

11-12-21 Arizona Speedway:

I left around noon this afternoon to drive from Vegas to Phoenix for the first night of the Western World Championship. I could have stayed to watch the Super Late Models at the Vegas dirt track since they were debuting tonight but I'd almost always watch sprint cars, especially USAC, and I really wanted to get to Arizona Speedway before it closed forever.

It was actually quite a pleasant drive for most of it, a lot through some small towns with nice scenery. The track itself is past the city, a little ways outside along a highway pretty out and by itself. There were a decent amount of people there. It wasn't hard to find parking but it looked like it could fill up with a big show.

I arrived right around 5:30pm which was the advertised time for hot laps. There wasn't anything happening on track at all, no cars or packer trucks or anything. I wasn't sure if I missed it or something but the people sitting next to me said they hadn't seen a single car yet, not even for engine heat. They ended up starting almost exactly a full hour late for no apparent reason, they didn't say anything about it or have anything happening on track.

I had reserved seats in the furthest most grandstands on the turn 4 side. They were pretty shallow with individual fold down seats for all rows except the top one, which was a bench. That worked well so I could stand. Standing gave a nice view of the track, sitting down the shallowness meant a lot of heads were in the way. The section was nicely elevated so I could see almost all of turn 4 even though I was sitting in it.





The track itself had good dark clay and some nice banking, about a third mile in length. Not much in the infield to obstruct visibility, with a full wall around the outside and wooden fences to combat noise apparently. I'm not sure what was close enough to be affected by noise from the track.

Several teams had merchandise trailers on the midway and there were a number of food options plus the free NOS energy drink for USAC. I got dinner, wandered around and read a book for a while until racing actually started.



There were 38 USAC national sprints and 25 national midgets. They did engine heat in the pit area and push started all the cars there except for the features. Qualifying began with the sprints which, since they were pushed off in the pits, came right out onto the track under power and took the green first time across the line. One of the cars caught a bike in turn 1 and did a full pirouette on the tail tank before coming back down on the wheels. Tanner Thorson set a new track record by almost three tenths. The track came in really quick, building a cushion immediately and moving up quickly, with the majority of the cars running right on the cushion. Thorson was visibly so much smoother than the others just in the way that the car set right into the cushion and it was pretty clear that he was going to take the top time after he ran.

They brought out the packer trucks to knock down the cushion before the midget qualifying but it built back up pretty quickly. Many of the midgets were bouncing big time through one and two, I'm surprised none of them flipped. Another track record was set, again by almost three tenths.

They knocked down the cushion again before sprint heats but it built right back up. It's clearly some really tacky dirt with a ton of grip. The cars are so fast, for some reason they looked visibly faster to me than at most tracks, it was really fun to watch them racing. The track was top line dominant but wide open for racing with a good amount of passing and slide jobs even in the early heats. It was very competitive overall and had two lines for racing.

Midgets then ran heats and it was a similar story there, very competitive and some excellent slide jobs and cars sliding into gaps I didn't think they could fit into. They continued to bounce through the turns big time.

The sprint cars had a C main that saw two of the ten cars get upside down in the ten laps. One biked in turn 2 on his own and went over a couple times, then another was after the checkered flag. Across the finish line, one car forced another into the outside wall down the front stretch, causing it to climb up the wall and dig in with the left front and start cartwheeling. It bounced nose to tail to nose in a perfect cartwheel at least two full rotations, and the first jump from my perspective appeared to be higher than the catch fence! It was a wild and surprisingly perfect cartwheel, the most so that I think I've ever seen.

18 cars started the sprint car B main, the surprise was Chris Windom who had engine trouble early in the night and therefore had to start from the back. It was fun watching him work his way through the field and he got up to 9th, ultimately taking a provisional for the feature.





The midgets had one scratch and they just started 24 in the feature without a B main. The track crew turned over the top of the track but didn't do any other prep and didn't roll it in or anything. On the initial start of the feature, Emerson Axsom in turn 1 caught a bike up in the loose stuff on the top of the track and started tumbling, rolling into and up the catch fence in turn 2 and going over 4 or more times, coming to a rest on the wheels.

The racing throughout was very good, with multiple grooves. Cory Eliason led much of the feature in his first midget start.

One of the unique things they do at Arizona Speedway is that the winner gets to sit on a steer. They literally bring in a trailer with two big steers that they bring out into victory lane. They must be pretty well behaved since they're just on a lead, right there with the rest of the people celebrating. They had quite the horns on them.



The sprint car feature rounded out the night but had a hard time getting started. There were two false starts and a stalled car before they finally got it going on the fourth attempt. There was a bunch of contact between cars, and pretty sizeable, but they were able to keep it going. The racing was a lot of fun and the track continued to impress with slide jobs and multiple lanes available.

It was an excellent night of racing. The track was in perfect condition with no dust whatsoever and the racing was competitive and exciting from the first heat. It's not often you find a track with such an impeccable surface. I'm really sad that it's closing down, it put on an excellent show that would have been well worth coming back to in the future. I'm glad I got to experience it when I could.