

## 1-27-22 Cocopah Speedway:

Today marked only my second day of racing this year and the first new track of the year. I was in LA for the Clash at the Coliseum next week and when I saw that Cocopah was running three straight days of 410 non-wing sprint car racing it was a pretty obvious choice to come out a week early and check it out. It was about a 5 hour drive from LA and leaving at 11am I managed not to hit any traffic en route. The track is right outside of Yuma, which is a way from everything else so there's a lot of fairly empty desert once you get past San Diego, but it was an enjoyable enough drive. The track is located next to a casino and resort and had a big dirt parking lot and dirt road leading into it. The road was very washboarded and bounced the car around quite a bit.



I pulled in about 5pm for 6pm hot laps and there were very few people in the parking lot or grandstands. It was \$20 to get in, less than I was expecting for 410 sprint cars. The midway is at the top of the track and is a large concrete area with large clean bathrooms and the concession and souvenir stands. The grandstands were all concrete in the style that I usually see set up for lawn chairs but no lawn chairs were allowed here. I found a seat in the top row on the turn 1 side, but top row didn't give much advantage other than a backrest because there's always people standing along the top behind. The views were pretty good overall, the only thing that would interfere with my sightlines is someone sitting one row below me on the turn 4 side.



The track is a large  $\frac{3}{8}$  mile with some banking but pretty flat overall. Nothing in the infield to obstruct views which I always appreciate. It's situated right outside of Yuma and right next to an Air Force base so there were fighter jets flying overhead throughout the night, plus some regular jets landing at the airport.



They started right on time, pushing the cars out for engine heat and wheel pack around 5:30 and starting hot laps right about 6pm. 27 sprint cars signed in for the USAC/CRA, mostly 410s with a few 360s. I was

happy to see that many, CRA usually had solid car counts but I wasn't sure with it being somewhat far away and early in the season if there'd be a drop but there wasn't. It was also the first time racing at Cocopah in close to 10 years. The IMCA support divisions were pretty disappointing though, with 3 stock cars, 5 sport compacts, and 6 hobby stocks.

The sprint cars did single car time trials and Damien Gardner set a new track record. The line was around the middle to begin with and continued to move up throughout qualifying. The track wasn't particularly tacky and I didn't see anyone bike up at all, but there seemed to be a good amount of grip nonetheless.

Heats began with the IMCA classes. The three stock cars started three-wide which I thought was a cool touch, and the racing was actually fairly solid for the first half or so, but once they got strung out it was just follow the leader around the bottom. It was a similar story with the other two divisions, okay for a lap or two but then just strung out. It's hard to have good racing with that few cars on that big of a track.



The sprint cars rounded out heat race action with three heats. It was very good racing, with multiple grooves right from the start. It was very impressed with the quality of the racing and the competitiveness, there was a top and a bottom all throughout the night and a great battle at the front of heat one. The track looked very fast.

In heat 3, Sterling Cling went too hard into turn 1 out of third place and hit hard into the wall, barrel rolling four times and getting the top of the cage on top of the concrete wall, making visible sparks in a very violent crash. He was okay but the car was done for the weekend unfortunately.



After scratching the B main they took about 45 minutes doing track prep after heats. They took a tractor and turned over the top and bottom of both turns then ran it in with the pack trucks, leaving only a narrow strip in the middle untouched. I was surprised how little rubber the track took. There was some bluegroove but not as much as I would have expected, especially since it appeared to be a fairly slick track. I guess it's grippier than I thought initially. I was impressed by how the track held together throughout the event.

The IMCA features all went caution free and didn't have anything particularly exciting, not surprising given the low car counts. The sprint car feature was a wild one though. The racing was very good with multiple grooves, with the leaders generally running the top, exactly what I like to see.

One car got into the turn 1 wall, I think he hit with the right rear which lifted the front wheels off the ground, then just went right over the wall and came to a rest on all fours parked right outside the track, between the concrete wall and the billboards, almost like he meant to do it it was so perfectly parked.



The track had a crane in the infield, apparently brought in specifically for when sprint cars are racing. I guess cars going over the wall isn't too uncommon, and if they were to go over the billboards it's a decent drop down on the backstretch and turn 1 and 2 sides. The crane lifted the car right back onto the track and set him down, then they pushed the car to the pits. It seemed quite intact and they attempted to fire it up and continue.



When they resumed the race it got crazier still. Not one, or two, but four cars were upside down before the 30 laps were completed, in four separate incidents. Three were cases of a car that jumped the cushion or otherwise got into the wall and got upside down as a result. One was two cars getting together entering turn 1, both backing into the wall and one getting on the roof.

It took over an hour to finish the 30 laps. Outside from the long time spent under red flags, the feature was excellent and the racing was a lot of fun to watch. The cushion was right on the wall on both ends of the track which made for great slide job opportunities, and there was a bottom that some cars chose to run. There was basically no dust either, just a tiny bit that didn't affect my viewing at all. I was very impressed, especially because the wind was slightly blowing into the grandstands.

I left around 10:30, though with a green to checkered feature I would have been out by about 9:30 instead. Not too bad for a 6pm start. The crowd didn't seem that big, but it's also a Thursday night and 4,000 person capacity grandstands so it was probably solid attendance. One thing that was kind of cool is they would have different happy hours at the beer stand throughout the night. The commentator would announce \$3 beers until the start of qualifying, or until the crane is off the track, or whatnot. Overall a nice facility and great racing, I'm glad I made the drive out and got to see such a good show with great weather.