

My First Race Day

By Cindy White

It was a beautiful sunny Saturday in Ventura, CA. My guy and I were strolling Main Street, visiting art galleries and antique stores, when the sound of whining engines invaded the air.

“Let’s go!” He said.

“Sure”, I replied.

A middle aged woman who had never experienced dirt track racing, this was to be the day.

A short drive away, we entered the Ventura Raceway arena and found seats above the mud line. It was clear why most people sat in the higher bleachers.

A colorful collection of tiny delivery trucks lined up on the small dirt track ready to earn their place in the finals. Not exactly aerodynamic looking things, and rather noisy.

I was surprised by the exhilaration I felt as the midget cars’ engines roared and the tires slid around the turns. My motherly instincts screamed, “Slow down!” Of course all I could say was, “Oh my gosh.”

Next up were the modified cars. Covered by a flimsy shell of colorful aluminum, they were bigger, louder, and faster. I was having a great time, and rooting for my favorites by now.

Next came the full sized hobby stock cars. They looked to be held together with Bondo and duct tape. I wasn’t sure how 7 cars would fit together on a track smaller than a football field. But they managed. Except when they didn’t.

The sprint cars followed, with bodies that reminded me of the balsa wood racers my kids made in middle school, with decorated aluminum shells over the top.

With about 740 horse power, man, they went fast. The wheels seemed to be independent of the body, making them really squirrely, and with the short track, they spent more time sideways than straight. When they collided it created a tangled mess.

Soon it became clear that what appeared to me as complete lack of control, was actually an incredible amount of control. I can only imagine the adrenaline rush these drivers are feeling during a race.

Everything about this sport was well organized, from the flag handler taking cues from an unseen source, to the tow truck drivers, to the guys on the ATV’s scurrying about dealing with any issues on the track. At times these field managers’ job equated to

herding cats as they got the cars back in proper order after a yellow flag event. Occasionally their job was to run onto the track between cars and pick up shiny silver debris.

Intermission welcomed the setting sun as the water truck made its rounds, creating the desired amount of mud. When it came time for the final races, there were as many as 18 cars on the track. I couldn't foresee how so many cars could manage around the small course at high speeds without crashing into each other. They don't. Soon we were back to only 6 cars remaining.

In the dark of night, now we could see the flames shooting from the cars. Intense.

The winners of each race truly deserved their wins. It took tremendous skill and guts to come out ahead.

This was no beer-soaked, loud-mouth, swear-word-flinging crowd. This was a family environment at its best. Intermission included a traditional candy toss to the large crowd of children gathered at the walkway. The sponsors included a local dentist and other local businesses. Race winners acknowledged their dads, wives, daughters; all of them highly involved on the race team. Children of all ages, ears stuffed with foam, looked at home hanging out in the bleachers with friends.

This is an experience no one should miss. Bring a blanket to sit on, and a little cash for parking, entrance, a cold beverage and warm Kettlecorn. Make a day of it, and before the racing excitement begins, spend some time at the beautiful Ventura Beach right across the street.