

8-31-24: The Milwaukee Mile

One of the standouts on the 2024 IndyCar schedule was the return to the historic Milwaukee Mile, and a double header at that. It made it a clear choice to check out, especially since IndyCar has a large grid this year and has been very competitive.

I flew out for the weekend, getting a rental car in Chicago and stocking up on the required deep dish pizza before driving up to Wisconsin. The parking situation wasn't entirely clear from the website, other than that they offered infield parking, which was something I definitely didn't want to deal with. It turns out that \$20 let you park in the lot right near the entrance. I don't know how full it got since I arrived only slightly after the lots opened, but there seemed to be more space available than it appeared when looking at Google Maps.

They opened gates right on time and we got in without a long line, then wandered around the midway. It's at the Wisconsin State Fairgrounds and it was a really nice one at that. They had what seems to be the required chairlift ride that all the state fairs seem to have, though the chairs were all taken off of it.



It had a lot of permanent buildings with unique character for a wide variety of food and beverage options. They didn't have too much as far as sponsor booths or driver merch. Penske has a merch hauler and there was a big tent with combined IndyCar merch, but that was it, other than the small HyVee tent that had what I was really looking for, a race pin, and that was very exciting to add to my collection.



They had a number of interesting food options and a very good variety overall. Whenever I'm at a fair I try to get the weirdest food I can find that I'm not going to get elsewhere which in this case was spaghetti and meatballs on a stick, which wasn't particularly special but I don't regret trying. They also had quite excellent garlic cheese curds, though I'd expect nothing less being in Wisconsin.

The whole midway was actually free to the public and they only checked tickets when going into the actual grandstands themselves. I don't know that anyone really came out that didn't have a ticket but it's a neat concept at least. There were a number of free concerts going on in the amphitheater area that I didn't partake of but could have been fun.

They had a couple of display cars in the midway to look at, then we took a walk into the infield and it was neat that we were able to do that. The garage area required a separate ticket but we were able to walk around the rest of the inside of the track. Along the frontstretch they had brought in street course catch fencing in front of the fences that existed already, presumably because they didn't feel they were up to par for IndyCar. The interior fencing along the rest of it did look better and they didn't have to supplement it.



It was also fun to see the Air Titans up close as they had a couple of them parked in the infield, along with the sweepers and other support vehicles.

We eventually went up to our seats for qualifying, NXT then IndyCar. We were top row and had a good view of the track. I'm very familiar with New Hampshire Motor Speedway since it's the closest NASCAR track and also a 1 mile circuit. This seemed to have somewhat shorter straights and wider radius turns, and a bit lower banking, only 9 degrees.

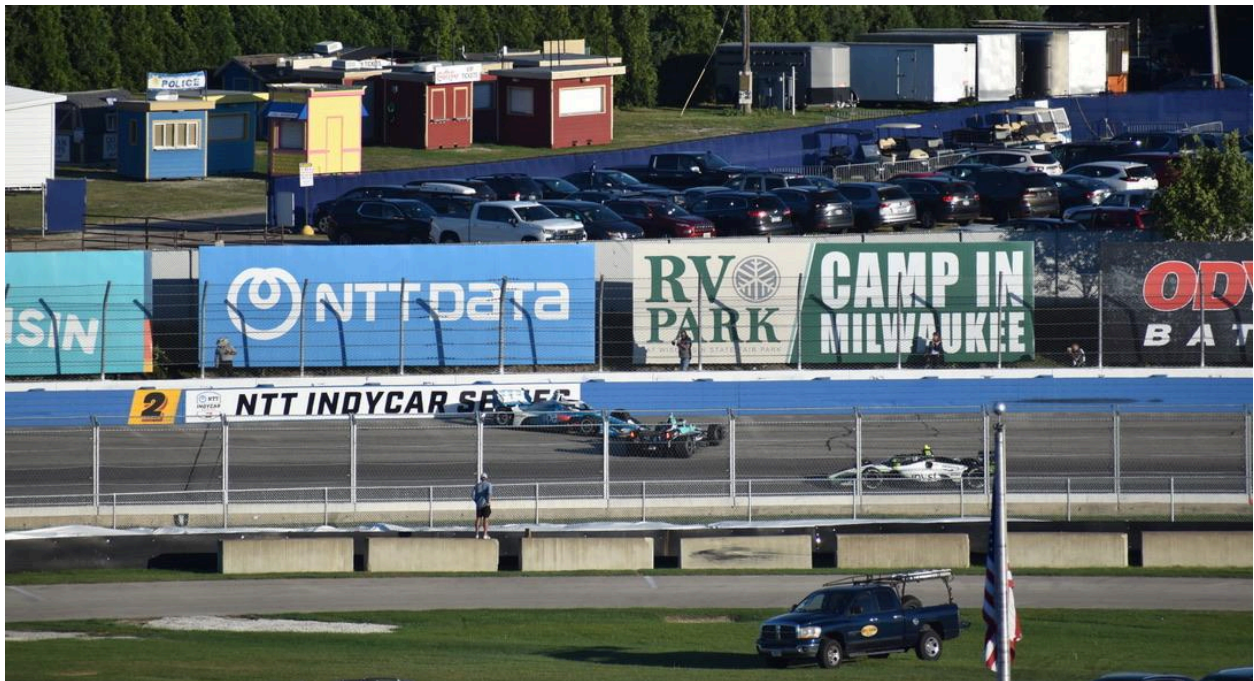


One of the NXT cars had light contact with the wall in qualifying. IndyCar was clean and they ran about 10mph faster than the NXT cars on average. Everyone ran slower on their second lap, seemingly due to tire degradation being extremely high.

The NXT race was first up. It wasn't particularly interesting but there was one spin and a lot more passing than I expected, though my expectations were minimal. There was a lot of passing through traffic in particular and one car managed to defend heavily down at the bottom of the track and go about the whole race holding his position while being the seemingly slower car. I was able to hear the PA clearly throughout.



The IndyCar race was very interesting. The tire degradation was a big deal with falloff of multiple seconds over the course of a run, leading to pit stops being dictated by tires instead of fuel. There was a lot going on, including a crash involving Newgarden, contact on pit road sending a tire flying down pit lane, and Herta losing a wheel on track.



I was impressed by the racing. It was exciting and interesting, something that can't always be said of the previous IndyCar races I'd been to (looking specifically at Gateway where the leader couldn't pass the last place car). There were a lot of passes, especially from Conor Daly who worked through the field multiple times and gave Juncos Hollinger it's first podium finish. Pato O'Ward won which I was happy to see. I don't have a great sample size to draw from, but I think it was the most interesting IndyCar race I've personally attended.