

OFF COURSE

Virgil Range, Aurora Country Club



Racing Fever — Have You Caught It?

For those of you who haven't been bitten by the racing bug, here's a little something that might just change your mind. Imagine yourself strapped inside a piece of steel and carbon fiber doing 200+ miles per hour around an oval with 30-degree banks in the turns. Your helmet is bouncing violently between the cushioned tubular roll cage. Your fingers are throbbing from the kung fu grip you've had on the wheel. Your legs are aching from sitting, throttling, and braking for over 200 miles. Then you hear your spotter over the radio yelling "Get low! Get low!" Too late, your car is spinning, and then it skids sideways about 150 yards. Bam! You hit the wall and just hope that none of your colleagues induce further pain by bashing into you. Bam again! So much for that hope—you are now flipping over, landing on the hood of your once-beautiful car and sliding down the track upside down with a deadly combination of sparks and high-octane fuel shooting from your car. What are these guys thinking when they get into that car?

Racing is a sport. It is not just a bunch of grease monkeys driving fast cars into left turns. NASCAR is one of the most popular sports in our country now, boasting a fan base of millions. Did you know that there are people out there who wear Dale Jr. underwear? True story. The people who race these cars do so at great personal risk, and it is not just to get the moonshine to its destination before the local constable nabs them, as it was in the days of Junior Johnson. No, these guys put their lives on the line every time they get into their cars and strap in, and that's their everyday job! And it's a BIG money sport too—it takes over \$250,000 just to prep a car for the Daytona 500. That's why there are so many decals on those cars—it takes HUGE sponsor money to keep a race car on the track. Here's a little history—the first NASCAR-sanctioned race was held on Daytona's Beach Course on February 15th, 1948; and the first race held in Indianapolis was on May 11th, 1911. And it keeps getting bigger every year.



*Kevin DeRoo and Jimmie Johnson's car.
They're both good, but at different stuff.*

In NASCAR, there are 5 main team owners. Hendrick Motorsports has Dale Earnhardt Jr., Jimmie Johnson, and Jeff Gordon driving for them (if these names don't ring a bell for you, go back and read something stupid like Bull Sheet). Penske Racing has Kurt Bush and Ryan Newman as its main drivers; Joe Gibbs

Racing employs Tony Stewart, Denny Hamlin, and JJ Yeley; Jeff Burton, Kevin Harvick, and Clint Bowyer ply their trade for Richard Childress Racing; while Roush Fenway Racing has the greatest number of drivers, including Greg Biffle, Carl Edwards, Matt Kenseth, and Jamie McMurray. The current points leader is Jeff Burton, but I'm not going to go into how a driver gets points—it's very confusing.

Racing of various kinds has been available to fans in the Chicagoland area for some time. Indianapolis is within driving distance, and local dirt tracks always close by. But it was May 8th, 2000 when the Chicagoland Speedway opened in Joliet, Illinois, and brought professional racing into our back yard.

(continued on next page)

The track is a 1.5-mile D-shaped oval with 18-degree banking in one turn and 15-degree in the other, and yes, they are all left turns. I've heard that if you travel south of the equator they drive clockwise and all the jokes are about right turns. The facility holds 75,000 people, and the record NASCAR speed was set in 2002 by Kevin Harvick with a mark of 136.832 MPH.

Jimmie Johnson was the first NASCAR driver to taste the bubbly in victory lane at Chicagoland after winning a Busch Series race on July 14th, 2001. The next day, Kevin Harvick won the speedway's first NASCAR Cup event. On July 11th, 2008, NASCAR was back in Chicagoland with the Busch Series on Friday night and the Cup Series on Saturday night. These events are a weekend-long extravaganza. Half the fun is hanging out in the parking lot with the die-hards and their RVs, and ATVs, and Boo-Bees, and of course their bean-bag toss games.

On May 25th we welcomed back the IRL (Indy Racing League)

when Illinois native Danica Patrick, the first woman ever to win an Indy race, points leader Helio Castroneves, and the rest of the IRL racers participated in the Peak Antifreeze 300. Indy racing is totally different from NASCAR, with open-wheel cars boasting 900+ horsepower and top speeds over 80 mph faster than their cousins. Buddy Rice posted Chicagoland's fastest IRL speed at 224.064 mph.

Although I have never been to a NASCAR event (yet), I do enjoy attending dirt track racing. This is much different from NASCAR, but the principle is the same—drive fastest and cross the finish line first and you get champagne dumped on you.

Typically there are four different kinds of cars—Late Model, Modified or Sportsman, Street Stock, and Hornet. Late Models are the fastest and Hornets are slowest (being pretty much normal cars you'd find driving down the street with only a roll bar and some other minor requirements). The cool thing about dirt track racing is that it is fun, exciting, entertaining, and affordable for the whole family. It's like going to a Kane County Cougars game instead of a Cubs or Sox game—same great time with WAY less cost. Some local tracks where you might want to



The track is really tilty.

satisfy your thirst for fast cars include the Grundy County Speedway in Morris, Illinois, and the LaSalle Speedway in LaSalle, Illinois. The World of Outlaws late model series and the Lucas Oil late model series both pay yearly visits to LaSalle, and offer some of the fastest dirt racing I have ever seen. The World of Outlaws late model division is arguably the best dirt track racing in the world. I would recommend

highly a trip to LaSalle, if you feel you might enjoy catching the racing bug without jumping in full-bore.

I probably have racing in my blood—my father was a racer, having competed with Rusty Wallace, Ken Schrader, and many other notable drivers. If you want to take the family out for a day of entertainment that won't empty your pocket, give racing a try. It's fast, fun, exciting, entertaining, affordable (if you don't go crazy buying the Dale Jr. undies), and it can be found just around the corner. Oh, and you'll LOVE the noise!

-OC

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