, or you can decide that the PC was full of crap, and **Appeal** the decision. If you appeal the decision, after the event your appeal gets sent to the SEB and they (via the **Nationals Appeal Committee**... Another one!), render a final decision.

So the next time your buddy says "I talked to the SCCA rules guy and he said" you can cut him off and explain how it really works. Well, after you tie him down so he can't get away, anyway.