

History of The Milwaukee Mile

The historic Milwaukee Mile, located at Wisconsin State Fair Park in West Allis, Wis., has been an iconic part of Milwaukee's treasured past since 1876. The Mile has hosted thousands of nail-biting races, awarded thousands of winning trophies, welcomed loyal fans from across the country for nearly 150 years, and is a staple in the legacy of the West Allis community.

The Milwaukee Mile opened as a private horse-racing track that was purchased by the Agricultural Society of the State of Wisconsin to create a permanent site of the Wisconsin State Fair Park. The track hosted its first dirt-track automobile race on Sept. 11, 1903, making The Milwaukee Mile the oldest operating motor speedway in the world.

In 1954, the Mile bid farewell to the dirt surface as the track was paved with an asphalt surface, but half-mile and quarter-mile dirt tracks remained in the infield of the track. In 1967, a permanent pit road was constructed for the safety of the high-speed cars that were frequently using the Mile for races. The construction of the pit road eliminated the quarter-mile and half-mile dirt tracks, putting an end to the short-track racing era at the Mile.

The infield of the quarter-mile dirt track at the Mile was also the location of a football stadium informally known as the Dairy Bowl. It hosted several Green Bay Packers games each season from 1934 through 1951, and even the NFL Championship Game in 1939. The Packers played their Milwaukee games at Marquette Stadium in 1952 before moving to County Stadium when it opened in 1953. The Packers played games in Milwaukee until 1994.



An overhead shot of the Milwaukee Mile during the 1999 IndyCar race.

During those races, The Milwaukee Mile has hosted some of the most notable names in racing history, including historic drivers Barney Oldfield, Ralph DePalma, Jim Clark, and AJ Foyt; famous families, including the Unsers, Andrettis, and Allison's; former champions like Darrell Waltrip, Rusty Wallace, Dario Franchitti, and Alan Kulwicki; as well as current racing stars Matt Kenseth, Dale Earnhardt Jr., Jeff Gordon, Scott Dixon, and Hélio Castronoves, along with many others.

To this day, The Milwaukee Mile still hosts the annual Milwaukee Indyfest, a two-day festival of speed at the Milwaukee Mile. Milwaukee Indyfest includes live music, a family fun zone, lots of racing, and opportunities for driver autographs. With the rich history and loyal race fans, the Mile is sure to continue to create great racing memories for many more years to come.



Aug. 22, 1965 - AJ Foyt (#1) sat on the pole for the State Fair Champ Car race in his front engine dirt track machine after his speedway car failed to show up at the track. Foyt's was the only car in the field designed to run on dirt, not on pavement. He valiantly drove to a 2nd place finish in the race. Photo Courtesy of Russ Lake.

The Mile has held several major racing events throughout its history, such as the American Automobile Association, United States Auto Club, NASCAR, CART, Champ Car World Series, and the IndyCar Series.

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Timeline of Events at The Milwaukee Mile

1903: The first automobile race was held on the dirt-surfaced track. William Jones of Chicago won the inaugural five-lap race averaging 36 MPH.

1914: After a tornado and fire destroyed many buildings, temporary bleachers were installed and Fairgoers were allowed to park automobiles on the infield and around the track to observe auto races.

1925: Another grandstand addition was started and a safety fence was built around the racetrack.

1927: A cement wall was built around the racetrack for the protection of drivers and spectators.

1929: Tom Marchese promoted his first auto race at the track. By the time Marchese retired in 1967, he was credited with promoting more major races than anyone else in the history of the sport.

1933: The first Indianapolis-designed racing automobiles, known then and until 1953 as Champ Cars or Big Cars, competed at the Milwaukee Mike. Wilbur Shaw won the 100-mile event.

1941: Drivers raced on the track over two days, and Rex Mays won the 100-mile race. It was the last racing event to be held on the track until after the end of World War II.

1954: The Milwaukee Mile was paved with asphalt, and new half-mile and one-quarter-mile dirt tracks were developed.

1955: A new 1.8 mile road-course track was created inside The Milwaukee Mile.

1957: The Milwaukee Mile was featured on the cover of *Asphalt Institute Magazine*.

1967: A new pit road was constructed at the Mile eliminating the quarter-mile dirt track. This ended a long history of short track automobile racing at the Fair Park. Veteran State Fair race promoter, Tom Marchese, retired, and was honored for his long and illustrious career in auto racing.

1968: The track was repaved, and in July, A.J. Foyt won the first USAC Stock Car Race to be held at the Mile.

1978: In May, the first American Speed Association (ASA) Stock Car Race was held. Bob Senneker won the 150-mile inaugural event.

1981: Although auto racing continued at other times during the year, it was discontinued during the Wisconsin State Fair.

1984: NASCAR Grand National Stock Car Race was held at The Milwaukee Mile and won by Sam Ard; Wisconsin drivers Alan Kulwicki and Dick Trickle finished 2nd and 3rd respectively. The NASCAR Grand National Series only remained at The Milwaukee Mile for two years.

1992: The track was officially named The Milwaukee Mile when Carl Haas Racing signed on as the primary promoter of the track.

1993: The NASCAR Busch Series returned to the Milwaukee Mile and would remain racing there until 2009.

1995: The NASCAR Craftsman Truck Series began racing at The Milwaukee Mile in its' inaugural season. The racetrack surface was also repaved. The truck series would remain racing at The Milwaukee Mile until 2009.

2010: Wisconsin State Fair Park officials confirmed that the Milwaukee Mile would not host any NASCAR or IndyCar races in 2010.

2011: IndyCar returned to the Milwaukee Mile for IndyFest.