



Drivers inspecting the fixing of the track.

IndyCar Drivers Are Looking Forward to 2013 Belle Isle Race on New, Bigger Track

DETROIT (AP) – It's October in Detroit, so the unofficial state flower – the construction barrel – is still in full bloom.

It was definitely true on Belle Isle, where workers were pouring and smoothing asphalt last week – a beautiful sight for a group of IndyCar drivers.

"This is great," said new series champion Ryan Hunter-Reay. "I'm really excited to see the way this place is getting fixed."

In June, the IndyCar series returned to Belle Isle, only to have the Detroit Grand Prix shortened when the track began to fall apart. Even after a two-hour red flag to fill holes and replace long strips of synthetic rubber, the drivers were only able to complete 60 of the scheduled 90 laps.

For many races, that would have been the end of their affiliation with the series, but when it is Roger Penske's baby, things are different. Not only will the tour come back to Belle Isle in June, it will do so for a doubleheader – a 70-lap race on Saturday and 70 more laps on Sunday.

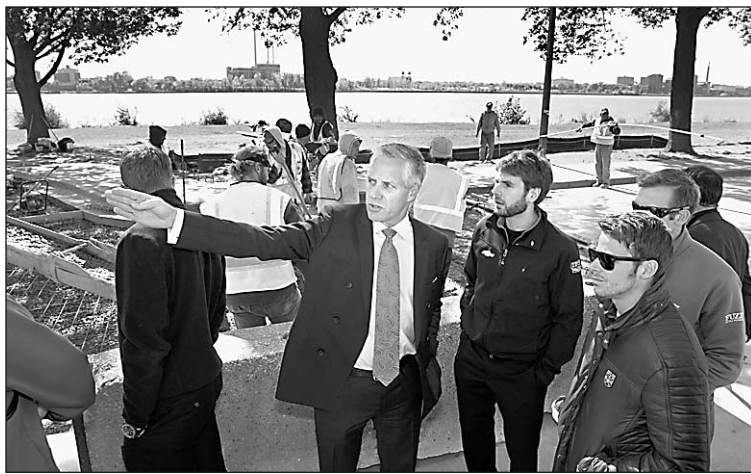
"This is a huge event for the city of Detroit," said Grand Prix Chairman Bud Denker. "Not only are we going to have a better track, thanks to millions of dollars in repairs and upgrades, we're going to have a bigger track with the expansion from 2.1 miles to 2.35 miles. And to celebrate that, we're going to be the host of the first IndyCar doubleheader – what we're calling the 'Dual in Detroit.'"

The track is going to return to a configuration used in 2000-01, adding a half-mile straightaway through the tree-lined center of the island.

"I don't know for sure what effect it will have, but it will definitely give us another place to pass," said series veteran Tony Kanaan. "That's a good thing on this track, and it should make things more exciting for the fans."

After a short press conference, the drivers jumped behind the wheels of Chevy Tahoes to drive parts of the track and check out the construction that is still going on along the riverfront.

"We're way ahead of schedule," Denker told them. "This will



Chevrolet IndyCar race drivers Ryan Briscoe (left) and Will Power (right) listen as Chevrolet Detroit Belle Isle Grand Prix Event Chairman Bud Denker explains the repairs that are being made to the Belle Isle racetrack.

all be done in three weeks, because we need to be finished before the snow gets here."

Even before getting out of their trucks, the drivers were impressed by what they saw.

"There's a lot more space here, and we're not driving over seams all the time like we were last time," said Oriol Servia, who finished fifth in June. "It's going to be a lot faster and a lot smoother."

The drivers watched and chatted with construction workers as a complete rebuild continued on a road that is used 51 weeks a year as the public route around the scenic island.

"That's the reason this was such an expensive project – we've done engineering studies far beyond anything that has been done for this track or this island before," Denker said.

"We've even done core samples from around the track and videotaped the sewer lines to make sure we could improve the drainage. We always have to remember that we aren't only building a racing surface, we're building something that has to survive as a public road during a Michigan winter."

Judging from last week's reactions, they are well on their way to accomplishing that goal.

"This looks fantastic," said Marco Andretti. "I love racing in Detroit, and this is going to change everything."

The reaction of the drivers was crucial, since they will be asked to drive two full-distance, full-point races here next summer.

"I hurt already," Servia joked. "When you race this track on a Sunday, you wake up Monday and you are sore. Now we're going to wake up feeling like that on Sunday, then have to do it all over again."

Andretti agreed, saying that the most important part of equipment that weekend will be the team's massage table, but other drivers focused on the implications of having a pair of races in two days.

"Most of the time, when you have two races in the same weekend, they are both half-distance for half points," said Will Power, who finished behind Hunter-Reay in the 2012 standings.

"These are two full races for full points, so the entire championship race could change for people that have good weekends and people that have bad ones."

It has been less than a month since the season ended, and even though the drivers were shuttling media members in their trucks, they found it impossible to completely hold back their instincts. Andretti charged past Servia heading onto pit lane at the end of the tour, while Hunter-Reay stayed out on the main track and claimed victory.

"I can't wait to get back here," he said.



Drivers and organizers all look forward to next year's "doubleheader" on an expanded Belle Isle track.



DRAGWAY RETROSPECT

by Dewey Ketner

The Thrill of the Rumble and Roar of Drag Racers

The race cars gathered at O'Reilly Raceway Park in Indianapolis recently were washed out by Mother Nature the weekend of Sept. 1-2, so the racing was rescheduled for Sept. 8-9, a drier and warmer weekend.

Hot on the track, as it turned out, after all. This was all for the 48th annual Mac Tool/U.S. Nationals NHRA Full-Throttle Drag Racing Series.

The racers and their cars returned with a firm mindset for one of the most competitive qualifying and overall racing venues of the 2012 drag racing season.

Spectator spirit was in the heavens as the grandstands were loaded to max capacity, all coming to see and hear the greatest show down on Earth of the most powerful racing vehicles ever built by man.

Crew chiefs, under security blankets, were making final calculations to the 8,000 h.p. fuel dragsters, determined to show their loyal fans that rainwater is just temporary while the mindset of dynamic racing competitors is the quickest and most durable and lasting.

Finally, the weather was perfect: race temperature about 79 degrees, barometer 29.07, adjusted altitude of 2,862. Track temperature was a sizzling 109 degrees, however.

Meanwhile, the competition itself was so evenly matched that many qualifying runs were made with reaction times within .005 (or, 5/1,000ths of a second), ETs within .003 (3/1,000ths of a second) and mph within .007 (or, 7/1,000ths of a MPH).

With competition so tight, every racer was mindful of cutting the clock tight – but not to foul. Fouling is rare among the top racers in the high-end classes, by the way.

The best of the most competitive racers in the U.S. were here in Indianapolis for two reasons:

1) To win the Wally Trophy for their class, but of prime importance, also:

2) To gain points to qualify for that great final showdown in Pomona, Calif., later this year.

Firesuits included helmet, neckwear, gloves and booties. For wear: expiration dates, fire resistance, etc., have been examined by the best safety crew in drag racing, as has the complete car body, chassis, transmission, parachute, tires, wheels, air foils and every connection thereof related to this equipment. Nothing is left to chance – safety first, safety last and safety always.

So, with approximately 400 vehicles to run off, time is precious on race day. Fuel cars normally have about 75 minutes between runs, which is a short time as the engines and clutches have to be rebuilt, sometimes engines replaced, along with tires, wheels and other various items until the car is ready for inspection.

Now, if you want to experience the greatest emotional impact on your "racing mind and body," just be at the spectator fence not more than 200 feet downfield from the launch/starting line.

This gives you the benefit of the burnout and the actual race.

The sensation from here is the funny car and fuel dragsters will give you a memory to last a lifetime.

So, as you might imagine, 75 feet from the launch of either of these two classes is an unexplainable experience.

The sound of 16,000 horsepower exploding the nitro fuel, the fury of the violent explosions creating uncontrolled turbulence of the environment, slapping your face and body not unlike a giant paddle, leaving you in a questionable state of mind – did I just survive a tornado?

And, how the sweet part – filling your nostrils and lungs with that mind-pleasing, powerful pungent sensation, maybe it's even an ardent spicy lavender smell (exhausted fuel).

The anticipation of that final race on Sunday, Sept. 9, for all the marbles, creates an out-of-this-world, sensational high for the race fan that lasts and lasts.

Finally, your mind is in Stage One, as the burnouts grab your attention – smoking tires bring the car to life.

Stage Two: Extreme ear-bashing sounds of generations of experimenting with horsepower quickens your heartbeat – the high is getting your mind in position for Stage Three.

Stage Three: Here, the wind feverishly beats your entire body – you can't escape it, but you wouldn't want to, anyway, because it's part of the whole program. Now comes Stage Four.

Stage Four: This is where you realize that less than 4 seconds have gone by (seems a whole lot longer because your body has just been 'abused' and will suffer the effects for quite some time), but it's drag racing joy that will long be remembered as your feet never forget the ground-shaking and rumble that they experience.

And now the stunning delight of smell, taste and heartbeat will carry you forever as you realize you have just witnessed an undescrivable final run between two of the most competitive drag racers in the world.

(W) Tony Schumacher (U.S. Army Dragster) 0.049 3.806 315.34

(L) Spencer Massey (FRAM/Prestone Dragster) 0.071 3.828 319.37

Weather conditions: air temperature 79 degrees, relative humidity 42 percent, barometer 29.07 inches, adjusted altitude 2,862 feet, track temperature 109 degrees.

This is Schumacher's 354th career event, with 116 final rounds and 68 prior wins. He has eight wins and two runners-up at this event alone and is in his sixth final round of the season, with one prior win. Massey is in his 65th career event, 20th final round, with 10 wins. This is his first U.S. Nationals final round. Massey is 9-3 against Schumacher in prior events and 1-0 in prior final rounds.

Do not ever bet against Schumacher at Indy!! Schumacher beat Massey off the line and made a quicker run to tie Bob Glidden with nine U.S. Nationals wins. There were several flashes atop his engine, but the track is clean and his car showed no visible damage.