



Start your engines!

Site takes you for a ride around NASCAR

Occasionally I'll change my own oil or do some other minor car maintenance. I'll also admire a passing Ford Mustang or Mercedes SL Roadster. But, even though I have some appreciation for the technology and design of automobiles, I would never be accused of being a gear head. That's why NASCAR races, like this weekend's Pennsylvania 400 at Pocono Raceway, are something of a mystery to me.

It appears that I'm in the minority, though. According to **NASCAR.com**,



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InSites

17 of the top 20 most-attended U.S. sporting events are NASCAR events. And the average attendance of a race, which many fans turn into a week-end-long event, is over 120,000.

The website is a good resource for fans, or anyone who is curious about NASCAR — which, by the way, stands for National Association for Stock Car Auto Racing, not, as many non-fans say, Non Athletic Sport Created Around Rednecks.

Sophisticated rednecks

While the beer-swilling knucklehead, stumbling around the infield waving a Confederate flag, might be a common NASCAR stereotype — and those people do exist — the races are actually high-tech events. They are run by teams of intelligent people, highly skilled in mechanics, physics and sophisticated marketing techniques. These traits are exhibited on NASCAR.com, as well.

Pennsylvania 400

What: NASCAR Sprint Cup Series

Where: Pocono Raceway, Long Pond

When: Qualifying — today, 10:30 a.m.; Race — Sunday, noon

Coverage: ESPN; Times-Tribune.com/Sports; on Twitter @SportsTT

Info: PoconoRaceway.com

Just like the web sites of other major sports leagues I've reviewed, the people at NASCAR know how to take advantage of all the web has to offer. The site is a slick combination of stories, photos, videos, graphics, merchandising and lots of other interactive content.

Getting up to speed

Of course fans of the sport are going to get more out of the site than a casual visitor. While I recognized the names of many of the drivers and venues, there's a lot of terminology and inside stuff that I wasn't familiar with. Fortunately, one of the links under the News tab at the top of the page is for NASCAR 101. This page is just what it sounds like, a primer for the NASCAR novice. It contains a glossary, statistics, history and more. There's other subcategories under the News tab, including archives, a newsletter, an RSS feed, opinion pieces, entertainment stories and more.

In addition to the News tab, there are nine other tabs across the top of the site that organize the content. The Video tab features hundreds of interviews with NASCAR notables, clips of races and, of course, spectac-

ular, high-speed crashes.

The Drivers tab features profiles, photos and statistics of current and past drivers, as well as video and merchandise. The Standings tab has ranked tables of drivers from the Sprint Cup and Nationwide series, and also several other NASCAR divisions, such as trucks and the Chase for the Cup Series championship.

There's a Schedule tab that covers all the events for the year; and a Tickets tab where you can arrange travel and purchase tickets for events.

Get behind the wheel

Several of the tabs encourage fan participation in the sport. The NASCAR Nation tab contains social media links, blogs and chat rooms where users can offer opinions and swap stories. The Trackpass tab offers fans, for a price, access to live video and audio from the cockpit of their favorite driver. The Fantasy tab features online games and sweepstakes with vehicle-related prizes, such as 5,000 gallons of gas or a new Toyota Camry. And of course no sports website would be complete without a gift shop. The NASCAR shop offers a dizzying array of souvenirs for all ages and price ranges.

NASCAR.com's pages are full of colorful content, links and ads in busy yet organized layouts. The design is unified, yet varied enough from section to section to keep it interesting. While mainly a site for fans, anyone can appreciate the intricacies of the site, and the sport.

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