



TRACK TIME

2014 NASCAR PREVIEW

GET READY FOR
ACTION
ON THE RACETRACK!

New Qualifying Format



COURTESY OF NASCAR

A sweeping change to NASCAR's qualifying format is set to make things a whole lot more exciting in 2014. The qualifying format is undergoing a complete overhaul this season for most races, switching to a group setup that will put drivers on the track at the same time.

Designed to emulate an actual race, the process will require each driver entered in the race to be on the track during the opening qualifying session.

NASCAR will eventually cut the group to the 12 fastest drivers, and then determine the pole from there. The 12 drivers in the final group will start 1-12 in the race.

OUT WITH THE OLD

NASCAR's previous system determined starting lineups based on individual drivers each running two qualifying laps. Only one car was allowed on the track at a time. In 2014, with the exception of the Daytona 500 and the Truck Series race at Eldora Speedway, the new qualifying

procedures will be enacted. NASCAR is hoping for more excitement – and revenue – from the change, as the new format is expected to fit nicely into a one-hour television slot.

NEW RULES

Get to know the rules of the new qualifying set up:

- Prior to the first session,

cars will be lined up on pit road based on random draw and will enter the track in that order. Later rounds will be based on speeds from previous rounds.

- The official time in each session is considered a driver's fastest time.

- Teams can only adjust their cars during breaks and are not allowed to jack up the vehicle or raise the hood.

- If there is an accident, the session will be red-flagged. The shutdown time will not count toward the length of the session.

- If it rains during qualifying, the last completed session will determine the starting order.

- If two drivers post the same speed, owner points will determine their starting position.

Rookie of the Year Possibilities

NASCAR's Sprint Cup field is ripe with youthful talent as its 2014 rookie class enters the season with lofty expectations.

Last year's Rookie of the Year battle came down to the finish, with Ricky Stenhouse Jr. edging out Danica Patrick for the designation.

This year's encounter looks to include a larger field and more excitement. But just how far can they go?

Only two drivers in their first full-time seasons, Carl Edwards in 2005 and Denny Hamlin in 2006, have made the Chase in the 10-year history of the format.

Here is a look at a few select rookies from the 2014 class, hailed by many as the best we've seen in years.

AUSTIN DILLON

Dillon enters the season as top choice by many fans for rookie of the year. He won the rookie title in trucks in 2010, the truck title in 2011, the Nationwide rookie crown in 2012 and then the Nationwide championship in 2013.

Dillon's title came despite him not being able to pull off a win during the entire season, making him the first NASCAR national series champion to earn a title without a victory. And he certainly has the pedigree. His grandfather is team owner Richard Childress.

KYLE LARSON

A relative stock-car newcomer is expected to be Dillon's biggest challenger. Larson was eighth in the Nationwide standings in his second year of full-time stock-car competition. The 2012 K&N Pro Series East champion, Larson also won a truck race at Rockingham and top rookie honors in Nationwide in 2013.

THE REST OF THE FIELD

Justin Allgaier, Michael Annett and Parker Kligerman round out the five most promising candidates for Rookie of the Year, and they each have bona fide backgrounds.

Allgaier posted an impressive Nationwide performance last year, finishing fifth in the standings for Turner Scott Racing. Annett, who missed eight Nationwide races last year after breaking his sternum, will drive for Tommy Baldwin Racing.

Parker Kligerman, who finished ninth in Nationwide, will drive for Sawn Racing, which is entering its second season.



Austin Dillon



Kyle Larson



Justin Allgaier



Parker Kligerman



Michael Annett

Johnson Going for Seven

LAST YEAR'S CHAMPION COULD JOIN ELITE GROUP THIS SEASON



COURTESY OF NASCAR

It's a mark that many NASCAR traditionalists thought would stand forever, but Richard Petty and Dale Earnhardt might soon have company in the seven-title club.

After having his five-year winning streak halted in 2012, Jimmie Johnson was back on top last year, claiming his sixth Sprint Cup Series championship.

The driver, originally from California, has become a racing legend in his own right and will go down in history alongside Petty, Earnhardt and the many other trailblazers who came before him.

VERSATILITY

In a sport of constant change and rule alterations, Johnson's achievements have been made possible by his versatility and ability to roll with the punches.

Case in point: His championships have come in three different generations of NASCAR Sprint Cup cars.

Johnson has been quoted as saying 2013 was one of the more special title runs of his career. With four victories throughout the regular season, Johnson led the points standings after all but three races.

The Hendrick Motorsports driver still found himself starting the Chase as the No. 2 seed behind Matt Kenseth. But Johnson won at Dover International Speedway and Texas Motor Speedway to eventually pass his rival.

Johnson used his experience — he is the only driver to qualify in all 10 years of the Chase era — to edge Kenseth by 19 points down the stretch.

THE JIMMIE JOHNSON FOUNDATION

Equally as impressive as his feats on the track, Johnson's work in the community has helped cement his reputation as a superstar even further.

He and his wife, Chandra, launched The Jimmie Johnson Foundation in 2006 to help children, families and communities in need. The foundation supports several charities, including Habitat for Humanity and Make-A-Wish Foundation.

According to Johnson's website, his annual golf tournament has helped raise \$2 million in support of Habitat for Humanity projects.

The Newest Hall of Famers

Every year, a handful of legendary figures from motor racing are inducted into the NASCAR Hall of Fame in Charlotte, N.C. Here is a look at this year's five prestigious inductees.

TIM FLOCK

Flock earned 39 victories throughout his career and was a two-time NASCAR premier series champion, the first title coming in 1952. His most impressive season came in 1955, when he posted 18 wins, 32 top-fives and 18 poles in 39 races. Flock's 18-wins in a single season stood as a record until Richard Petty's 27 in 1967.



DALE JARRETT

Jarrett posted a remarkable career comprised of three Daytona 500 wins and two Brickyard 400 at Indianapolis Motor Speedway victories. His 32 NASCAR Sprint Cup Series victories – 21st all-time – were complemented by his 1999 series title. Dale joins his father, Ned, in the hall, as the duo becomes only the third father-son pair to be inducted (the others being Bill France Sr. and Bill France Jr., along with Lee and Richard Petty).



JACK INGRAM

Before the formation of NASCAR Nationwide series, Ingram won three consecutive championships (1972-74) within the Late Model Sportsman Division, as well as the inaugural title of the Busch Series. He went on to earn another title and 31 victories in the Busch Series.



FIREBALL ROBERTS

Glenn Roberts is hailed by many as stock car racing's first superstar. During his career he often came up big in the biggest events, winning the Daytona 500 in 1962 and the Southern 500 in 1958 and '63. Overall, he won seven races at Daytona International Speedway, starting with the Firecracker 250 in the summer of 1959 – the year the speedway opened.



MAURICE PETTY

The chief engine builder at Petty Enterprises, Maurice Petty joins older brother Richard, father Lee and cousin Dale Inman in the hall. Nicknamed "Chief," Petty was a behind-the-scenes catalyst in propelling Richard Petty to a majority of his record 200 NASCAR victories, plus his seven NASCAR premier series championships and seven Daytona 500 victories.



Driver and Fan Safety: A Top Priority



COURTESY OF NASCAR

Drivers and fans prefer to keep their attention focused on the track, while NASCAR works hard to make sure that is exactly where the action stays.

Driving accidents are unavoidable in racing. Fast tracks, faster cars and aggressive drivers are ingrained into the sport, and competitors wouldn't have it any other way. But recent high-visibility wrecks that have not only injured drivers, but fans as well, have brought the issue of safety back into the spotlight.

TRAGIC NUMBERS

An investigation by the Charlotte Observer found 22 deaths occur every year at U.S. auto races big and small. Obviously, not all of these incidents occur within NASCAR. In fact, no driver has died in the racing body's top divisions in the years since Dale Earnhardt's death in 2001.

That horrible accident was the harbinger for many policy changes in the sport, as NASCAR began mandating head-and-neck restraints for drivers, installing safer walls at tracks and designing cars to be sturdier.

FAN INJURIES

Drivers aren't the only focus of NASCAR initiatives. Last year's violent Daytona crash during the Nationwide race saw rookie Kyle Larson's car knocked airborne and into a catch fence in a 12-car wreck.

Larson walked away, but 28 fans were injured as the car's engine and other parts scattered into the grandstands.

Between 1990 and 2010, at least 46 spectators have died at U.S. racetracks, according to further analysis by the Observer.

POTENTIAL CHANGES

Many of NASCAR's larger tracks have raised the height of their fences in recent years, as the organization continues to research ways to improve fan safety levels. Recommendations have included moving fans farther away from the track and exploring more new-wave fencing options.

NASCAR's Research and Development Center has enlisted the help of external safety specialists to devise and deploy new initiatives aimed at ensuring the safety of drivers and fans alike.

2013 Year in Review

The racing was exhilarating and the competition fierce across all three NASCAR premiere series in 2013. Fans can expect more of the same in 2014.

While many veterans, including Mark Martin, will be leaving the full-time circuit, young blood is flowing through the sport and will continue to rev up a passionate base of NASCAR-crazy supporters across the nation.

SPRINT CUP

Jimmie Johnson and the Gen-6 car dominated the 2013 Sprint Cup discussion, as NASCAR's most-decorated present driver edged Matt Kenseth by 19 points to win his sixth title.

The season also saw impressive campaigns from Kurt Busch and Kyle Busch, who both earned big comebacks into the Chase.

Hendrick Motorsports qualified all four of its drivers – Johnson, Dale Earnhardt, Jr., Jeff Gordon and Kasey Kahne – for the Chase, while Joe Gibbs Racing posted the most combined victories among team owners.

NATIONWIDE

It wasn't pretty, but Austin Dillon won the 2013 title without earning a race victory. He and Kyle Larson – another Nationwide standout – are heading to the Sprint Cup this season, leaving the door wide open for other newcomers.



COURTESY OF NASCAR

Mark Martin said goodbye to NASCAR racing in 2013 after a long and illustrious career.

Sprint Cup regulars like Kyle Busch and Brad Keselowski will also surely leave their mark on Nationwide this season, as the pair combined to win 19 of the 33 races in 2013.

TRUCK SERIES

It was a year to remember for veteran Matt Crafton, who leveraged his perseverance and decade of experience to clinch the 2013 Camping World Truck Series championship.

He won the title just by starting the season finale at Homestead-Miami Speedway, ending a season marked by a win at Kansas and 19 top-10 finishes.

Crafton also was in conten-

tion to win the owner's championship for his team but failed to do so as Sprint Cup star Kyle Busch won the Homestead race to clinch the title for his namesake Kyle Busch Motorsports.

New Car: One Year Later

One thing missing from this year's early-season NASCAR discussion is the Gen 6 model, which was a topic of much talk and debate at this time last year.

The Gen 6 car — referring to NASCAR's sixth generation race car — took over the sport before and during the 2013 campaign, as drivers got used to their sleeker, speedier rides.

There were some bumps in the road but drivers, owners, pit crews and fans worked through the changes together. Now with the focus back on the actual racing, the Gen 6 craze may be dying down a bit.



COURTESY OF NASCAR

Kyle Busch battled his way to victory in his Gen-6 Toyota Camry on the road course at Watkins Glen in 2013.

RECORD-BREAKING START

The Gen 6 car, a collaboration between NASCAR, Toyota, Chevrolet and Ford, aims to put the stock back in stock car. It seems to be working.

The 2013 season saw 19 track qualifying records broken; a record number (127,306) of Green Flag Passes; and the lowest Margin of Victory (1.267 seconds) since 2005. Additionally, 20 races ended with a margin of victory of less than one second.

THE LOOK

So what makes a Gen 6 different than previous NASCAR Sprint Series cars? A lot.

From driver branding to safety enhancements, the

newest additions more closely resemble those found on the showroom floor.

They feature stylish bodylines and eye-catching designs to give each model its own look. Driver names are now featured on the upper portion

of the windshield, with sponsor decals and car numbers removed from the headlight and taillight areas.

THE SAFETY

NASCAR added a forward

roof bar and center roof support bar to the roll cage of the Gen 6 model. This design helps reinforce overall integrity and increases the crash structure of the roof.

Also, larger roof flaps were added to improve liftoff num-

bers and decrease the likelihood of an airborne car.

The size reduction of the car can also have a positive impact on safety results. Total weight of the car has been reduced by 160 pounds, giving it a slim and trim appearance.