



Midwest Traveler

THE MAGAZINE FOR AAA MEMBERS

MAY • JUNE 2013

Start Your Engine

Race into Indianapolis
for Indy 500 fun

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A day in Lee's Summit, Mo.



Your finalists
are chosen



The Need for Speed

The Indy 500, the world's largest single-day sporting event, caps off a weekend of festivities for auto-racing fans.

BY KATHERINE RODEGHIER

IndyCars purr around the track warming their engines, just a gentle warning of what's to come. Then the green flag drops and the race is on.

In a millisecond, the noise of the engines elevates to a high-pitched whine. Spectators push foam plugs deeper into their ears as drivers accelerate to more than 200 mph, covering a football field a second, all the while fighting 5 G's to stay in control.

The lead changes dozens of times in the typical three hours it takes drivers to speed 200 times around the 2.5-mile track. Electronic signs count the laps: 197, 198, 199, and the crowd is on its feet. At lap 200, the checkered flag waves and the Indy 500 is over.

But the exciting finish is just the climax of a long Memorial Day weekend of thrills. Prior to race day on Sunday (Monday if it rains), visitors take in concerts, watch a parade, cheer rookies, collect autographs, people watch, and party. Indiana's capital city suspends most serious business for a weekend of racing and revelry that's been a tradition for more than a century.



Children enjoying the 500 Festival Parade, which takes place in downtown Indianapolis. Katherine Rodeghier photo

FRIDAY'S SOLEMN REMEMBRANCE AND CARB DAY ACTION

In downtown Indianapolis, the weekend begins on a somber note at the Soldiers and Sailors Monument. Remembering the reason for the holiday, the 500 Festival Memorial Service pays tribute to Indiana men and women who died in military service. Patriotic speeches accompany a wreath-laying ceremony, cortège, and fly-over of military aircraft.

In suburban Speedway, Ind., about 40,000 race fans gather at the Indianapolis Motor Speedway for Carb Day (short for carburetor, now a thing of the past) to fine tune these Honda and Chevrolet V-



8 engines in the speedway's numbered garages. Race teams vie for favorite garages, indulging superstitions about lucky and unlucky numbers. Fans hang out around the garages and Gasoline Alley leading onto the track, hoping to snag a photo or autographs of their favorite drivers and a close look at the cars. At about half the weight of a family sedan, these open-wheel cars are highly refined machines.

The next generation of drivers takes its turn today on the track during the Freedom 100. This Indy Lights race for up-and-coming drivers goes 40 laps and competition is fierce.

For rookies, the speedway is hallowed ground, like Yankee Stadium to a farm-team ballplayer. Yankee Stadium could easily fit inside the speedway's 224-acre infield. It's so big that four holes of a public golf course, Brickyard Crossing designed by Pete Dye, are played inside the oval. The Indianapolis Motor Speedway Hall of Fame Museum is there, too, with about 75 vehicles, including more than 30 Indy 500 winners.

Later in the afternoon, spectators make their way to the infield



Fans watching the race from the 224-acre infield, which is so big that it features a museum and four holes of a public golf course.

Katherine Rodeghier photo



IndyCars reach speeds of more than 200 mph during the thrilling race. ©IMS/Forrest Mellott photo

Opposite top: Pit stops, like this one with Penske Racing's Helio Castroneves, take about 10 seconds or less. Steve Swope photo

for rock concerts, dragging coolers and lawn chairs to wrap up the day with a night of music and picnicking.

SATURDAY'S PARADE AND PARTIES

The focus today centers on downtown Indianapolis where the 500 Festival Parade draws a crowd of 300,000. Spectators begin staking out their turf early in the morning, and by the noon start, they are four-deep on sidewalks, and all seats in reserved stands are full.

Bands march down Meridian and Pennsylvania streets followed by giant character balloons. Celebrities passing by on floats and in cars might be TV and film actors, pro athletes, country music singers, and rock stars. The biggest cheers go up for racing legends with last names like Andretti, Foyt, and Unser.

During the 90-minute procession, all 33 drivers in tomorrow's big race ride down the parade route in convertible pace cars. They line up three abreast in staggered groups arranged in the same starting position they'll take on the track.

Tonight, parties break out all over town, from informal get-togethers in parking lots and campsites at the speedway, to ticket-only affairs in downtown venues. The most famous, the 500 Festival Snakepit Ball, usually takes place over the Indiana Roof Ballroom. Celebrities in formal wear enter on a red carpet as crowds rubber-neck and news cameras roll.

SUNDAY'S SHOWDOWN ON THE OVAL

The gates to the speedway open at 5:30 a.m., and all morning, a sea of humanity pours in. It's a people-watching bonanza: dudes with tats peeking from heavy-metal-band T-shirts; diapered tots in strollers; white-bearded grandpas in checkered-flag hats; college kids in flip-flops; middle-age mamas wearing fanny packs. They head toward the stands or the infield, hang out along Gasoline Alley, and around the Pagoda, a 13-story tower at the finish line with luxury suites for VIPs like David Letterman, part-owner of one of the teams.

Just how many people are inside the oval at race time is a guess because the speedway doesn't disclose attendance. It has seats for approximately 250,000, but unofficial estimates put the crowd close to 300,000, making the Indy 500 the world's



Above: Fans kissing the bricks during Carb Day at the track. Katherine Rodeghier photo

Right: The Indianapolis Motor Speedway Hall of Fame Museum has about 75 vehicles, including more than 30 Indy 500 winners. Visit Indy photo



BEFORE YOU GO

For Indy 500 information and tickets, visit www.indy500.com or call (317) 492-8500. For parade details and other 500 Festival events, visit www.500festival.com or call (317) 927-3378. Visitor information is available through www.visitindy.com or call 800-323-INDY (4639).

To visit Indianapolis, first stop by your nearest AAA service office for maps, reservations, TripTiks® and TourBook® guides. A list of offices to serve you is on page 3 in this issue or visit AAA.com.

Order free information about Indiana through the Free Travel Information Card, found at page 48 or online at AAA.com/Traveler.

AAA is the primary sponsor of Team Penske driver Helio Castroneves at four IndyCar events in 2013. Steve Swope photo



largest single-day sporting event.

The build-up to the green flag covers many bases. Prayers are said, the military saluted, balloons launched, "Back Home in Indiana" is traditionally sung by Jim Nabors, celebrity performers lead the crowd in patriotic songs and the national anthem. Military aircraft circle low over the oval. Soon the words everyone is waiting for come over the loud speakers: "Ladies and gentlemen, start your engines."

An IndyCar can accelerate from 0 to 100 mph in three seconds and top speeds exceed 230 mph. This compares to 90 mph, the top practice speed in the first Indy 500 in 1911. Spectators keep their eyes on the pits where races often are won or lost. Tires are changed, fuel pumped, and aerodynamic adjustments are made. A good crew does it all in eight seconds.

As racers whip around the oval, a party revs up in the infield, especially in the Snake Pit near Turn Three. In the 1990s, the speedway clamped down on the pit's notorious drunkenness and debauchery. To make the Indy 500 more family friendly, activities like face-painting and bouncy houses replaced hot-bod and bikini contests. Still, a degree of Mardi Gras revelry prevails.

Whether watching on monitors on the infield or from the stands, eyes turn to the finish line for lap 200. After a victory lap, the winner climbs out of the car and kneels down to kiss the bricks on the

finish line, a yard-wide remnant of the original brick track that gave the speedway its nickname, "The Brickyard." Then it's on to the winner circle for the presentation of the trophy and a long swig of milk, a tradition begun in 1936 when the winner requested a bottle of buttermilk.

This Memorial Day weekend, race into Indianapolis and be a part of non-stop fun. ●

Katherine Rodeghier is a contributor from Western Springs, Ill.

Can't make it to **Indy?**

If you're not able to attend this year's Indianapolis 500, there's plenty of auto racing at other Midwest tracks.

Kansas Speedway in Kansas City, Kan., hosts NASCAR Sprint Cup Series races, the NASCAR Camping World Truck Series, and the ARCA Racing Series, and will host the GRAND AM Road Racing event weekend for the first time this year (Aug. 16 and 17). The speedway has a 1.5-mile tri-oval racetrack and seating for 73,635. Fans get an up-close view of racing action at the behind-the-scenes interactive Sprint FanWalk in the infield.

Gateway Motorsports Park, formerly Gateway International Raceway, reopened in March 2012 and hosts NHRA and ADRL on its quarter-mile drag strip and car clubs on its 1.6-mile roads course. It also has a 1.25-mile oval. Located in Madison, Ill., part of the St. Louis metro area, it has seating for 78,000.

Lucas Oil Speedway in Wheatland, Mo., hosts Midwest National and regional touring series on its 3/8-mile, semi-banked clay track. Race fans also can see drag boat racing here. Twenty-one suites, a fishing pond, camping, and go-cart track also are part of the facility that's about an hour north of Springfield in southwest Missouri. ●

— Katherine Rodeghier

AAA members can get a free Track Pass for the STP 400, April 21, at Kansas Speedway with any \$99 or higher ticket. For tickets and details, visit www.kansasspeedway.com or call (866) 460-RACE (7223).



For tickets and details about Gateway Motorsports Park, log on to www.gatewaymsp.com or call (855) RACETIK (722-3845). See AAA's car at the All-American Hot Rod Showdown, Aug. 9-11, and the AAA Insurance NHRA Midwest Nationals, Sept. 27-29. AAA member discounts include: up to 20 percent off a three-day adult reserved seat package when purchased in advance; \$10 off single-day adult reserved tickets when purchased in advance; and \$5 off parking at the gate when AAA members show their AAA card. Ticket discounts expire Sept. 20.

Kansas Speedway, above, will host the STP 400 on April 21. AAA is the primary sponsor of the #22 Penske Racing/AAA Ford Fusion driven by Joey Logano at three events in 2013, including the STP 400. AAA has an associate sponsorship for the remaining races in 2013. AutoStock/Brian Czobak photo

Lucas Oil Speedway offers a \$3 discount off general admission tickets to AAA members. See AAA's car at the Show-Me 100 over the Memorial Day weekend. For tickets, call (417) 282-5984 or visit www.lucasoilsspeedway.com.



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