

My First NASCAR Experience: The Allstate 400

by *Thomas Cackler, PassPorter Featured Columnist*

If anything rivals my love of Walt Disney World, it's my passion for sports. Although football and baseball are tops on my list, I also enjoy watching motor sports, including NASCAR. When a friend called a year ago to see if I could make it out and join him at the Allstate 400 at the Brickyard in Speedway, Indiana, I jumped at the chance to not only visit an old friend but also visit one of the most legendary tracks in the world for a real race.

As this was my first race, I don't know how much of my experience was due to the venue itself or how much of it was due to the nature of NASCAR. The atmosphere was more a combination of a state fair mixed with a flea market than a professional sporting event. Temporary food stands surrounded the track as did booths selling racing memorabilia with everything from seat cushions to used racing tires. Race sponsors had an interactive midway area that offered entertainment and activities in addition to promotions for their products.

Speaking of spending money, if someone complains about the price of food and souvenirs at Walt Disney World, chances are good they have never experienced a NASCAR race. The ticket itself for a seat in turn four was \$60 and that was about mid-range, with the least expensive ticket going for \$35. Food was slightly more expensive than at Walt Disney World, but not terribly so. Turkey legs, for example, were \$7.00 at the race while they are \$5.50 at Walt Disney World. Souvenirs were also slightly more expensive at the race. For example, a ball cap cost one or two dollars more than a similar cap at a Disney park.

The festival attitude extended into the parking lot where many people drive their RV's in and spend the entire week at the track. Most of these RV's flew the flags and colors of their favorite drivers. Those who didn't stay all week arrived early in vans and trucks to tailgate, preparing breakfast and lunch before heading into the track. The atmosphere certainly would remind someone of a college football game with the actual event taking a back seat to the tailgate parties on either end.

One other surprising thing was that the track officials allowed coolers in. While this did seem to lead to a few fans who "over-indulged," it provided cool relief for the extreme heat to the rest. Many fans passed around ice to help cool people off. When someone in our group got a little sick due to the heat, some nearby fans took wet washcloths from

their cooler to help cool him off. Conditioned by the NFL and Major League Baseball, it hadn't occurred to me that I could take in a cooler, but I certainly wished I had by the end of the day.

The other surprising thing was the volume. Loud doesn't begin to describe the level of noise from the machines that raced around the track at close to 200 miles per hour. During one stretch of the race when the line of vehicles circled almost the entire track, you couldn't hear the person sitting next to you even if they yelled in your ear. At first I scoffed at the people who brought earplugs, but I quickly realized that they had the right idea. I wouldn't have minded having a set during the race!

The race fans we encountered were excited to hear that it was the first race for several of us. Much like passionate Disney fans, they told us what to watch for and offered advice on how best to enjoy the race. We even experienced a bit of magic as the teenager with us received a previous year's ticket with his favorite driver on it. Overall, most of the crowd behaved well and allowed everyone to enjoy the race. Just like any other sporting event, there will always be a few obnoxious fans but the respectful fans heavily outnumber them.

The thing I disliked most about the track was the layout. The Indianapolis Motor Speedway is a big track with a large and heavily built-up infield. This meant that spectators in turn four couldn't see the backstretch or turns one and two due to the size of the track. Instead, those fans had to watch the action on large monitors positioned in the infield. I was a little disappointed that I paid \$60 to watch half the race on television when I could have stayed home and enjoyed the whole thing from my recliner for the cost of my monthly cable bill.

At the end of the day, this NASCAR event was different from any other event I had ever attended. As I went into it with no set expectations, I certainly wasn't disappointed. Was it my cup of Mad Hatter's tea? No, I can't say it was. While I won't rule out a race in the future, I have a feeling I'll attend another major sporting event first. To each his own!

About The Author: Thomas Cackler is the PassPorter's E-Book Team "on call" editor and consultant. A veteran of five trips to Walt Disney World and one Disney Cruise since 2002, Thomas is a member of several online Disney communities including the PassPorter forums where he shares his knowledge and love of the Disney Parks with anyone who will listen. He lives in Iowa with his wife Julie and nephew Joey.

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