

7-03-23: Rockford Speedway

As I was already in Chicago for the street race, I was excited to see that Rockford Speedway was running as they unfortunately announced that they're going to shut down at the end of the year. After all the torrential rain over the last few days it was a beautiful day, nice and sunny. After spending the day exploring Chicago and eating deep dish pizza I got to the track with my brother about 40 minutes before heats were scheduled to start.

The track is situated right in the middle of town which I didn't expect for some reason, it was surprising to all of a sudden see it right along the road. We parked and there was a big line at the ticket window that didn't seem to be moving very quickly. When they announced anyone with online tickets could go to the side gate to get scanned in I quickly went online to get them. They offered reserved seats, which turned out to be the entirety of the frontstretch main grandstand, and unreserved "bleachers" that appeared to be on the backstretch, so that's what I went with. With presumably most people having to choose their reserved seats at the window, that probably made the line so slow. I've never understood selling reserved seats at the window, if you're already there in person you could just as easily go pick out the seat yourself and it would speed up the line significantly.



We got into the gate and wandered around the midway which was well built up and very crowded. They had multiple food and beer stands plus an actual bar in its own building full of racecar sheet metal on the walls and ceiling and various other racing memorabilia that was a neat place.



I collect pins so I was excited that the gift shop actually had one, it's not common for tracks to have them.



When we eventually tried to find our seats it turned out to be surprisingly difficult. The signage made it seem like we were seated on the backstretch but the workers at both ends of the track didn't allow anyone to walk back there. Eventually we found someone who confirmed that bleacher seats are on the backstretch but he thought they weren't selling them for today's race. He walked us back to the main office, where he went in to talk to someone, then came back out and said he had to talk to someone else, then we waited for about 10 minutes until someone else came down and said that we could go through the turn one side gate and they would let us through. My guess is that they weren't intending to sell the bleachers section but someone didn't update their website and therefore they ended up selling tickets for it, and they eventually realized and had to open it up.

We walked back around the outside of turns one and two where they stored a bunch of various equipment and vehicles, including a number of school buses that seemed like they were there to be raced.



The whole bleacher situation ended up working out for us as there were very few people in that section and we got top row seats with a good view. With no one around, the sightlines were very good, though as people filled in I think it would have been much more of an issue with seeing turn three and the exit of two. The sun was pretty bad over turn one but it was below the trees by 7:45.



The racing started with “original sixers”, six-cylinder cars that had a huge turnout, 36 of them. I’m not sure I’ve been to a track with more than a dozen six-cylinders before. They really slide up to the wall in the middle of the turns, with many almost hitting it. It’s surprisingly top dominant with not many cars running low on their own accord. There was some three wide throughout the heats and always some fun racing on the track. I really enjoy a top dominant track and there’s not many of them that are asphalt. It’s fun watching the cars right up on the wall and sliding up the track in the corners.

The 4-cylinders came next, and there were 14 of them. They were much nicer looking cars than the 6-cylinders, with racing bodies and they looked quite a bit faster actually. The announcer said the 6-cylinders are the entry class with 4-cylinders being a class above, and they were noticeably faster as well. The racing was again very good, running two wide three deep for a while. It was still top dominant but a couple were trying to make the very low line work. They still slid up through the corners and was fun to watch. I also appreciated the choose cone and double file restarts.

The late models were the premiere class, with 16 of them, then a special flagpole race for 6 street stock style cars. They had a tractor tire as the flagpole just past the start/finish line.

They ran spectator drags in the middle, with 25 that showed up and a wide variety of vehicles. It was a standard standing start, one lap elimination race, though they ran the final a best two out of three, including the second race backwards around the track.



The 4-cylinder feature was some of the better 4-cylinder asphalt racing I've seen in a while. It was close and competitive throughout the field with two wide battles for the lead for many laps and two by three back in the pack for sustained periods as well. They could also throw sliders into the corners, coming in low and sliding up to the top for corner exit. At one point the top four chose the top on a cone restart. In fact, only two chose the bottom at all, with the other 11 all starting on the top.

The sixer main was 16 surprisingly green flag laps with 24 cars. There's enough cars that there's always something happening. One caught fire after the checkered flag with a lot of flames, it took them a while to get it put out.

The 76 lap late model feature was the main event of the night. It was good racing, with passes for the lead multiple times between a number of different cars. It was a lot more entertaining than I'd expected for not a large car count. They did take a 10 minute break at halfway where the crews were allowed to do any work they wanted. It turned out to be a pretty fun race.

There was a firework show at the end of the night that we didn't stay for. I did notice as we were leaving that there were a bunch of people parked in the Menards parking lot across the street from the track waiting to watch the firework show and the track announcer jokingly talked about the "freeloaders" outside the track.

I'm glad to have been able to count Rockford, it's a nice facility and it's sad to be losing it. They clearly have a lot of community support as the frontstretch grandstands were quite full and the midway was packed every time I walked around it. The racing groove at the top of the track and all the passing throughout the divisions was a lot of fun and worth the visit.