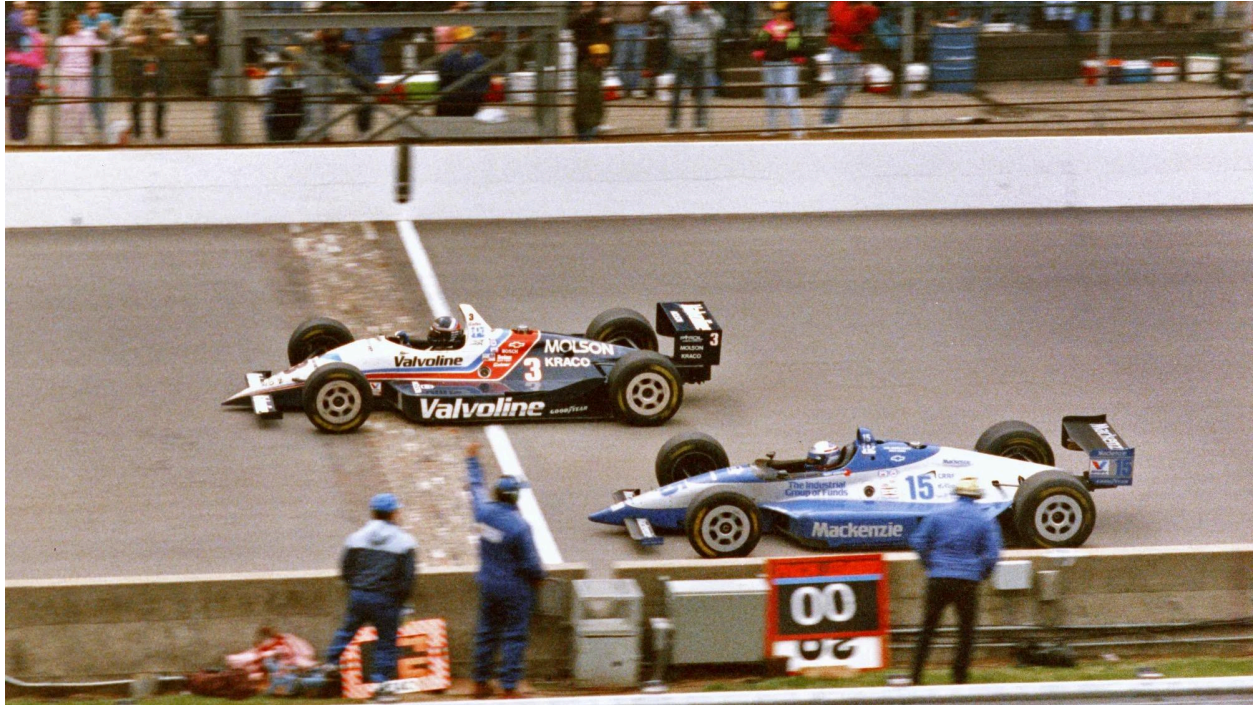


Why The Indianapolis 500 is the Greatest One Day Sporting Event In The World

By Landen Nelson on August 30th, 2024



Al Unser Jr. (No. 3) races across the finish line ahead of Scott Goodyear (No. 15) by 0.043 seconds to win the 76th running of the Greatest Spectacle in Racing in the closest finish in Indianapolis 500 history. Mike Fender / Indianapolis News.

The Super Bowl, the Kentucky Derby, and the Fifa World Cup. All three are both very prestigious events in sports history and are ranked as some of the most attended sports events in the world but there is one event I failed to mention. That being the Greatest Spectacle in racing the Indianapolis 500. There is not a better way to celebrate Memorial Day weekend than seeing 33 cars going over 220 MPH, lap after lap cars pushing the boundary of disaster, and when it is all said and done there is one driver who conquers one of the crown jewels in motorsports, drinks the milk, and will always be remembered as an Indianapolis 500 Champion.

There is great history with the Super Bowl, NBA Finals, and the Fifa World Cup but not compared to the history of the Indianapolis 500. The Greatest Spectacle in Racing is older than all three of those events with the first race occurring on May 30th, 1911. That was three years before WW1 and twenty eight years before WW2! The first race took 6 hours and 42 minutes to finish with an average speed of 74.6 MPH and was won by Ray Harroun. Compare the statistics to the 2023 Indy 500 with the average speed of the race being 168.193 MPH, taking roughly three hours to finish, and was won by Josef Newgarden. The reason the times of the length of the race and average race speed changed was because of the advancement of technology with the cars.

During the late 1950s and late 1960's the Indianapolis 500 was dominated by the front engine roadster cars. Then in 1965, the Lotus Car Company made history when it came to building cars for future Indianapolis 500's. Jim Clark went on to win the 1965 Indy 500 in a rear-engined race car and ever since then INDYCAR has made teams place their engines in the rear of the car. Then in 1972, another change was made regarding cars racing in the Indy 500. USAC decided to permit bolt-on race wings to be added to teams' cars and it proved to be successful. Bobby Unser took pole position in 1972 by a history-making 4-lap average of 195.940 MPH and absolutely crushed the Indianapolis Motor Speedway's track record time of 178.696 MPH that was set by Peter Revson in 1971. Ever since the 1972 Indianapolis 500 INDYCAR's have been running with rear wings. There is no other sporting event in the world that has evolved as much as the Indianapolis 500. With teams, engineers, mechanics, and car manufacturers pushing the boundaries of speed, aerodynamics, physics, and chemistry just to win one race.



The Marmon Wasp driven by Ray Haroon was the first car to win the Indianapolis 500 in 1911.



Jim Clark and Team Lotus Ford became the first team to win in Indianapolis 500 history with a rear engine powered car in 1965.



Mark Donohue and Team Penske became the first team ever to win the Indianapolis 500 with a rear winged car in 1972.

A lot of people ask me how can you attend a sporting event just to watch cars go in circles all day? Well, the race is more than 33 drivers going in circles for 500 miles and on the verge of crashing lap after lap. The fans are what make attending the Indianapolis 500 so special. It's crazy to believe fans from all over the U.S., Europe, South America, and Asia come to visit Indiana just for this race. The fans define the words of The Greatest Spectacle in Racing. Yes, the drivers want to win the race because of how prestigious the event is and the history behind the race but more importantly the drivers want to win in front of the best fans in the world that's cheers echo even when the Indy 500 is not taking place. The history and stories behind why the fans attend this race are unbelievable. For example, the start of one family member attending the Indianapolis 500 turns into many generations later continuing to attend the event and carry on the legacy of one family member. The fans of the 500 are some of the most passionate and dedicated

fans in the world. On race days fans will be in line to walk into the Indianapolis Motor Speedway at 5 a.m. and the gates don't even open until 6am. If that's not dedication then I don't know what else is. Also, those same fans won't even leave the track until 10 pm. According to forbes.com, there was an estimate of at least 345,000 people who attended the 108th running of the Indianapolis 500 and there were less than 3,000 tickets available for sale on race day. For an auto race you might as well say it was a sold-out event because the majority of auto races in the U.S. between NASCAR and INDYCAR it is hard to come across a race where there are less than 3,000 tickets for sale. The fans of the Indianapolis 500 definitely know how to show up, that's for sure.

Now what is the main reason why the fans attend the Greatest Spectacle in Racing? It is to see the finish of the race, who wins the race, and who's name and face will be a part of the sterling silver and 110 pound Borg Warner Trophy for eternity. Also, the drivers name and face to be on a trophy with the best drivers to have ever raced the Indianapolis 500. For example, to join the company of A.J. Foyt, Al Unser, Rick Mears, and Hélio Castroneves as drivers who have won the Indy 500 is legendary. Those drivers are the only ones in Indianapolis 500 history who have won this spectacle four times the most by any driver. The history this race holds is incredible but not as special as seeing an incredible finish during the Indy 500. There is nothing like witnessing a duel between two drivers and a close finish between the two for the Greatest Spectacle in Racing. Watching these events take place is something that gives you goosebumps, gets your heart pounding, a wave of emotions, and an adrenaline rush like nothing before. In the last two Indianapolis 500's there has been a last lap pass for the win. In the history of the race there have been thirteen finishes where the distance between the first and second place car has been less than seven tenths of a second. I don't believe there is a sporting event in the world where

someone's heart pounds more, adrenaline rushes more, goosebumps occur more, and emotions go on a faster roller coaster than the Indianapolis 500. These are the reasons why the Indianapolis 500 is the greatest one day sporting event in the world.

[Finish of the 108th Indy 500](#)

[Rick Mears Wins His 4th Indianapolis 500](#)

[1992 Closest Finish in the Greatest Spectacle in Racing](#)

[Hélio Castroneves Wins His 4th 500](#)

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