

5-20-23: Bowman Gray Stadium

Bowman Gray had been on my bucket list for a long time. A track inside a football stadium is something you don't find every day, and they can draw 10,000 people for a weekly show which is absolutely insane. I was really excited to find out that they were racing on Saturday night after the trucks at North Wilkesboro.

The truck race finished in plenty of time for us to drive the hour to Winston-Salem. I had no problem skipping the Cup heats. We arrived right about when gates opened. I didn't necessarily feel the need to do so but we had nothing else to do and I wasn't sure what the parking situation would be. Looking at it once we got there, I'm not sure where they would park all those people so it was good to get there early where parking was easy.

We got in and got our tickets at the gate, then walked onto the midway that puts you up at the top of the stadium. It was really cool to finally see in person, it's one of the tracks I've specifically wanted to go to the longest before I finally visited it.

We found a seat in the top row of the no smoking/alcohol section, as I was told by my friend who grew up nearby that that's the place you should sit, as things can get a bit rowdy sometimes. Really anywhere is going to have a good view I think. There's nothing in the infield to obscure a view and it's a small track so I don't think there'd be an issue really anywhere.



The big thing that struck me was that there was no catch fence around most of the track, only in turns one and two. The grandstands go right up to the track and though they are raised up somewhat from the track, they're not that high and I would be scared of a tire or a piece of debris going flying right into the

stands there. I would never sit there, it's far too dangerous and I'm surprised they're even allowed to have seats that close. People straight up lean over the sides and cheer on the cars as they're racing, maybe 6 feet from the cars. That's way too close.

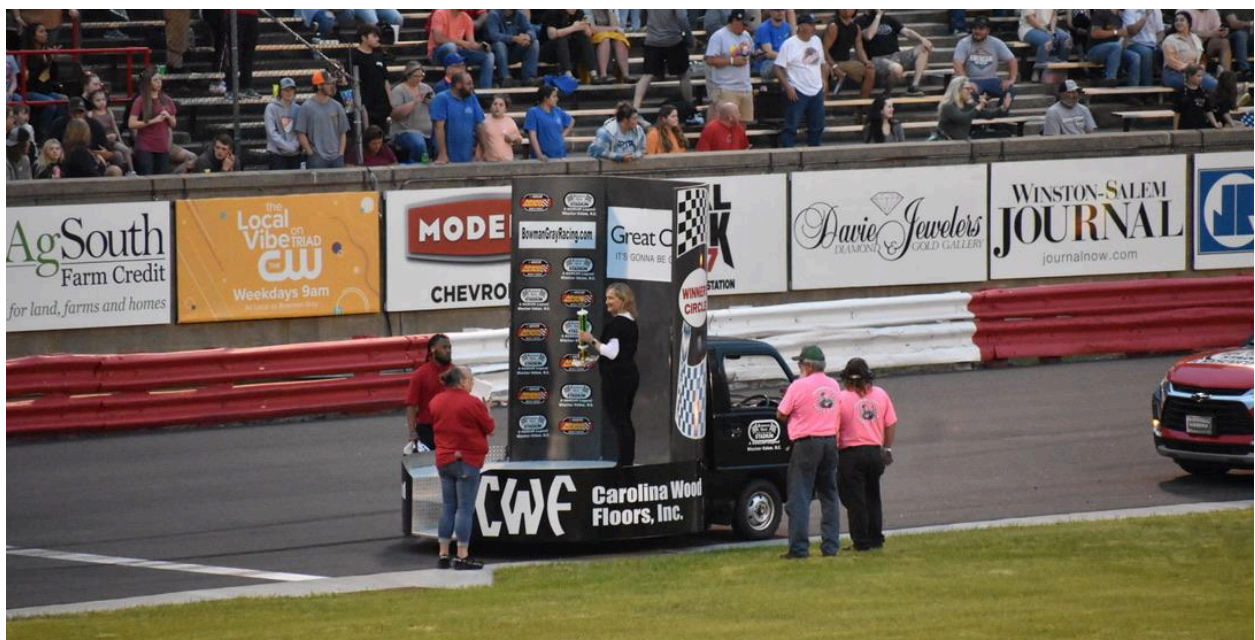


Outside the safety issues, it was an amazing setup for a racetrack. Such good sightlines, such a unique setting, an absolutely insane crowd. It was really cool to see.

They ran practice from 6-7 or so, then did single car time trials for the modifieds at 7 and nothing until the show started at 8pm. When I saw the schedule posted beforehand with "racing at 8pm" I figured it was features at 8 and heats beforehand, but no, there was no racing until 8. This was frustrating with weather in the area and rain obviously coming.



I was very relieved when they started right on time and the first feature took the green to make the track countable. It was the stadium stocks, which seemed like fancy 4 cylinder cars. There were 21 of them, and they drew for their starting positions. There was an unusual mix of street stock, mini stock, and late model style bodies all together in the same feature. They ran a lot of pace laps and had single file restarts but the racing was close and fast. There were plenty of dive bombs into the turns but it was surprisingly clean considering. They did winner interviews only, with a stage on the back of a truck that they drove out onto the track. That was unique.



The sportsman had 17 cars and they were seemingly late models. It took a while to line everyone up after each caution but they raced pretty good once they got going.

The modifieds were scheduled for their feature next but it started to lightly rain, just the faintest drizzle but enough that they couldn't throw the green. They circled for quite a while before finally giving up and bringing the modifieds back to the pits. They kept circling with the tow trucks and various other vehicles, including a pickup that squealed the tires through every turn.

The modified race did eventually happen as the rain moved through, the first of two dual mains, and I was glad I got to see the premiere class though the racing wasn't as interesting as some of the other classes. It was very single file and a lot of follow the leader, not a lot of passing.

It was an event sponsored by Great Clips and during the time between races they announced that Bryce Kenney was in attendance, the driver of the Great Clips Mohawk Warrior Monster Jam truck which I appreciated.



They ran a skid plate race and those are always very fun. On the first lap in turn two, the leader got into the wall and rolled onto the roof! I wasn't expecting a flip at all tonight, and definitely not in the skid plate race. They got the driver out and left the car on the track upside down and restarted the race. It was very entertaining with a lot of drivers having trouble getting around and some being pretty good at driving the skid plate cars. They were very willing to just leave disabled cars on the track.



The sportsman second main had a number of crashes, including a stackup of five cars along the wall in turn four before the initial start. They eventually started single file after numerous failed starts. There were a couple cars that were really moving other people out of the way to pass and we saw the first bit of retaliation of the night during this race. Multiple drivers at the front were wrecking each other and the announcer was really playing up the conflict.



Speaking of the announcer, the speakers were really good but it took me a long time to figure out where they were located. They sounded like they were coming from the middle of the field but that obviously didn't make sense. I eventually realized they had huge speakers at the far end, on the building in three and four that were echoing off the stadium in an interesting way causing the illusion that they were in the middle.

The second modified main was pretty tame actually, running green to checkered.

The street stock main was the last weekly feature, and it had cars that mostly had late model bodies. There were a lot of wrecks in this one too and an entertaining feature.

The last race was the chain race, which was fun but not quite as fun as a figure-8 train race. There were demolition derbies to end the evening but we decided to skip out on those, they've never done much for me. The racing was a lot of fun throughout and I'm really glad I finally got to attend a race at Bowman Gray. It's truly a unique spectacle in motorsports, I don't know of any other track that's like it.