

7-04-23: What Cheer Raceway

Somewhat surprisingly, there were only two races I could find in the entire 6 hour radius from Chicago on the Fourth of July, one in Michigan and one in Iowa. Because the only race I could find on the 5th was also in Iowa I decided to go to the What Cheer figure 8 races to save myself about 12 hours of back and forth driving.

I made my way leisurely over from Chicago, stopping at a fun railroad museum, a disc golf course, and anything else interesting along the way. With nothing in particular to do throughout the day and plenty of time to get to the track I turned my GPS to avoid freeways and took the backroads through rural Iowa for a nice drive.

I arrived at the track, which was located in a small town fairgrounds. It was a pretty informal setup with no entrance gates or anything, just someone standing along the pathway to take your \$7 admission. The grandstands were weirdly shallow with seats that slanted backward significantly, making the sightlines pretty bad. I can't imagine they were designed to lean like that, must have been sagging due to age.



The main stands were covered then there was a fairly large area next to the stands with picnic tables that also offered a pretty good view. I ultimately decided to just sit on top of the picnic tables as that was more comfortable with an equally good view as the stands themselves.



The track is a tiny dirt figure 8 track, I'd guess a tenth mile around the outside, it looked notably smaller than an $\frac{1}{8}$ mille like Lanco. There were light poles in the center of the two loops and a significant berm built up in the middle, with a good amount of banking in the turns. It was a nice dark dirt that had a lot of moisture in it, never dusty and in fact the more powerful cars would spray clods of dirt in the air instead. The flagstand is on the backstretch relative to the stands, though I suppose that means the stands are actually on the backstretch. I liked that decision and I wish more tracks would consider it, since it removes an obstacle from our sightline and at such a small track there's really no detriment to having the flagstand across the way.

The concession stand had a good selection of items including ice cream floats. I had a cheeseburger which used liquid nacho cheese as the cheese, which is a very unusual choice that I'm not sure I've seen before. The crowd seemed to be composed mostly of families and there were a lot of kids running around throughout the night. I don't know much about the surrounding area but the roads I drove in on at least seemed very rural so this is probably the big thing to do on the Fourth.

They started about 45 minutes late with hot laps, but they at least went quick and it seemed like only a small subset of the total cars came out for hot laps. They only took 30 minutes, which was the exact time scheduled for them to take. I'm always skeptical of such a short time but they did pull it off. Racing started at 7:15.

The cruisers were first. I'd seen a similar division before at Slinger Speedway and they're a fun concept, it's a driver with the steering wheel and brakes and a passenger with the throttle. They actually ran the outside oval! I didn't expect that, and it meant for a bonus countable track and that's always exciting. There were 11 of them and they were fun to watch since the driver and copilot had to work together with the throttle and steering. Whenever there was an incident it was a red flag, then they restarted the next

time around to the line, with no yellow flag being used. I guess that makes sense for such a small and tight track.

The front wheel drives also ran the oval, and there were 14 of them. They had a good bit of attrition where only two of the 5 cars finished the second heat.



The stock heats were the first class that ran the figure 8 and they started from a standstill, unlike the previous two that had a rolling start. There were 8 of them, then 7 of the open cars that followed. The opens had a lot of power, kicking up big clods of dirt that almost made it into the pit area. They were a lot faster and a lot bolder in the intersection and had a wide variety of body styles and wheelbases, including a couple with the driver sitting in the center of the car.



The 6 trucks and 8 pro stocks ran their heats to finish up heat racing. I'm not sure exactly what made a pro stock but they looked very similar to the other stock classes. At one point, one had some contact and went over the inner embankment at speed, getting all four wheels off the ground by a foot or so.

They only started 10 cars maximum so they ran a B main for the front wheel drives, with only the winner advancing.

There was a long intermission where they played various sorts of fair games with the audience, like a three legged race and an egg race. The features started at 9:10 and each featured a full inversion which made things fun.

The cruiser main had some pretty good racing, it was very short in laps but was entertaining, and only 5 cars finished. They did winner interviews in front of the grandstand after each feature.

They didn't have a tow truck for disabled vehicles and instead used a tractor.



The open main was the best of the night. They had real power and more speed than I would have thought I'd see from such a small track. The track clearly had a lot of grip too, with multiple of them seriously biking up on two wheels.

At this point it was fully dark so they stopped to do a 20 minute firework show. I don't often stay for firework shows but there were still races to go afterward, and it was the Fourth of July so I'm glad I got to see some sort of fireworks. It was a better show than I expected for a small town event.

The last couple races continued the trend of a lot of attrition, with only half the starters finishing the truck main. All throughout the night there was no dust at all and I didn't even need to wear ear protection surprisingly. I didn't have particularly high expectations for a fair figure 8 race but I was very satisfied with the show they put on. It's my first Iowa figure 8 race and I know they take it pretty seriously out here and it did make for a fun show.