

## 6-11-22: Ventura Raceway

I just so happened to have a free Saturday in LA on the same weekend USAC/CRA was going to be at Ventura and that became the obvious choice for where to spend the evening. It took about 2 hours to drive up because even on a weekend with no crashes or anything there was 45 minutes of traffic on the way up. After my GPS took me to a gate that was closed with no signs or anything I wandered around a bit and found the correct entrance, driving past a big concert stage and BBQ festival set up in a fairgrounds parking lot on the way in. Further into the fairgrounds was the track and parking there was plentiful, though cost \$10.

I arrived a few minutes after gates opened and there were a ton of open seats. The track is really small, I knew it wasn't even quite a quarter mile around the outside and looking at it up close it looks smaller than that. There's not a ton of banking but it's distinctly there and the whole track is shaped into a sort of bowl. There's catch fence around the entirety of it.





I chose seats on the exit of four in the top row. It seemed like there would be pretty good sightlines everywhere, there's nothing inside the track to obscure visibility. It also has such short straightaways that side to side angles aren't really an issue. This might be the only permanent track I've been to where I could see the ocean from the grandstands. It's right on the beach, only a few hundred yards behind the grandstands.



Hot laps were scheduled to start at 3:30. I really appreciate when there isn't much downtime between gates opening and stuff happening on track (looking at you Kokomo, with gates that open three and a half hours before engine heat). They actually started 10 minutes early with the kids classes that ran the inner oval, which was unfortunately not countable.

The sprint cars used the whole track on corner exit during hot laps, with one getting into the front stretch wall a bit with the right rear. The track opened up very quickly and cars were running fairly high up. They went straight into qualifying afterward, two laps single car where the push truck pushed the cars off out of the entrance in turn 4 and they took the green the second time around, with the trucks following them around and exiting in turn 3. One car got the wall on the exit of four with the right rear and another got decently hard with the side into the turn 3 wall. Multiple cars over rotated the turns, it seemed pretty slick. One rode a wheelie almost the entire length of the backstretch!

They took a road grader and turned over the entire track after hot laps and I got a real solid slice of pizza from a food truck there. Concessions were actually quite reasonably priced, a lot better than the other California tracks I've been to. \$6.50 for a cheeseburger and \$10 for chicken and fries is on par with what I expect to pay at most places. They had a souvenir with a display that had a couple pins. I asked if they were for sale and they apparently were glued onto the display but the lady said I could have one of the USAC ones for free so I appreciated that.



There were three different kids classes that had 4 or 5 cars each. There were also 5 senior sprints, 6 sport compacts, 4 hobby stocks, and 24 USAC/CRA sprint cars. I'm glad the sprint cars showed up because everything else was pretty disappointing. 24 is solid and right around what I was realistically hoping to see.

The kids classes ran heats followed by the rest of the classes, with the sprints last. Nothing particularly notable happened up until the sprint cars. I did notice that all restarts are single file for all classes.

The sprint cars were really throwing it into the turns, getting quite sideways, which is one of the things I love about non-wing racing. Several cars were popping wheelies on the exit of the turns, especially down the backstretch. There was one that climbed the front wall pretty good, getting well up on the side before coming down on all four wheels. There was a stackup on the exit of four that had one car do two high speed 360 spins but managed to stay upright.



The sport compact main had some of the best racing of the night, even though only four cars were left on the track after a few laps and one was completely off the pace the whole time. Two cars were battling hard for the lead and one turned the other to take it, after which they threw a caution flag just to dock him two positions for the maneuver. Later, coming to the white flag, the leader got wide in turn four and tagged the wall with the rear, getting into the second place car and putting him into the wall, which he ricocheted off and into the third place car. The now second place car drove into three and intentionally got into the right rear of the leader, taking them both up the track and in doing so dislodged the final piece of his already flapping hood so it came up entirely over the windshield. He went on to cross the line first and the third place car made the pass for second in a race to the line, then the winner was DQ'd for rough driving. Quite an exciting finish with only three cars really in the race.

They took a needlessly long 30 minute intermission where they barely did any track work. The fog actually started rolling in in earnest during this time, I was starting to get worried about visibility. It got distinctly harder to see, never became an issue fortunately but there was quite a bit of fog. The lighting was decent, you could see everything but I'd have liked there to be a little more of it.

The hobby stock main was uneventful, unsurprising with only four cars. Two of them were clearly teammates as well, and one retired very early on.



The sprint car feature started all 24. There was good racing at the beginning, with some cars on the outside, very tight and exciting. Damion Gardner had engine trouble all night and only got the car fired for the heat, so started pretty far back in the feature. It was fun watching him work his way up through the field in the first 12 laps or so. There were several cautions in 1 and 2, cars spinning and collecting others. Nothing big and most drove away, but several cars ended up on top of the wheels or front ends of other cars.





The lack of a lap counter made it difficult to keep track of where we were at in the race, but the announcer provided updates during cautions. There were four or five cautions in the first half of the 30 lap feature, but it ran pretty straight after that. After 10 or 12 laps the track seemed to take a lot of rubber and it glued everyone down to the bottom, you couldn't make any progress anywhere else and it killed all passing. Everyone had the left sides on the berm and no one could get around anyone else unless they made a mistake and opened up the bottom. For having a nice track all night previously I was disappointed how it turned out for the feature.

A car with a 360 engine actually won. It shows how the horsepower isn't useful if you can't get it to the ground, especially on a short track and especially with the conditions tonight. I think they said it's the 6th time ever that a 360 has won a USAC/CRA race.

Even with a lackluster ending to the feature I enjoyed the facility and the racing overall. I love small bullrings like that and I love non-wing sprint cars. It was easy to get in and out though it had a nice crowd by the end. I anticipate I'll be back in the future, being so convenient to LA.