

The Month of May at Indy500

Richard Bryant

I found the 2015 Indy 500 to be one of the more exciting races I have ever attended, due to the many lead changes, the driver going from last position at one point in the race - all the way to first, and the fast paced passing in the last half of the race - and the various last minute changes mandated for safety reasons. Having carried heavy camera equipment all around the 2.5 mile Indy 500 race track for the better part of 3 weeks, I got strenuous exercise while enjoying the thrill of the sport. I hope the reader will also enjoy the photos selected from over 5,000 taken.

In early May, I walked into the IMS (Indianapolis Motor Speedway) museum, and almost immediately, I was attracted to the old 1972 garage. That was the first year I went to the Indy 500. Bobby Unser won the pole position with an average speed of 195.94 mph - a new track record for that time.

Innovation and Rules

The exhibit features innovative contributions from race drivers and engineers. Dan Gurney pioneered the first bolt on wings that year to

give the race cars a more aerodynamic shape and increased speed. Sound familiar? Many innovative designs first appear at the Indy 500 and eventually have made their way to the cars that we drive today.

This year, the need for innovations and rule changes again became a necessity. With the new aerodynamics packages added by Honda and Chevy came the promise of faster speeds, better mileage, and better handling and control of buffeting crosswinds. It soon became apparent there was not enough testing of these aerodynamic packages under racing conditions. After some delay, rule changes were made that allowed all teams to bring down speeds by 5 to 8 mph.

Speed and Safety

Anytime you have cars going at high speeds, the slightest mistake, breakage, or mechanical failure can lead to death or disability of driver, crew member, or even race fans. Since the first race in 1911, it has happened on a number of occasions. The memory of the tragic loss of Penske driver Dan Wheldon in October 2011 in the Las Vegas race, after winning the Indy 500 that



year only accelerated the focus on safety issues for both the racing series and the world's fastest endurance race- the Indy 500.

The list of safety features added at Indy 500 is extensive, as is the safety measures or rules added by the Indy Racing League or IRL which sanctions the race. Past innovations include higher and stronger fences; new safer and softer barrier walls;



Carbon fiber car bodies that are much stronger and lighter than steel; crush and crumple zones built in on cars to absorb impact energy and reduce sudden impact stop; neck braces to reduce neck injuries; limitations of engine 'boost' to reduce speeds when needed; improvements in communications including steering wheels with digital light displays indicating 'yellow light' conditions on the track; simple rules such as mandating safety helmets for all crew members working on the cars in the pits during the race. All important breakthroughs in engineering that may well find their way to passenger automobiles and highway safety systems given time.

For in the week of practice leading up to qualification weekend there were three serious crashes where cars became airborne, which is a serious concern to the safety of all drivers, as well as fans. It was a testament to the built in car safety features and the 'softer wall' that allowed drivers Helio Castroneves, and Ed Carpenter to walk away from serious crashes where their cars went upside down. However when James Hinchliffe crashed due to mechanical breakage of a suspension rod,

he hit the wall with a force of 125 G's and that rod pierced the carbon fiber body like an arrow, and again flipped sideways. After a series of meetings with officials, engineers, teams, and owners, safety changes were made to the cars to correct all problems.

Walking through the garages, I saw the mechanics disassembling the entire race cars on several occasions to make all the needed changes and testing in time.

I talked to teams putting in countless hours of overtime to get it all done. They literally live on the grounds during their time here. They wouldn't have it any other way.

At IMS change is inevitable and always for the better. That is Indy, and why it has remained the unchallenged 'Racing Capital of the World' since 1911. Those are the reasons Drivers around the world have great respect for the Indy 500 track and its history and support. As an avid fan, you can't help but notice as well. I count myself among the masses that fully support what they are doing here, and I left the track this year feeling ever more impressed.



1. Hard charging Juan Montoya goes from 30th to first;
2. Montoya surrounded by the press
3. Front runners Charlie Kimball and Simon Pagenaud pit late in the race
4. 2014 winner Ryan Hunter Raey and family after his qualification run
5. 3-time-INDY500 winner Dario Franchitti on the starting grid just prior to race
6. Opening Rap song and dance of the 500 parade
7. Marching band tuba reflects the reviewing stand at War Memorial Plaza



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