



TRACK TIME

New Rule Package for 2019

In a move to make the NASCAR Monster Energy Cup Series more competitive, officials have unveiled two baseline rule packages to the circuit. The new regulations are tailored to popular tracks and how drivers navigate the course. Time will tell if the changes in the rule book will create new stars in the world of racing.

When explaining why the rule change was necessary, NASCAR's executive vice president and chief racing development officer, Steve O'Donnell said, "It's really a focus on getting back to a true focus on the drivers and what NASCAR is all about — close, side-by-side racing and trying to deliver more of that."

Race fans should be excited about the new changes and the drive to create more exciting races. Here are how the new rules will affect the sport in 2019.

AERODYNAMICS

In an attempt to reduce downforce and stabilize handling, officials have tweaked restrictions to promote aerodynamics in vehicles. Here are the changes you may notice when you visit the track this year, according to the official guidelines.

- Spoiler will be 8 inches by 61 inches;
- A 10.5-inch splitter should have 2 inches of overhang;
- Radiator pans are to measure 37 inches in the front and taper to 31 inches at the rear; and

• Aero ducts are to be used at the majority of oval tracks larger than one mile.

A few exceptions of these rules will be seen at five races with larger oval tracks. According to NASCAR, both



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Pocono events and races at Atlanta, Darlington and Homestead will use the small-tapered spacer but will not feature aero ducts which transfer air to the side of the car, away from the front tires.

The organization hopes the

changes will result in better handling to increase drafting opportunities and closer competition.

ENGINE MODIFICATIONS

Different tracks will call for engine modifications depend-

ing on their length and shapes. For courses on oval tracks over 1.2 miles, vehicles are required to use a tapered spacer on the intake system, which cuts horsepower from 750 to 550.

Events at Daytona and Talladega have used restrictor

plates since 1987, so the new spacers are expected to be a big change. O'Donnell says of those changes, "We think that'll put it more in the driver's hands, especially as we go to some of the intermediate tracks."

Is it a Rookie's Year to Win?

In the last few years, the NASCAR Cup Series has not been kind to rookies.

In fact, a newcomer hasn't won a race on this circuit since 2016. With several impressive racers entering the competition, time will tell if they can make their mark in the major leagues.

The last rookie to take a win in the Monster Energy Series was Chris Buescher. After a disappointing finish in the Daytona 500, he would secure a victory a week later in Pocono at the Pennsylvania 400. In that race, there was impending severe weather, causing officials to cancel the race while Buescher held the lead.

Learn more about the four Rookie of the Year candidates who will attempt to make an impression on their sport's largest stage.

DANIEL HEMRIC

A member of Richard Childress Racing, Daniel Hemric has shown an impressive set of skills on the Xfinity Series, earning playoff berths for the two seasons in which he has participated. He will be behind the wheel of the No. 8 Chevrolet Camaro ZL1 for 2019.

The number is significant to his potential legacy as it is the same digit with which driving legend and fellow Kannapolis, N.C., native Dale Earnhardt debuted.



Hemric

HEMRIC: STREETER LECKA/GETTY IMAGES

RYAN PREECE

A decorated champion from the NASCAR Whelen Modified Tour, Ryan Preece will take over number 47, as a member of JTG Daugherty Racing. He caught the attention of the team at Homestead, where he caused more experienced drivers to scramble to keep up with his efforts.

He will team up with Chris

Buescher to take the reins on the Monster Energy NASCAR Cup Series.

MATT TIFFT

In 2015, Matt Tift debuted in the NASCAR Xfinity Series and earned a 10th-place finish as a member of Joe Gibbs Racing. The very next year, doctors discovered a brain tumor in the young racer, leading to a successful sur-



Preece

JERRY MARKLAND/GETTY IMAGES



Tift

gery that would only delay his racing efforts for 11 weeks. He would return to Xfinity and obtain back-to-back playoff appearances. This year, he will captain vehicle number 36 during his stint in the Cup Series.

TANNER BERRYHILL

Obaika Racing will debut newly hired Berryhill to showcase his skills at the Daytona 500. He has over 40 starts in the NASCAR Xfinity Series and looks to continue his work ethic and intelligence on the big stage.



Berryhill

Mustang's 2019 Debut

In 2017, Toyota debuted its new Camry to enter the NASCAR Cup Series, followed by the Chevrolet Camaro in 2018. This year, Ford looks to stir up the competition in the major leagues by introducing the new Mustang.

This move from the manufacturer will usher out a Fusion variant that had been zipping around the track since 2006, although it did see upgrades in 2013 and 2017.

The Mustang has been prominent in NASCAR's minor league circuit, the Xfinity Series, since 2011. This year will be its introduction into the premiere-level Monster Energy Cup Series Competition.

A BRIEF HISTORY OF FORD

Ford Performance has a long history in the NASCAR tradition. In fact, their first win during a big race came in 1950, when Jimmy Florian captured the victory in Dayton, Ohio.

While they haven't clinched a championship season since 2004 with driver Kurt Busch, they hope the new Mustang



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will propel their captains to success. Take a look at the following timeline for a few of the different models the manufacturer has modified for the track, according to the Entertainment and Sports Programming Network.

1956-1959: Ford Fairlane

1960-1968: Ford Thunderbird/Ford Galaxie

1968-1971: Ford Torino

1978-1997: Ford Thunderbird

1998-2005: Ford Fusion
In 1969, Ford produced a special edition Torino named the Talladega. It was a muscle car used to introduce the initial opening of the popular event on the Talladega Speedway.

WILL THE RULE CHANGES SLOW DOWN FORD?

Since NASCAR has implemented new rules this season

to lessen horsepower and create more aerodynamic vehicles, the Ford Mustang is ahead of the curve for the new package of 2019.

Rather than modifying an existing vehicle to fit tighter regulations, the manufacturer has tailored the vehicle to meet expectations. This should lead to having all the kinks worked out before the green flag drops, while other manufacturers may scurry to

keep up.

CURRENT NASCAR ROLE

While the Mustang will be making its first appearance in the Monster Energy Cup Series this year, it has been participating in the Xfinity circuit since 2011.

Since its introduction, the muscle car has won 70 races, including three championships, two by Ricky Stenhouse Jr. and Chris Buescher.



JARED C. TILTON/GETTY IMAGES

A New Talladega Experience

Save the date, race fans. April 27-29 is when the NASCAR Monster Energy Cup Series takes center stage in Talladega, Alabama.

Treat yourself to a weekend filled with sights, sounds and the smell of burned rubber. For racing enthusiasts, does it get any better?

This isn't just any race. When the drivers buckle in, they enter a high-speed competition on the longest oval track in the series. At 2.6 miles, spectators can expect exciting takeovers,

neck-breaking acceleration and many times, a victory by a margin of inches. It is a vacation immersed in events, celebrity appearances and good old-fashioned races.

This year, those behind the extravaganza have rejuvenated the experience and are welcoming fans to check it out.

RACE FACTS

To get yourself more excited for the big event, check out these interesting facts from the history of the raceway from this year's sponsor, Geico.

- The youngest racer to win the track was Bobby Hillin Jr. at the age of 22.
- The Talladega Speedway holds the

record for most lead changes (88 times in 2011).

- The smallest margin of victory came by merely inches as Jimmy Johnson beat out Clint Bowyer by only .002 seconds in 2011.

- Plan to bring your appetite. The venue will sell about 7,500 hot dogs during each race at the concession stands.

NEW FEATURES

Even if you are a veteran of visiting the Talladega Speedway, this year's event will feature many amazing amenities you've not experienced before. Attendees can expect some awesome upgrades.

The infield has received a major

update. Consider booking a camping spot in a new location near the start-finish line/Turn 1 to get an incredible view of the races. These spots come with the convenience of shower hookups and full-power connections for RVs.

The Infield Project cost about \$50 million in redevelopment and is aimed to change the way fans enjoy their favorite sport.

When looking for tickets, check out the Talladega Garage Experience admission. You will gain exclusive access to teams, cars and inspection stations with viewing walkways in the Cup Series Garage. It is an interactive experience being offered for the first time this year.

2019 Hall of Fame Inductees

It's a special year for the NASCAR Hall of Fame, as the organization celebrates its 10th anniversary. The venue entertains fans in Charlotte, N.C. with an interactive experience including hands-on exhibits.

The Class of 2019 includes epic drivers and knowledgeable owners. Check out four of the inductees who will be entering the ranks in this elite club.

DAVEY ALLISON

Son of fellow Hall of Fame member, Bobby Allison, Davey grew up around the sport and received his big break in 1987, where he became the premiere series Rookie of the Year from the seat of a Ford Thunderbird.

Allison would cite his favorite racing experience as the 1988 "Great American Race," where he came in second place to his father. In 1992, he would snatch an exciting win in the Daytona 500.

Unfortunately, his life came to an early end a year later when he tragically died in a helicopter accident.

JEFF GORDON

Gordon is widely considered to be the racer who pulled the sport into the mainstream. His charisma and talent attracted those without interest in NASCAR to cheer on number 24.

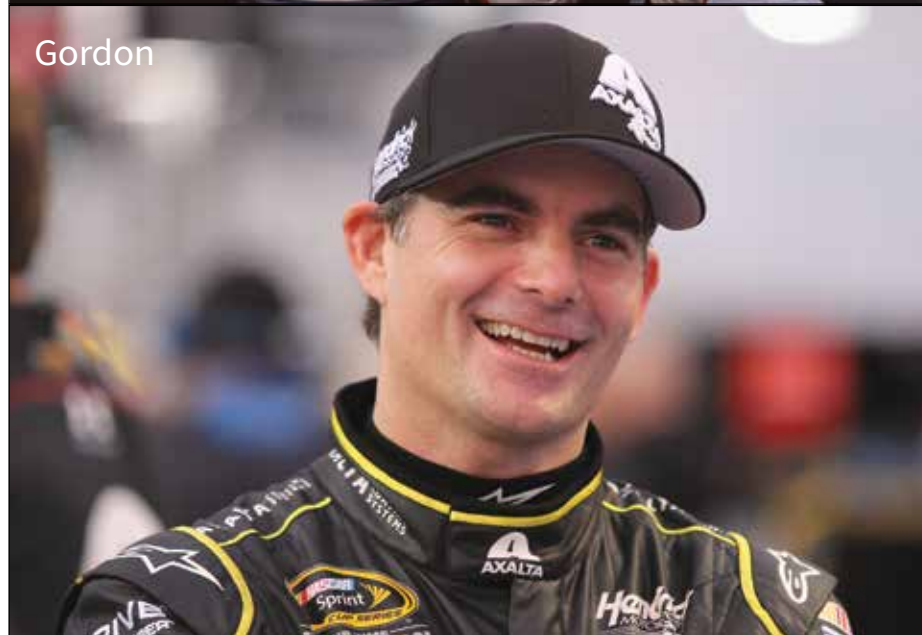
His illustrious career includes 797 consecutive starts in over 800 attempts and 93 wins. Jeff Gordon is a three-time Daytona 500 champion and has the record for winning the Brickyard 400 a total of five times. He retired as a full-time racer and now provides race



Allison



Kulwicki



Gordon



Penske

TOP: SC IMAGES & ARCHIVES VIA GETTY IMAGES; BOTTOM: JERRY MARKLAND/GETTY IMAGES

TOP: ISC ARCHIVES VIA GETTY IMAGES; BOTTOM: JARED C. TILTON/GETTY IMAGES

analysis for FOX.

ALAN KULWICKI

This racer took a non-traditional path to capture his NASCAR achievements. Moving to Charlotte in 1984, he quickly gained the Rookie of the Year award in 1986 with a

self-owned team.

Once Kulwicki proved himself as a racer, he was widely pursued by impressive teams but ultimately remained with his own crew. In 1992, he overcame a 278-point deficit with only six races remaining in the premier series to capture a

championship campaign. His life would end the next year after an unfortunate plane crash.

ROGER PENSKE

Known throughout the sport as "The Captain," Penske celebrated his 50th year in racing

in 2016. He is behind a team that has captured over 100 wins in the NASCAR premier series.

His victories include a championship in the main circuit, two Daytona 500 wins and three consecutive championships in the Xfinity Series.

Kurt Busch on the Move Again

The 2019 NASCAR Monster Energy Cup Series will see Kurt Busch representing his sixth different team since 2001.

News of his move to the successful Chip Ganassi Racing crew was confirmed in December and has the racing world buzzing.

The move during this year's Silly Season means Busch will take the place of Jamie McMurray, who has driven for Ganassi in 13 of his 17 seasons at Cup level. He will be bringing the Monster Energy sponsorship with him while racing in the No. 1 Chevrolet Camaro.

SUCCESSFUL TENURE

Kurt Busch has spent a successful 19-years behind the wheel in NASCAR. Throughout his time, he has racked up 30 wins at the highest level.

In 2004, he became the Monster Energy Cup Series champion as a part of the Jack Roush Racing team. For the last five years he has competed with Stewart-Haas Racing, where he compiled six victories, including the Daytona 500, in 2017. Last year, he advanced to round eight in the NASCAR Playoffs.

MOVING FORWARD

"I am tremendously proud to be joining Chip Ganassi



JONATHAN FERREY/GETTY IMAGES

Racing and the prestigious group of alumni," Busch announced in a press release.

He will be pairing up with teammate Kyle Larson, driver of the No. 42 Chevrolet Camaro ZL1.

Larson was the MENCS Rookie of the Year in 2014 and has pulled off 15 wins during

his NASCAR career. The duo will rely on Busch's experience and Larson's knowledge of the new wave of racers who make up their competition.

It will be an interesting year for CGR with these two at the helm during the Monster Energy Cup Series.

ANOTHER BIG CHANGE FOR CHIP GANASSI

With the exciting addition to their team for the Cup, CGR was forced to make a difficult decision regarding the minor league circuit, Xfinity. Due to a lack of sponsorships and funding, they determined to cease operation of their car

for 2019.

During their time in the series, the organization acquired six races and finished second in the owner's championship. Time will tell if their lack of participation in Xfinity will enhance their chances at a championship during the main circuit.

New Roles for Superstars

When a driver exerts so much energy into their NASCAR career, it's not surprising when they fall into roles associated with the sport once they hang up their racing gloves. While they'll no longer be speeding around the track, a couple of veterans will still have a prevalent presence in racing.

KASEY KAHNE

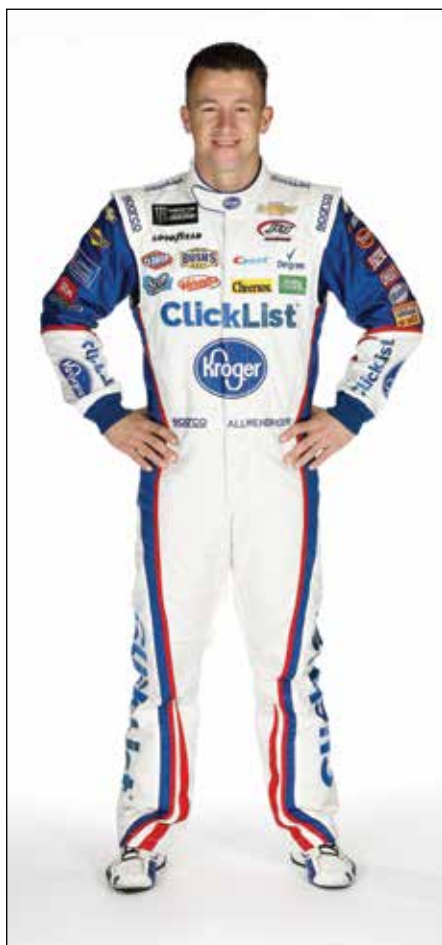
On Aug. 16, 2018, racing favorite Kasey Kahne made an announcement that he would be stepping away from full-time driving. The 38-year old achieved 18 career wins in the NASCAR Cup Series and is known for his public support of incredible charities.

While his days as a professional stock-car driver may be over, his plans for 2019 will allow fans to see him on the type of track where his passion for speed began.

Before jumping behind the wheel in professional sports, Kahne earned his reputation on dirt tracks in his hometown of Enumclaw, Washington. He was quickly recruited by Robert Yates Racing in 2002 and had an impressive stint in the Xfinity Series.

In 2004, Kahne was signed to Evernham Motorsports, where he would enter the seat of a Dodge Charger that was reintroduced to the sport the same year. His season included five second-place finishes and 13 spots in the top five. His efforts would earn him the Rookie of the Year Award.

After his illustrious career in the sport, his seemingly sudden retirement surprised many fans. Due to health issues, the racer was forced to



CHRIS GRAYTHEN/GETTY IMAGES

Allmendinger

sit out for the final five races of the Cup Series, in 2018.

Enthusiasts can still see the legend traveling behind the wheel this year. He and his team, Kasey Kahne Racing, will be competing on dirt tracks in the World of Outlaws Series.

AJ ALLMENDINGER

Allmendinger entered the NASCAR circuit in 2006, when he performed in the Truck Series.



MATT SULLIVAN/GETTY IMAGES

He would later take the wheel of a stock car in the 2008 Daytona 500, where he finished third — the fourth-best finish for a first-timer on the track.

In 2014, he won the Cup Series for the first time in JTG Daugherty Racing's history. However, after a few unsuccessful seasons, the team decided to release

Allmendinger after the 2018 season.

This year, fans can find him as a booth analyst for NBC Sports, covering the IMSA SportsCar Championship.