

Hectic, Dangerous and Exciting... It's SPEEDWAY!

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All Photos by Robert Hargraves



When it comes to exciting motor sports, nothing else comes close to speedway motorcycle racing. The sport was born in the late 1920's in Australia and England, where it grew as a worldwide phenomenon. Speedway had its heyday in the 70's and 80's, where you could find a race every night in California without fail. The most well known venue back then was the famed Ascot Speedway in Gardena, California and in Costa Mesa at the Orange County Fairgrounds. In 1982 the Speedway World Championships were held at the Los Angeles Memorial Colosseum, when the sport was at its highest. Although time has not kept speedway in the spotlight, which has since been taken over by Motocross, speedway motorcycle racing is still a huge draw and just as exciting as it was in 1982. It's now time to put your helmet on, smell the methanol and discover why this sport is so endearing.

A speedway motorcycle is a lightweight, single-gear bike, a 500cc motor with a throttle and a clutch and not much more. That's right No Brakes! The engines run on pure 100% methanol. The design of these bikes is for the rear wheel to spin at a high rate of speed, while the rider is doing a power slide into the turns! These bikes are vicious beasts that will throw you, smash you and leave you physically and mentally drained if not ridden correctly.

Never been to speedway? Don't worry, it's simple to follow. Four riders keep turning left over four laps on an oval track and each race is over in less than a minute. It looks simple, but respect for the bikes is the number one rule! You need to have respect for anything that goes 0 - 70mph in 3 seconds, where you have to open the throttle at turns, instead of slowing down.

Now in 2016, Speedway is still entertaining fans and raising up a new generation of not only fans, but at riders as well. Names like Bruce Penhall and Mike Bast, have since retired from the sport, but some of the veterans are still riding today! Riders such as "Fast" Eddie Castro, "Mad Dog" Shawn McConnell, and Bobby "Boogaloo" Schwartz are still thrilling crowds, but a new generation has cropped up to keep the sport alive. Some of the new breed of young riders are following in their father's footsteps. Riders such as Kurtis Hamill (son of 1996 World Champion Billy Hamill), Broc Nicol (son of Doug Nicol) and others are paving a new way for the new generation. The new crop of pros today can be seen weekly at tracks throughout California. Names such as "Mad" Max Ruml, Gage Giest, Aaron Fox, 16 year old sensation "Little Missile" Luke Becker, and 6 Time National Champion Billy "The Kid" Janniro, are taking the sport to a whole new level and solidifying its future for generations to come! The participants run the gamut from successful business owners, first responders as well as high school students. Heather Rowe, is a wife and mother, also races Extreme Sidecars, where you have a 1000cc motorcycle with no brakes, a driver and a swinger hanging off the back for weight differential to make sure that the bike does flip, while opening up the throttle

through the turns! She says, "I race in this sport because I want to send a message to girls that you can do anything you want in life!" Rider Joey Donaldson, lives for the excitement, no brakes, turning right to go left, the cheering crowds, and the friends he has met along the way.

Are you ready for the thrill and excitement of speedway? In Southern California you have two tracks that hold events on a consistent basis. On Wednesday evenings, Industry Racing takes place at the Industry Hills Expo Center and is the only speedway track that contains a roof covering, so racing takes place regardless of the weather. (www.industryracing.com) After 48 years, Costa Mesa is still holding events on Saturday nights at the Orange Country Fairgrounds about 9 times a year. (www.costamesaspeedway.net) If you want to travel a bit for a great show, there is none better than Fast Fridays in Northern California. The small town of Auburn, located about 45 minutes north of Sacramento, is dedicated to speedway! In almost every shop and eatery you will find something that promotes Fast Fridays, located in a beautiful lush setting lined with trees at the Auburn Fairgrounds. Every Friday night you get to witness some of the best racing at a gorgeous facility. (www.fastfridays.com). Other specialty races are held throughout the year, such as a winter series at Perris Raceway, Santa Maria Speedway in central California, Big Time Speedway, and Ventura Raceway, the only race track in the State, located right on the beach! The biggest event there will on June 25 of this year, the Commotion by the Ocean, where one of four rounds of the AMA National Championship will be held. (www.venturaceway.com).

Whether you want to travel to catch a race, or just get a mid-week break to let off some steam, Speedway Motorcycle racing is an extreme, nail biting, on the edge of your seat type of event. Once you see one race, you become a fan for life! For more information on upcoming shows in California, race reports and rider profiles, visit www.speedwaybikes.com.

