

= 1998 Pepsi 400 =

The 1998 Pepsi 400 was a NASCAR Winston Cup Series stock car race held on October 17 , 1998 , at Daytona International Speedway in Daytona Beach , Florida . Originally scheduled to be held on the Fourth of July , the race was postponed until the fall due to widespread wildfires in central Florida ; it was the first superspeedway race to be held at night , and the first time ( and , as of 2015 , the only time ) there were two consecutive points @-@ paying restrictor plate races , with the Winston 500 being run first on October 11 .

Contested over 160 laps , it was the thirtieth race of the 1998 season . Jeff Gordon of Hendrick Motorsports took his eleventh win of the season , while Bobby Labonte finished second and Mike Skinner finished third . Gordon retained his point lead on the way to his third Winston Cup championship title .

= = Report = =

= = = Background = = =

Daytona International Speedway is one of six superspeedways to hold NASCAR races , the others being Michigan International Speedway , California Speedway , Indianapolis Motor Speedway , Pocono Raceway and Talladega Superspeedway . The standard track at Daytona International Speedway is a four @-@ turn superspeedway that is 2 @. @ 5 miles ( 4 @. @ 0 km ) long . The track 's turns are banked at 31 degrees , while the front stretch , the location of the finish line , is banked at 18 degrees . John Andretti was the defending race winner . The event was the fifth of five night races held during the 1998 Winston Cup Series season .

The 1998 Pepsi 400 was originally scheduled to be run on July 4 , 1998 , as the seventeenth race of the 33 @-@ event Winston Cup Series schedule . It was the first superspeedway race , and first NASCAR event held at Daytona , to be run at night following the installation of Musco lighting at the Daytona International Speedway ; it was also scheduled to be broadcast live on CBS , the first stock car event to be televised live on primetime network television .

During the days leading up to the scheduled start of practice at 3pm , Thursday , July 2 , 1998 , concerns rose on account of the massive wildfire outbreak that was underway in central Florida ; thousands of people were forced to evacuate the area , and Interstate 95 , the primary north ? south thoroughfare through the region , was closed . At 10am on July 2 , NASCAR announced that the race was being postponed ; while July 25 was an open date , the decision was made to reschedule the race for October 17 , to allow additional time for the wildfires to be controlled . At the time of the postponement , the race was sold out ; this was the first time the summer race at Daytona International Speedway had achieved sellout status .

The rescheduling meant that the race would not be televised on CBS , as the network did not want to compete against Fox 's broadcast of Game 1 of the Major League Baseball World Series , also scheduled for October 17 . On July 21 , it was announced that The Nashville Network , a cable affiliate of CBS , would air the rescheduled race live in its entirety .

Prior to the race , Jeff Gordon led the Drivers ' Championship with 4632 points , and Mark Martin was in second with 4344 points . Dale Jarrett was third in the Drivers ' Championship with 4098 points , Rusty Wallace was fourth with 3883 points , and Jeff Burton was in fifth with 3805 points . In the Manufacturers ' Championship , Chevrolet was tied with Ford for the lead with 216 points each ; Pontiac followed in third with 138 points .

= = = Practice and qualifying = = =

Practice and first round qualifying was held on Thursday , October 15 , 1998 ; Bobby Labonte led pre @-@ qualifying practice with a lap time of 46 @. @ 722 seconds . Five Ford teams , those of drivers Chad Little , Jimmy Spencer , Rich Bickle , Dick Trickle and Billy Standridge , ran

Thunderbird @-@ bodied race cars , instead of the standard Taurus ran at most 1998 Winston Cup Series races , believing the Thunderbird to have an aerodynamic advantage at the restrictor plate racetracks . Randal Ritter 's car failed to pass inspection due to extreme irregularities in its construction , and the team withdrew before practice began .

Bobby Labonte posted the fastest time in first round qualifying , a lap of 46 @.@ 485 seconds ( 193 @.@ 611 miles per hour ( 311 @.@ 587 km / h ) ) , winning the Bud Pole Award ; Jeff Burton was second fastest . Jeremy Mayfield qualified 25th , the last car to qualify for the race on the first day of time trials . Second round qualifying was held during the afternoon on Friday , October 16 ; the fastest car in the session , placing 26th on the starting grid , was the No. 07 Chevrolet driven by Dan Pardus , qualifying at a speed of 189 @.@ 945 miles per hour ( 305 @.@ 687 km / h ) . Kenny Wallace and Rich Bickle also improved their qualifying times and made the starting field for the race ; Bickle was the slowest car to qualify on time , at 188 @.@ 608 miles per hour ( 303 @.@ 535 km / h ) . Bobby Hamilton , Jimmy Spencer , Ricky Craven , Johnny Benson , Jr . , Ricky Rudd , Kyle Petty and Darrell Waltrip received provisional starting positions ; Rick Mast , Dick Trickle , Rick Wilson , Robert Pressley and Gary Bradberry failed to make the field for the event .

Ernie Irvan , 14th in Winston Cup Series points entering the event , opted to sit out the majority of practice and qualifying , having suffered injuries in a crash the previous week at Talladega Superspeedway ; Ricky Craven practiced and qualified the No. 36 Pontiac for Irvan . Irvan did run a few laps during practice on Friday night , October 16 ; the " Happy Hour " practice session began at 7 : 30pm and was scheduled to run for two and a half hours , but was delayed during its duration for an hour and 45 minutes , as the track was dried following afternoon thunderstorms . Bobby Hamilton posted the fastest speed in the session , 191 @.@ 345 miles per hour ( 307 @.@ 940 km / h ) . Johnny Benson 's car suffered a hood failure during the session , the hood flying off of the car .

== Race ==

The race was held starting at 8pm on Saturday , October 17 , 1998 . Ernie Irvan dropped to the rear of the field prior to the start of the race , due to a driver change ; Ricky Craven had qualified the car . Although Bobby Labonte started on pole , Dale Jarrett , who had started third , led the first lap of the race ; Dale Earnhardt took the lead on lap two and held it through the first caution period of the race , for rain , for three laps starting at lap 13 . A large crash occurred on lap 32 ; initiated by Kevin Lepage losing control of his car in turn two , the wreck collected eleven cars , including Hut Stricklin , Geoff Bodine and three @-@ time Winston Cup champion Darrell Waltrip ; Earnhardt lost the lead during pit stops under caution to Rusty Wallace , with Dave Marcis pitting a lap later than the leaders to pick up five bonus points for leading a lap . Lepage suffered a fractured shoulder in a fall exiting his car .

The race resumed on lap 39 ; after Earnhardt took the lead for one lap at lap 44 Jarrett assumed the lead and held it for the next 37 laps , until pit stops shuffled the field and saw Earnhardt , Jeff Gordon , and Bobby Labonte swapping the lead among themselves . Jimmy Spencer and Jeremy Mayfield each also led a single lap during the long green @-@ flag period that ended on lap 107 when Dan Pardus hit the wall in turn two . Gordon had been leading at the time of the caution ; he lost the lead to rookie Kenny Irwin , Jr. during pit stops , and Irwin retained the lead after the resumption of racing on lap 110 , leading 15 laps in total until being passed by Gordon on lap 123 on account of having a flat tire , just before the caution came out once again for a rain shower .

The brief four @-@ lap caution saw Gordon retaining the lead ; he continued to pace the field as Irwin , on lap 141 , hit the Thunderbird of Chad Little , setting off a nine @-@ car accident that brought out a caution . Gordon continued to lead on the restart , and on lap 155 , five laps from the finish of the event , rain began to fall once again ; the caution flag was thrown , then the red flag , stopping the race to allow the track to be dried and the event to finish under green .

After a 37 @-@ minute red flag period , the race resumed ; Gordon was able to hold off his challengers over the final three laps to take his eleventh win of the season . In the midst of the final sprint , Chad Little ended up getting turned from behind by Jimmy Spencer while in a three wide battle exiting turn 4 and crashed hard into the inside wall , failing to make it to the stripe and

finishing 20th . Gordon set an average speed of 144 @. @ 549 miles per hour ( 232 @. @ 629 km / h ) while leading 49 of the race 's 160 laps . Gordon received \$ 184 @, @ 325 in purse money . Bobby Labonte finished second ; Mike Skinner was third , while Jeremy Mayfield and Rusty Wallace finished in the top five . The fastest lap of the race was set by Dale Earnhardt , at 191 @. @ 383 miles per hour ( 308 @. @ 001 km / h ) .

Gordon , who had entered the race with the points lead , extended it to 358 points over Mark Martin ; nobody would challenge Gordon over the remainder of the season , and he would go on to win his third Winston Cup Series championship ; he was the youngest driver to accomplish the feat . The race took two hours , forty @-@ six minutes , and two seconds to complete , and the margin of victory was 0 @. @ 176 seconds .

= = = Statistical notes = = =

The 1998 Pepsi 400 was the only Winston Cup Series start by Dan Pardus , and the last by Billy Standridge . It was also the last race for which Rick Wilson attempted to qualify .

The Pepsi 400 would return to its traditional July date in 1999 , and has been held at night every year since the 1998 event , except in 2014 when it was postponed to Sunday due to rain .

= = Results = =

= = = Qualifying = = =

= = = Race results = = =