

7-03-20: Big Diamond Speedway

The penultimate Pennsylvania Speedweek race tonight was at William's Grove but I decided to check out a track I'd never been before (and maybe see someone other than Kyle Larson win a feature). I opted for Big Diamond Speedway, a $\frac{3}{8}$ mile dirt track in Pottsville, PA. The drive to the track is through some small towns and two lane roads through the woods and it felt like it was much more in the middle of nowhere than it actually was.

As I arrived I followed the water truck as it was wetting down the parking lot. I arrived about 10 minutes before gates opened and there was a decently long line for tickets despite there being seemingly few cars in the parking lot. It went quick though, and they opened the gates pretty close to on time.

I bought my ticket and went in the gates. The main concourse is at the level of the entrance and the majority of the grandstands are below that, with one section above on the turn 4 end of the frontstretch. I decided to sit in the elevated grandstands, finding a nice spot on the top row. I do think the majority of the seats would have a nice view of the whole track. I always like tracks that are situated below the level of the grandstands as it tends to make for very nice views.



There were two cars on display on the main concourse, a modified and a USAC East Coast 360 sprint car. I don't know that I'd taken a look at either of those cars up close before and it was

neat to inspect how they're actually put together. Sprint cars are so simple in construction, there's not much beyond the chassis, motor, and wheels. I had read somewhere a couple weeks ago that center-steer modifieds are basically full bodied sprint cars and I really do see it now. The wheelbase is wider and the geometry is different, but the basic structure is pretty much the same. Kind of makes sense why I tend to enjoy both sprint cars and modifieds more than late models.

Right as I settled back into my seat I noticed the black clouds rolling in overhead. I hadn't noticed anything worrisome when I'd checked the week's radar a few days ago but there was definitely something passing through now. The track made the always unfortunate announcement that everyone needed to leave the grandstands and take shelter in their car as the storm blew in, bringing surprisingly heavy rain and high winds, with an occasional bolt of lightning. Fortunately, it didn't last long, I was back in the grandstands in under an hour.

There was a lot of track work to do due to all the moisture. One of the water trucks was a full size tractor-trailer and it had some real difficulties doing the track packing as the banking combined with the wet muddy surface caused the trailer to keep slipping down the track, sliding along behind the cab at over a 30 degree angle.

Eventually they worked the track in enough to bring out the cars. Many of the full bodied cars came out to help with the packing and they eventually got hot laps going less than two hours after the scheduled start of the event, a pretty good achievement for the volume of rain we got.



The roadrunners started the hot laps. Coming from the Northeast I'm used to roadrunners referring to 4 cylinder cars so I was really happy to see full-size street stocks here. The track was still so wet that there were multiple spins throughout the hot laps sessions and it looked like they could barely put the throttle down halfway, even down the straights. It was probably the wettest track I've ever seen racing on.



The track got progressively better throughout the modified and sportsman hot laps and into the sprint cars. The racing throughout was very good. Looking at the track on Google Maps it looked like a half mile and I always worry about half mile tracks leading to strung out racing, but it turned out to be a 3/8th mile and very competitive. Multiple grooves opened up the entire night and the racing was very entertaining. The car counts were great too, with over 30 modifieds, full fields of sportsman and roadrunners, and 19 sprint cars.



The sprint car feature was the second to last of the night and featured one of the wildest wrecks I've ever seen in person. One car caught the bike going into 3 and went over, tumbling multiple times, bouncing off the top of the wall and flying out of sight down the embankment outside of the track. I was on my feet screaming when that happened, it was wild. The driver was totally fine and the car didn't look nearly as bad as I would have expected after they spent quite a long time retrieving it.



The roadrunner feature rounded out the night. They were entertaining when they were racing but they really struggled to string even two contiguous laps together. There must have been 10+ cautions in the 20 lap race.

When they finally managed to take the checkered flag I headed straight out to my car to take off. Many people had left after the modified or sprint car race because it was so late, but there were a surprising number still there for the roadrunners. It was 2am when they finished. I drove the 6 hours straight home afterward, getting home around 8am. I might have slept in my car for a bit before embarking but I was planning on going to the Whelen Modified tour in New Hampshire tomorrow evening and needed to be back in time to head out to that. It was worth staying for the completion of the event though. Big Diamond put on a great show in a nice facility that exceeded my modest expectations of it. I would happily come back, and would particularly love to see sprint cars there again.