

2-05-22 Irwindale Speedway:

It was exciting to discover that Irwindale was racing the day before the Clash at the Coliseum, I'd already planned my trip out to LA and was intending to go watch practice and qualifying for the Clash on Saturday, but Irwindale was a much more enticing option, since it's just as close and more importantly is a track I've been wanting to check out for years. With all the talk over the last probably 10 years of it closing down, you never know how much longer it's going to have unfortunately and I was really glad to get to experience it myself.



The track is located right off the freeway surrounded by a number of mining/refining plants on both sides, leading to the distinctive equipment in the background behind the backstretch. I got there a little before 3 when gates were scheduled to open. It was a bit of a mystery what the schedule itself was going to be, since at different points I had seen that it was a 5pm start, 2pm start, and 3pm start, all I believe on the track website or Facebook page. There was also no schedule posted until after the gates opened on race day, the only thing listed was the classes that were going to appear. Gates did in fact open at 3 though, and they started single car qualifying for the late models beforehand and I was able to see much of the track through the fence while waiting to get in.

The facility was very clean and modern with very nice permanent grandstands and large restroom and concession buildings out back. The pit area extends right behind the grandstands and is separated by just a chain link fence so you can see right to the team's pits.

It seems like pretty much everywhere would offer a good view of just about all of the track since they are quite tall even and the bottom row is set up above the wall and back a bit. It's full aluminum benches with

backrests on every row. There are boxes up top so the top 10 or so rows are behind support pillars. I started out sitting in turn 1 and moved to turn 4 side because there was a tree that blocked a very small part of the track, right where the pit opening was located. Otherwise they were pretty much identical vantage points. The sun set off to the turn 1 and 2 side so it wasn't too bad for most of it but there was a half hour window right before it set down that wasn't optimal.



Each of the three series did single car qualifying, starting with the Spears Modifieds, then the Spears Late Models, and the Spears Super Late Models. I got into the stands in time for all of the Super Late Model qualifying. It wasn't particularly interesting but it was neat how the dominant line seemed to be about a lane down from the wall in both turns as the vast majority of cars ran there, but a few ran more towards the bottom and weren't too far off in pace.



There were 33 super late models, 36 pro late models, and 21 modifieds, much larger fields than I was expecting. It was features only for all three, with all cars transferring and lined up from qualifying. The schedule had on it an on-track meet and greet with the drivers and they had all the cars line up on the front stretch for it, but it didn't seem like too many people went out onto the track and it wasn't entirely clear to me how you were able to even get out on track. I was mostly concerned because those things usually take 45 minutes to an hour and they were already behind schedule, but they impressed me by wrapping it up very quickly and getting everyone off the track and opening ceremonies started right on time, with cars hitting the track for the modified feature only a little after 5pm.

Their mascot is apparently a lug nut and they had him come out in a converted legend car and drift around the track. I didn't think legends had the horsepower to drift like that, maybe they upgraded the engine while they were changing it into a convertible.



The modifieds were the first feature, running for 75 laps, mostly caution free and not a lot of battles either. I've rarely seen great racing out of these style of modifieds with the very narrow wheels, as opposed to northeast tour or SK modifieds with the really wide Hoosiers which always put on an amazing show.

The main attraction was the 200 lap Spears Southwest Tour race for the Super Late Models. It turned out to be an excellent feature that got off to a great start with 20 laps of battling for the lead between the top two, plus almost two full laps of three wide by some cars mid pack. Lots of cars were bottoming out entering turn 1 while the tires were still building pressure, making for a ton of sparks as the field went into the turn each lap.

There was a caution at lap 40 that I eventually worked out was a competition caution. On the restart, the top two cars were nose to tail for about 60 laps, neither able to get away and battling close together the entire time. It was very entertaining to watch, they were nose to tail for just about the entirety of the first half of the race. Second place finally made the pass by using the bumper just a bit entering turn three and completing the pass into one. Both were running the top and were able to run side by side around the top lap after lap.

There was a halfway break with 7 minutes to work on the car, including changing tires. The race was more caution filled in the second half with multiple of them coming in fairly short order, though one car had a notable slide about the entire length of turn 4 and somehow saved it and didn't hit anything.

On lap 125 the leader slammed the wall in turn 3, rubbing against it until eventually coming to a stop in turn 4. I'm not exactly sure what happened but the announcers thought he just had the back end step around on him entering turn 3 and pounded the wall hard. It was an unfortunate way for that battle to end

since it was so close throughout the first half and no one else in the field really had anything for those two cars and the other one pretty much dominated the rest of the race. Still, the first 100 laps were some of the best 100 laps of asphalt super late model racing I've probably ever seen.

The pro late models rounded out the night. These cars were much more able to use the full track to race. Whereas the supers would basically both be on the top even when side by side, the pro late models could run the top all the way down to the grass, and there were cars making passes by going all the way to the grass in the turns and sliding back up on exit. They put on an entertaining show as well but there were a lot more wrecks and they at points had a hard time stringing five laps together.

Eventually it was announced at lap 60 that future caution laps were going to be counted due to the 10pm curfew. I was surprised they had a curfew since it didn't seem like there was much within earshot beyond mining operations, and 10pm is pretty early even then, curfews usually are at 11pm in my experience. In any case, I would have liked to see some more urgency throughout the event because the curfew was in place, such as cutting down on the excessive number of pace laps and figuring out how to hook up wrecked cars faster. I don't know what was going on but it took them so long to get a car on the hook and they seemed unable to parallelize even though there was more than one tow truck, they'd only hook one car up at a time. That was my biggest complaint of the night, things otherwise were kept moving fairly well.

20 laps were probably eaten up with cautions of the final 40, but the racing was good when it was green. With four to go one car hit the wall head on in turn 3 in a really violent crash. The driver was okay but it was a lot of cleanup and being after 9:50 I decided to leave because there was no way they were going to be able to restart in time for the curfew. Three features took 5 hours to run, but it was a lot of laps and it was entertaining for the most part. The facility is nice though and I appreciate how wide the track is and how much of it is usable. Hopefully I'll be able to make it back sometime and check out the inner third mile as well.