

Fans Flock to WWT Raceway In The Thousands For IndyCar Weekend

by Nathan Tucker, Sports Reporter
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MADISON, Ill. - Tens of thousands of race fans made their way to World Wide Technology Raceway this weekend for the annual return of the NTT IndyCar Series. It was a weekend jam-packed with on-track action, but also provided plenty of entertainment off-track as well.

Saturday's on-track festivities were hampered by the heavy rains that swept through the area. With the large rainfall came a lengthy track-drying process before cars could hit the track, starting in the evening with an Indy NXT practice session for IndyCar's top development series.

The IndyCar practice that took place shortly after shaped Sunday's Bommarito Automotive 500 in a big way, and caused a bit of drama for Team Penske, one of the most successful teams in the series.

Scott McLaughlin, driver of the No. 3 Team Penske car, spun out on the apron coming off of pit road on new, cold tires during the practice session. His teammate Will Power in the No. 12 car took avoiding action, moving up the track to avoid McLaughlin.

Power got into what's known as "the marbles", the bits of rubber that fly off racing tires as they degrade over time, and lost control into the turn two wall. He came sliding back down the track, where Marcus Ericsson, driver of the No. 8 Chip Ganassi Racing car, had no time to avoid him, t-boning Power.

Both Ericsson and Power's cars were just about destroyed, and both teams were rebuilding their cars beyond midnight to be ready for Sunday's action.

Understandably, off-track festivities were largely canceled on Saturday with all the rain. Only a small number of fans braved the weather for the practice sessions and Indy NXT race Saturday night. Those who stuck around for the Indy NXT Outfront Showdown were treated to a fun sprint race won by Christian Rasmussen.

When the track opened their gates on Sunday, fans piled in. Sunday was a beautiful day for racing with temperatures in the 70s. Comfortable for race fans in attendance, and ideal for race drivers, as a cooler track provides better grip.

With the fans flooding the Madison, Illinois racetrack in droves, the off-track atmosphere was at its peak on Sunday in the hours before the Bommarito Automotive 500. There were classic IndyCars for old-school enthusiasts, and DJs and bands kept the crowd moving throughout the day.

A big hit around the track are the local food vendors and restaurants that set up shop on the midway. As always, it's an array of sporting event standards like hot dogs and chicken strips, local BBQ favorites like Sugarfire Smokehouse, and popular national chains like Domino's to suit race fans of all palates.

On the track, USAC Silver Crown cars competed in the Outfront 100 Sunday. Silver Crown cars generally race on short dirt tracks, so the 1.25-mile asphalt oval sees the fastest racing the series runs all season.

After the Silver Crown show was over, it was time for Sunday's IndyCar main event, 260 laps around Gateway for the Bommarito Automotive 500.

Chip Ganassi Racing's Scott Dixon managed his Firestone tires better than any of the other 26 drivers on track, dominating his way to a win by more than 22 seconds over second-place finisher Pato O'Ward from the Arrow McLaren team. For the second year in a row, 21-year-old David Malukas scored a podium finish at Gateway coming in third.

Surprisingly, that podium did not include 2023 Indy 500 winner Josef Newgarden. Newgarden had won the last three races at Gateway and had won all oval races this IndyCar season before Sunday. He crashed into the wall with just around 50 laps remaining and had to retire his No. 2 Team Penske car.

WWT Raceway will open its gates again in September for the SpeedTour, where the Trans Am Series and Sportscar Vintage Racing Series will take to the two-mile road course that snakes in and around the oval track.

