

3-01-24: Nitrodome at Planet Hollywood

I've been a big fan of Nitrocross after having watched their races in Phoenix and Glen Helen over the last three years and I was curious what the race would be when they announced the season finale in Las Vegas. I was considering going and ultimately made the decision when I realized that it was during the same weekend as NASCAR and I'd be able to go to the Cup race at the Superspeedway. It's been since 2011 and that was, in fact, the last race before the reconfiguration and the 20 degree banking. So basically a second new track even though it isn't technically one.

I flew out with my brother and my dad drove down to meet us. We were a bit later than anticipated getting to the track due to a lengthy visit to the Hoover Dam beforehand but it didn't end up being an issue, despite surprising difficulties with parking.

I had guessed originally that Nitrocross would take place at the short course off road track at Las Vegas Motor Speedway. I noted it during my trip to the Bullring in December and it seemed like a perfect place to host it, based on the success from Phoenix, Glen Helen, and ERX at the short course tracks. I'm not surprised that they chose to build a temporary track on the Strip but I do wish they would have gone on the dirt at LVMS.



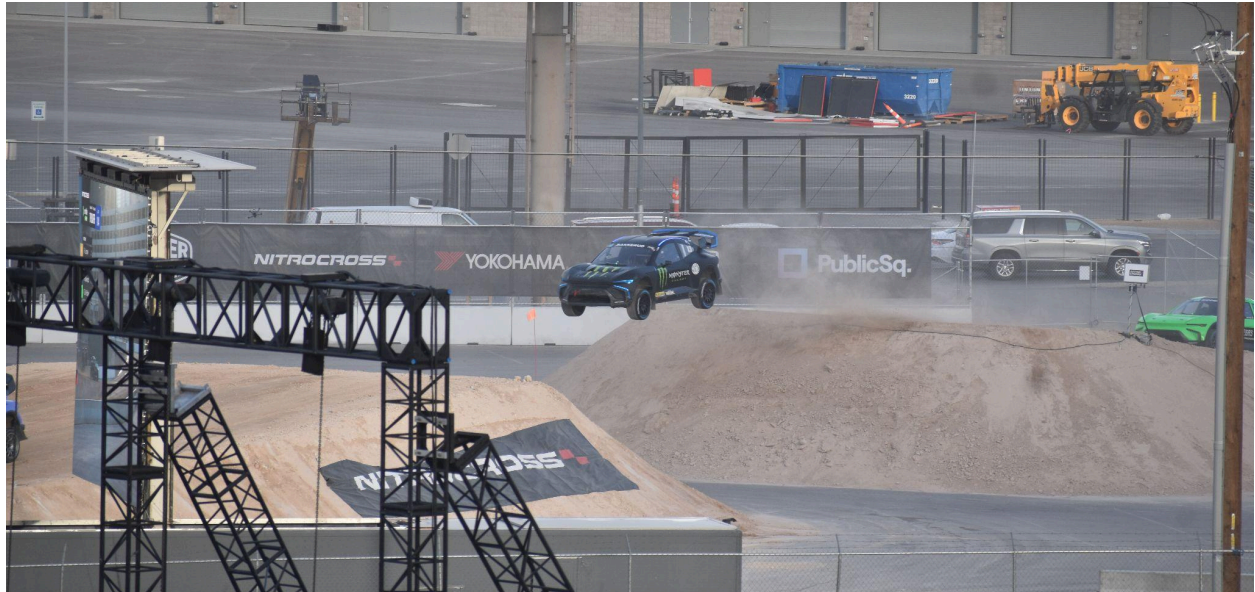


The track was big and interesting for a temporary parking lot track, especially compared to what GRC did when they came to Vegas previously. The Luxor parking lot track in 2014, for example, was about as small as you can get while still actually having a road course. This made full use of the area they had and included the signature gap jump for the Group E cars. For the rest of the classes, they simply ran a section of it in reverse and added only a single turn so it was not a separately countable configuration.

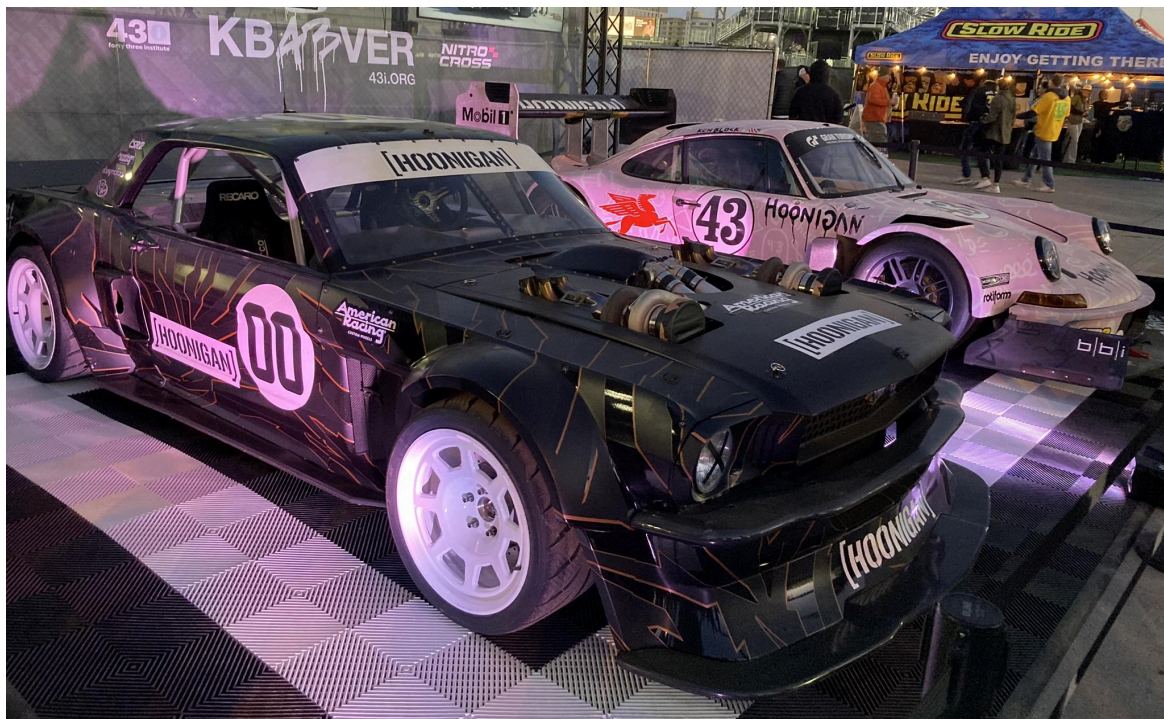


The grandstands offered a good view, but you couldn't see everything as one turn was blocked behind the Club Nitro tower and about half of one of the dirt turns was obscured by the fencing. Despite arriving late we were still able to secure top row seats with as good of a view as could be had from those grandstands. They did a good job of moving people quickly through the line, and it's an improvement that they start racing 5 minutes after gates open rather than 5 minutes before, but it's still kind of ridiculous that it's basically impossible to see all the racing unless you're first in line.





The midway was similar to other Nitrocross events I'd attended. I appreciate the open paddock and the accessibility of the drivers. They had a number of sponsor booths and it was really cool that they had a number of Ken Block cars on display, including the Hoonicorn. They had an absurdly large bar set up, but I guess it's Vegas. The crowd seemed strong, mostly filling the grandstands. They went back to the odd thing of selling separate grandstand vs general admission tickets, but they only checked wristbands for grandstands at the start of Friday and didn't seem to be checking at all afterward. It's a weird distinction to draw, I was glad to see them get rid of it at Phoenix and Glen Helen and I was surprised they brought it back here.





I actually ran into Ryan Preece, NASCAR Cup Series driver, in the grandstands! Cool to see him checking out the festivities and he was more than happy to take a picture with me.

The car counts were excellent, records in all classes. 12 Group E, 12 SxS, 9 Next, 12 Baja Bugs, and 11 Pro SxS in their class debut.

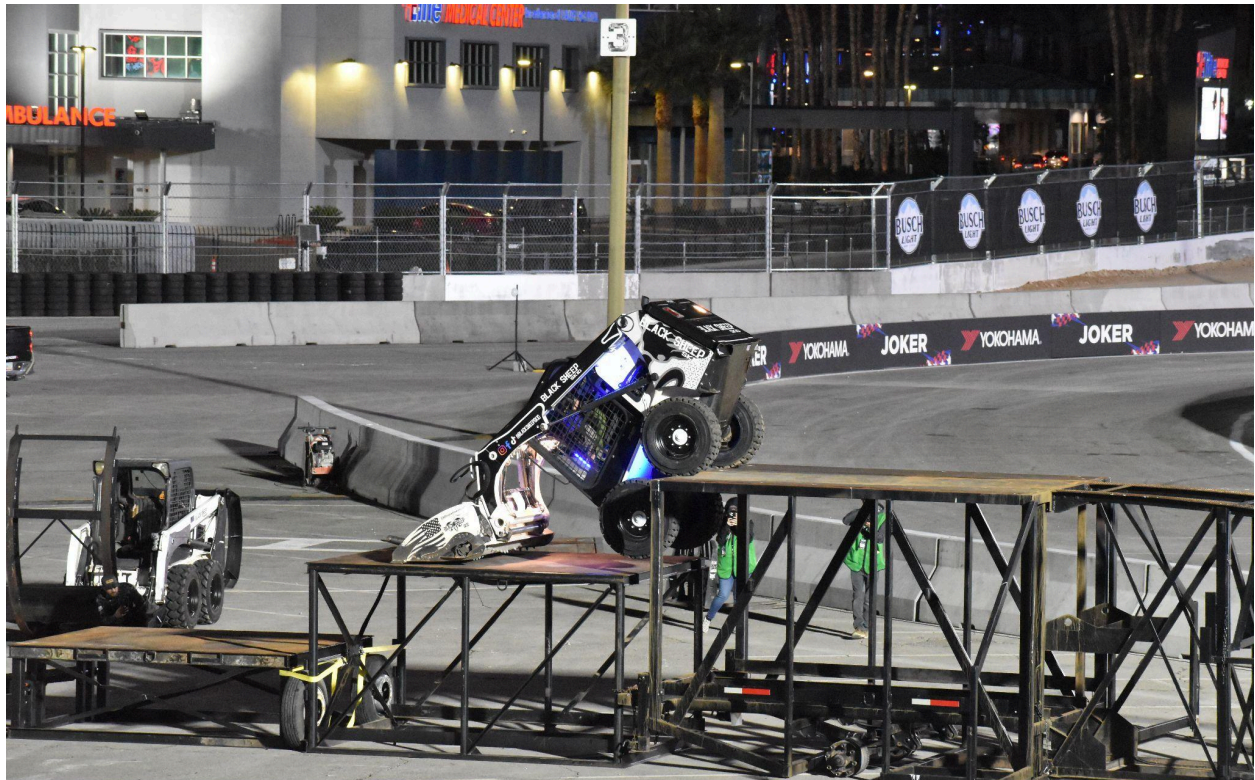


The track was narrow and hard to pass, but it had a pretty short joker that was between 1 and 2 seconds slower depending on the class and that kept things interesting. It was definitely possible to pass though, and we saw several good passes on track, primarily through the dirt sections. The final turn before the finish line had a really tight exit and I'm kind of surprised more people didn't slam the outside wall there, it seemed to really come up quickly. The dirt was a good addition, it made for a lot of passing opportunities and allowed drivers to distinguish themselves quite a bit more.

Nothing crazy happened for most of the night but there were a couple unique moments. Two Side by Sides got stuck together in their heat races, spinning a couple donuts trying to get unstuck. It ultimately required a forklift to get them apart. A Baja Bug managed to roll on its side in the dirt during practice.

It was super windy the entire weekend, we're talking 20mph+ sustained wind with gusts up to 50mph. We were a bit sheltered with the big buildings around but it was enough that the Nitro

Circus entertainment they had planned was unable to go unfortunately, since they had some of the really big names there including Ryan Williams. The entertainment we did have that was super unique was Black Sheep Skid Steers, and I really enjoyed their show. They did a lot of cool stuff with skid steers, climbing steps, spinning donuts, doing wheelies, and even doing somersaults.



The wind did mean that it was surprisingly cold, at least given my expectation that Vegas be at least tolerably warm all year, but 25mph winds will do that. I do think that it made a lot of people leave early. They didn't run a bad show, per se, but there were delays that weren't explained and there didn't seem to be a huge sense of urgency to get things moving. The originally published schedule wasn't followed and they would periodically post the upcoming schedule which would be different than previously stated, but they were accurate to the times they posted when they were within 30 minutes or so.

The Baja Bugs had probably the best feature of the night. They're just so much fun, even though they don't have much power they manage to always be super entertaining, with close battles and always action on track. I'd like to see them run heat racing just to see them on track more often.

I noticed that a number of people were watching from the Planet Hollywood parking garage that overlooked the track. It seemed like a good vantage point and I decided to check it out tomorrow, which I did. Turns out, it was the best seat in the house. It was legitimately the best view and you could even hear the PA system. For the second night we went into the



grandstands for the first half in order to walk around the paddock and whatnot but migrated to the parking garage for the second half for the better vantage point. Even when the trams went by they barely obscured the view.



The racing was good overall given the confines of the track (street lights, buildings, etc). It's never going to live up to racing on the short course off road tracks that I'm used to, but it was a lot better than previous parking lot courses I've seen and the car counts were very impressive. I wasn't disappointed by the show, though flying 6 hours to watch it is something I don't think I'd do again.