

# Laguna Seca, Records Broken

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***Today at Laguna Seca, not only were records broken, and one not likely to be broken anytime soon, but it was a day of surprises all around at the Firestone / NTT Grand Prix of Monterey. Laguna Seca Raceway has been one of the finest and most popular road racing courses in the world since it opened in 1957. 65 years of hosting everything from Super-Karts, MotoGP, Indy-cars and sports car racing, to Winston Cup (NASCAR) and the famous historic races each year in August. It draws racers and spectators from all over the world. It also has a natural layout including substantial elevation changes which most tracks cannot match. And... It has the "Corkscrew".***

One of the most well-known race-course turns in the world, a 150 foot drop in the middle of a quick left, right left combination slicing from the highest point in the area at the top of the hill and plunging back down into the bowl that makes up the rest of the track. Whether you recall it as just Laguna Seca, Mazda Raceway at Laguna Seca or WeatherTech Raceway – Laguna Seca, it's been the popular home of every possible form of road racing from around the world.

As of this morning there were 5 people who were numerically able to win this year's Indy-Car Championship, past champion, Australian Will Power, his Penske team-mate Joseph Newgarden, 6-time champion Scott Dixon and Marcus Ericsson. In reality, it was Will Power's Championship to lose, as he had a 20 point lead over Newgarden and Dixon, and the others had an outside shot at best. It would take a breakdown or crash of one or more of the top 3 to give the last 2 any real chance at pulling up into 1st place.

Let's go back and start with records, one broken and one still standing. Australia's Scott Dixon is a 6-time IndyCar champion and itching to tie A. J. Foyt's all-time record of 7 championships. Scott is tied on points with 2nd place Joseph Newgarden, but stands in 3rd place because he has fewer wins this season than Newgarden in the championship. On the other hand, as of yesterday morning, Will power was tied with "Super" Mario Andretti for the most pole positions in IndyCar.

The record had stood at 67 poles since Mario Andretti retired. Earlier this year, Power tied that record at 67 pole positions. Well, as they say, "Records are made to be broken" and on Saturday that is what Will did. With a lap at 112.505 Miles per hour, he won Pole #68 breaking a 29 year-old record of 67 poles set by Super-Mario at Michigan International Speedway in 1993. You get a single point for winning the pole, so Will extended his lead just a tiny bit! The nice part was that Mario was at the track and congratulated Will Power with a big smile! Mario, the Legend, was as gracious as always. Also on hand was Will's sponsor and car owner Roger "Captain America" Penske – obviously quite proud as well! More important, was that being on Pole gave Will an obvious advantage going into the start at today's season finale.

As the track went green, Power took the lead from first year English Phenom Callum Iloft going into turn 1 at the end of the front straight. Through the Andretti Hairpin 2016 Indy 500 Winner Alexander Rossi was able to squeeze past Iloft into 2nd place, with Pato O'Ward taking 3rd, and Iloft dropping back to 4th place. Power continued to lead the race, and extended his lead to nearly 5 seconds or more. As the race progressed, it appeared that Power would cruise to a win and his 2nd IndyCar title, but the race is 95 laps and many of the drivers have started on the super-soft Red compound. Lots of grip but not so much longevity! Like Formula 1, Indy car has tire regulations that require you to use at least one set of "Sticker Reds", or new, unused soft compound tires.

As a result, Laguna Seca was destined to be a 3 or 4 stop race, with the attendant risks that if your car was set up for the softer Red compound, and you started on them, the car might not like the other, harder compound. Different drivers are harder or easier on their tires and can make their tires last, while other drivers push to make up places while burning through their tires early...Not a good strategy in a 95 lap race. Power seemed to be able to get good life out of his tires, and by the 14th lap O'Ward had pushed past Rossi into 2nd place, putting Iloft and others farther back.

Power was able to make the Reds last 15 laps, overall a pretty good stint, but after the first few runners had made their first pits stops, it was Iloft getting better life out of his tires and assumed the lead for a few laps. Alex Palou, last year's IndyCar Champ had worked his way up to second, and Power was in 5th, with the longer lasting "Primary" compound tires. However Palou assumed the lead when Iloft finally had to pit around the 19th lap Joseph Newgarden, Power's Penske team-mate, also in the hunt for the championship, was now running in 6th, less than 2

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seconds adrift from his team-mate Power. With as many runners, and 95 laps to get through, not to mention the need to run both compounds of tires, it made for a lot of pit stops, and it almost became "Musical chairs" '. Remember, Will Power only had to finish 3rd to clinch the championship, regardless of where Newgarden, Dixon or anyone else finished!

Will Power was showing that his pole position was not a flash in the pan, as he had worked his way back into the lead, over Palou and O'Ward. By lap 27, surprise, surprise, things changed again, as Alex Palou, on the softer compound Firestones worked his way past Power and into the lead, while Joseph Newgarden, once running just one place behind his team-mate, found himself down in 13th! Laguna Seca is not like some of the Formula-1 tracks with vast swaths of concrete run-off at every corner, and as a result, there were a number of "Elbows out" incidents. Or as David Hobbs of F-1 fame once called it, "Argy-Bargy". ***You know, "Pardon me, excuse me, I beg your pardon" pushing and shoving resulting in excursions through the loose sandstone that surrounds Laguna Seca's 11 turns.***

Nothing serious, but ugly nevertheless! Power was able to remain near the front through all of the pit-stops, pushing and shoving that ensued over the next 40 or so laps, never dropping back farther than 3rd. At lap 68-69 Newgarden took the lead as Alex Palou pitted for the last time, but it didn't last long, as Palou re-took 1st place when Newgarden had to pit for his last set of tires on lap 75. Meanwhile, Will Power was rock-steady, holding third while the rest of the field danced, spun, clawed and tried to pull the chairs out from one another.

As the race wound down, Will's Wife Liz could be seen squeezing the life out of a plastic water bottle and wringing her hands along with the rest of the Penske crew. In the end, to no one's surprise Will Power became the 2022 IndyCar Champion for the 2nd time, finishing 3rd behind his own team-mate Joseph Newgarden in 2nd, and Alex Palou in 1st. Alex Palou won the race in 2 hours 3 minutes and 31 seconds. After 95 laps, 4 pit stops and lots of musical chairs, Newgarden finished 31 seconds behind and Will Power was 3 and half seconds behind Newgarden. Poor Scott Dixon, tied for 2nd on points going into the day, will have to wait for another try at a 7th IndyCar title next season, as today all he could manage was 12th place.

















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