

Footnote:

The author (**Peter Physick**) pays special appreciation to **Shayne Andrews** who (*unasked*) stepped up to the plate to write regular reports back to Facebook when I found it impossible to fulfil the daily task of writing the popular GST Blog for this tour.

I also recognise and thank Shayne for the supply of many photos and videos which populate this now updated Blog which has been written in the weeks after returning to Australia.

Any text in orange (except this one ☺) is a perfectly safe URL link for you to view.

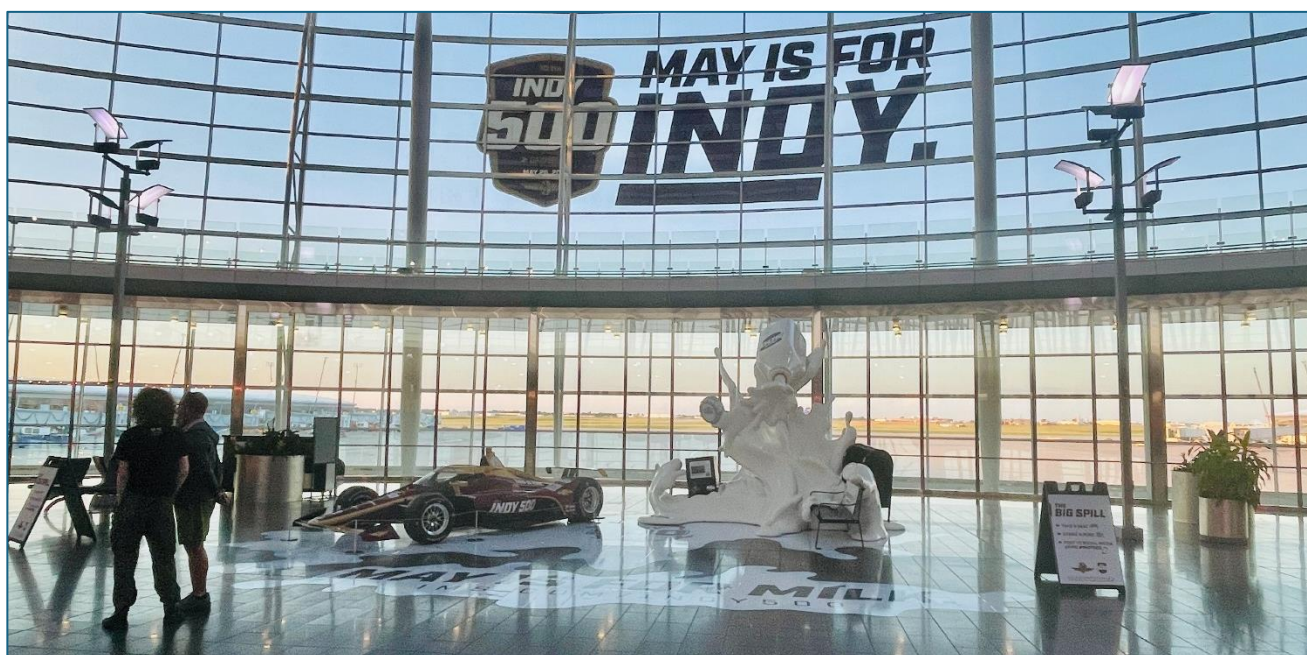
Day -2 / Saturday May 18th

As I walked through Sydney's International Airport towards gate #53, the big Airbus 350 that carries Delta's flight DL40 to Los Angeles came into view through the massive windows that frame the tarmac. "What number flight to the US was this one" I pondered without really knowing the answer.

Delta Airlines have been good to me ever since Global Speedway Tours made its maiden trip 13 years ago. They've been safe, courteous, reliable and best of all, the flight attendants have aged at the same pace as me. Considering how many Delta have [28,000 – I just googled it] it's amazing how often the same attendants are on the flight I'm on. I recognise them and they me, although no doubt they are trained to do that to everybody!

In two days' time 10 Australians will make a similar trek through their closest international airport to take off for a 29 day holiday of a lifetime. Especially if you're a speedway fan. And later, on June 26th, another 23 will make the same journey, but for 48 days. Yep there are two tours back to back in 2024. 77 days and 63 races across a total of 18 states.

Nothing of any consequence happened on the flight other than reaching LAX 40 minutes early and had to wait in the plane until Homeland Security opened up at 7.00am to let us into the country. Once that was achieved I dawdled up to Delta's domestic terminal to continue the ride to Indianapolis where I eventually landed bang on the appointed arrival time of 8.20pm on the same day as I left Sydney. Actually it was 27 hours in total.



For whatever reason, I was allocated the Presidential Suite at Plainfield's Baymont Inn. I looked everywhere but couldn't find Trumpy. And worse, Marilyn was nowhere to be seen to sing to me either. But then again it wasn't my birthday

Day -1 / Sunday May 19th

It's not every day that a hotel across the road burns down during the night. I've not had that happen before, but then again most folks probably wouldn't have either. A good sleep-in is what is usually required after a 15,000 km of flying. But that didn't happen because no less than 22 fire engines had arrived in our street to defeat the fire that had engulfed a new hotel being built opposite mine. I guess you too have also noticed that fire engines are incapable of arriving silently at a fire.

They failed to save anything by the way. Except for the lift tower and the slab.



Sunday was spent collecting the transportation that will take the first group around Indiana, Ohio, Kentucky, Tennessee, Missouri, Iowa, Wisconsin and Illinois over the next 28 days. Unfortunately I had to make several trips to the rental depot to get it right.

Sunday night I deliberately loitered in Walmart just aimlessly walking around with a trolley that gradually increased in its quantity of goods carried. Some of which was the initial supply of booze for the GST esky. Eventually I decided it was time to go to the checkout arriving there at 8.02pm. How do I know that? Because I emptied out the alcohol on to the belt only to be told by the check-out chick that I can't buy alcohol after 8.00pm on Sunday in Indiana. Missed by that much you might say.

Day 1 / Monday May 20th

Monday I picked up a second Ford passenger van after the first was deemed (*by me*) as unsatisfactory. Then returned to Walmart to retrieve the drinks I couldn't get yesterday before making the drive to the Staybridge Suites in Fishers, north of Indianapolis. Probably the best rooms ever for a Global Speedway Tours' trip. And we'll be there for the next seven nights!

The weather was spectacular. It couldn't possibly cause any flight delays today could it? Nope, it didn't. And so for the first time in many years all 10 tour members arrived on time and with all luggage intact.

Those on board with us are **Shayne Andrews**, **Russell Blackman** (*no show without Punch*), **Russell Bysouth**, **Colin Delaney**, **Tom and Norma Evans**, **Deryk Hartwick**, **Barry Lane**, **Jarod Steen** and **Steve Perry**. Plus tour host and blog author, **Peter Physick**. (*Note that as stated earlier, Shayne very kindly took the pressure away from me to produce regular Blog updates by publishing his thoughts and photos every day on Facebook. Thank you Shayne. They were a great help to me in putting this final website Blog together.*).

The evening was enjoyably spent greeting arriving tour members at Indy Airport before dinner at Wolfie's Bar & Grill where Shayne took the honours for the size of his ribs. On the plate that is.

Day 2 / Tuesday May 21st

Tuesday was set aside for housekeeping such as US SIM cards for the phones, fold up chairs for tailgating at the races and stocking up on goodies for the next week.

Followed by the 85 mile drive to Terre Haute for the Tony Hulman Classic for USAC sprintcars. This race was superb and the weather was outstanding. Rather unusual for the Action Track because rain is often the winner here.

As in previous years **Mike** and **Laura Henderson** (*from Washington State on the west coast*) were again back in the Midwest chasin' racin' for five months. We joined with their group for tailgating as always in the parking lot. Whilst out on the track **Logan Seavey** took the lead from **Brady Bacon** on turn 3 of the last lap. Best race I've seen at Terre Haute for years which left the tour members suitably impressed indeed! A great start to the tour for them.

Day 3 / Wednesday May 22nd



Our ground transport for this tour is a Ford as usual. Pictured above (*unadorned as yet by Australian flags*) outside the very impressive Staybridge Suites in Fishers, Indiana. Although to be fair, we were Chevrolet people for the first 10 or so tours, at least until one year Stubb was asked to pick up the tour vehicle before I arrived. He came out of the car rental company with a Ford and they wouldn't take it back. Reluctantly we stuck with it and by the second day found it to be an infinitely better passenger vehicle than the Chev which was basically designed as a cargo van before being fitted with seats.

So here we are in 2024 with a 2023 model to get us around between race tracks. But the first order of the day was to check out the pool and spa. We were intrigued by the rules set out for patrons.

We started today by visiting the Indiana State Fairgrounds, an historic venue which opened in 1892 specifically to host the State Fair each July. Auto racing had been staged there on the one mile dirt track since 1946 with the prestigious Hoosier Hundred attracting Indy drivers to race there the day before the 500 at the Big Track.

Sadly however, in 2021 the Fair Board decided to change the surface of the track to crushed limestone in order to appease the horse fraternity who quite justly claimed that their everyday use was way more attractive to the Board than those who only used it one day a year. Hard to argue against that. The only mechanical horsepower evident today was from 200 or so classic cars in a just finished Mecum's auction that were being loaded up onto specialised car carriers to be delivered to their new owners. (*I failed to get us in there, but I knew there were much better things ahead.*)



Next was a drive through downtown Indianapolis taking in monuments and various other well-established landmarks before arriving at one of the city's treasures. Long's Bakery on 16th Street. If you've seen the famous Seinfeld episode about the Soup Nazi then picture yourself in this shop.

There is always a line to get in and as with the New York soup shop, it is imperative that you know exactly what

you want before arriving at the counter with its vast array of donuts and bakery items. You order, then step back silently to await your paper bag to be loaded with your goodies. Once ready you get back into line, accept your bag with head bowed and then shuffle to the cashier, who somehow knows exactly what you have ordered. Then eat it outside ...

Next up it was the collection of our tickets for this Saturday's Indy 500 street parade. Following that up by driving to the famous track itself and then entering through one of the six tunnels that feed vehicles in and out. The museum was closed for extensive renovations, but we knew that beforehand. A few of the group took the opportunity though to do a tour of the track, called "Kiss the Bricks".

By now it was almost 2.30pm and a short drive around the corner from the racetrack, took us to Charlie Brown's for lunch. Located in the suburb of Speedway, Indiana, we were last in, right on closing time.

We had a ball with the staff who decided to vacuum the floors while we were eating. Legs up, legs down it became like a comedy routine until that is the vacuum cleaner blew up! They had it in bits all over the floor as we left to take a look at Sarah Fisher's go kart complex across the road.

After which it was off to the original Gasoline Alley and the Arizona Sports t-shirts bargain bins. Hundreds and hundreds of racing shirts, all at \$5.00. The great merchandise hunt has started.

And finally after a very full day's activity, we arrived at Circle City Raceway for the first of two nights of USAC Sprintcars. Of course we rendezvoused with Laura and Mike and friends which was planned.



However what wasn't planned was for **Kevin Eckert** to wander in to the gathering. He had seen the Australian flags adorning the Ford and wondered just who it might be. I reckon the last time I saw Kevin was at Quincy Raceway on Thursday Aug 9th, 2013 at an Illinois Midget week race.

We had a great reunion and he enjoyed meeting everyone in the group. Kevin and Barry in particular struck up an instant friendship owing to their love of all things statistical.

Separately on our Global Speedway Tours Facebook page there is a “pinned” feature story which records the winners of each night’s sweep with background on how they managed it and who they owned. Plus pictures. You might like to read it [at the following link](#). Rusty was the first winner.

Day 4 / Thursday May 23rd

Ray Skillman is a car dealer. Ray Skillman has franchises with Ford, Buick, GMC, Chevy, Kia, Mitsubishi, Mazda and Hyundai. Drive anywhere in Indianapolis and you wouldn’t go ten minutes without seeing a physical Skillman dealership, or a sign for one. Fortunately Ray Skillman also loves collecting classic cars. Particularly classic Indycars and our favourites, dirt track sprintcars and midgets.

Whilst the dealerships are all over the city, Greenwood is where there is a massive non-descript white building that for all the world looks like a regular warehouse containing stuff in cardboard boxes ready to be shipped out to the world somewhere. The fact that it sits behind a Skillman Hyundai dealership doesn’t even give it away.

It is suggested that 99% of Hoosiers don’t know it’s there. Which is a good thing for Mr Skillman. You see he doesn’t want 99% of the people to know what’s in it. Just the 1% who are genuine enthusiasts and it’s them he welcomes to his lair. He is proud as punch to show off what he’s got, but only to those who appreciate what they are looking at. I had to gain the help of a couple of powerful auto racing names to get the Indy 500 tour group in there today and also secure a date for the forthcoming Month of Money group of 24 in early August.

The following link will visually describe the group’s reactions as they walked into the showroom. And give you a look at what they saw for the first time. [Click here first](#) and [here second](#).

The inventory is not always for sale with most cars being there for the duration. Mr Skillman comes in every day when in Indy to walk amongst his babies. On the other hand he is a businessman and will sell pretty much anything in there provided there is a better one available for him to buy immediately. Maybe all up it tops the 100 million dollar mark? We spent two hours admiring not only the cars, but the vast array of other memorabilia. The vintage carousel in the middle is valued at \$1.5 million.





With the breath knocked out of us, our next objective was to put it back in courtesy of shovelling some lunch down with it. So with Laura in tow (*she joined us in the Skillman fantasy*) we stopped at one of the Denny's restaurants, perhaps America's most well-known chain of roadside diners. It was thoroughly enjoyable and surprised our guest of honour who hadn't ever frequented one before.

After Denny's it was off to buy more merchandise. Thanks to **Barry Lane's** investigative skills, he discovered that the "world's largest motorsports memorabilia convention" (*their words*) was on across the next few days and it started at 3.00pm this arvo in Plainfield. Right up our alley actually, as over the next 2½ months we will be staying in Plainfield on four occasions. It runs in conjunction with the Indy 500 and it's not hard to see why. You could spend days just looking, let alone buying stuff. I'm reliably informed that some of our members may have made a couple of small purchases. 🤔

This was followed by picking up our second rental car (a *Chrysler Pacifica*) which, besides being an excellent and comfortable vehicle to ride in, also becomes a workhouse when all five rear passenger seats are lowered into the chassis to create up to four cubic metres of luggage space. Shayne will drive this one and he'll quickly become reacquainted with driving on the wrong (*other?*) side of the road.

Then it was back to Circle City speedway for night 2 of their USAC non-winged Sprintcars. Another superb weather day and the promoter was rewarded with a great crowd. Cards were drawn and **Jarod Steen** kept everyone up to date with who had who once the A Main field was set.

What he couldn't control was who won. Incredibly **Russell Bysouth** won again. Picking up a cool US\$110 in 24 hours.

Everyone was so happy for him (*not*) ... 😊



Day 5 / Friday May 24th

The national Memorial Day holiday occurs across the US on the last Monday in May every year. The Indy 500 is raced on the Sunday before Memorial Day every year. The time honoured Carb Day is always held at the Big Track on the Friday before the 500. Keeping up?

Carb Day is so called because “*back in the day*” when race engines ran carburettors, Friday was the last permitted day that qualifiers could use the track to test and tune their carbies. Nowadays with no such device on the cars, Carb Day is still observed, but differently. Fans are certainly invited to pay to watch the final practice and the emphasis is still on carbs, but of the variety found in beer! It is a swim through believe me. Friday’s not a holiday in Indiana, but it may as well be as over 120,000 gather at the track on the infield to eat and drink. And party. Combine racing and rock ‘n roll and it becomes a hell of a day.

If I owned an Indianapolis based company and I thought my employees deserved a vote of thanks then I would take them to Carb Day - all day. They may never see a race car, but that wouldn’t matter. You would cater for them by bringing along the biggest BBQ you can fit in your biggest truck. Position it under the biggest shelter or gazebo known to man. A portable crane is usually helpful at this point. Then get the employees to lift off all the coolers (*read eskies*) from the back of the biggest truck. 55% of them have beer inside. The other 45% have food. The crane can also be utilised for this purpose.

Then, after tearing off the ring pull on your first can, all hands assemble to erect the tent. The area taken up by the tent could easily accommodate 15 more cars, but the parking attendants appear to not be at all concerned by that. After all, the infield of the speedway is 230 acres in size. In fact, the IMS infield is so big it could hold eight major world landmarks inside of it simultaneously: **Churchill Downs racecourse, Yankee Stadium, Rose Bowl Stadium, the Vatican City, the Taj Mahal, the White House, Liberty Island and the Roman Colosseum.**

Once the marquee is up, it’s time to move the BBQs into place between the 10 trestles that will hold all the food. The cooks have obviously been pre-selected. The ones opposite us today put on their aprons which had a full size picture of Michelangelo’s David on the front. *Methinks some shenanigans might occur later.* The food lies nicely spread out across all the tables just as the Indycars come out for their final practice. Murmurings are heard as to “*what is that loud noise*”?

To top it all off and to prove they have way too much food and drink, a young lady wandered across to the Ford which, as usual, was adorned with Australian flags across the two rear doors. I was the only one there at the time (*the rest were out increasing their merchandise supply*) and I’m sure she thought I was alone. Hence made the offer for me to join them for lunch. When I accepted and advised that that there was 11 of us, it made no difference. “*Everybody is welcome*” was the reply. And so lunch at Carb Day was organised just like that.



After the final practice was finished, and our freebee lunch was eaten, **and the Blue Angels had completed their practice runs** and an inspection had been made of the Dirt Track at Indy (*used for the BC 39*) we thanked our good hearted neighbours and made our way out of there before the concert started in

the Snake Pit where *George Thorogood & the Destroyers*, *Gin Blossoms* and *Kid Quill* will play 'til mid-night, or before if everyone passes out on the grass. What a shame we couldn't stay for it 😊

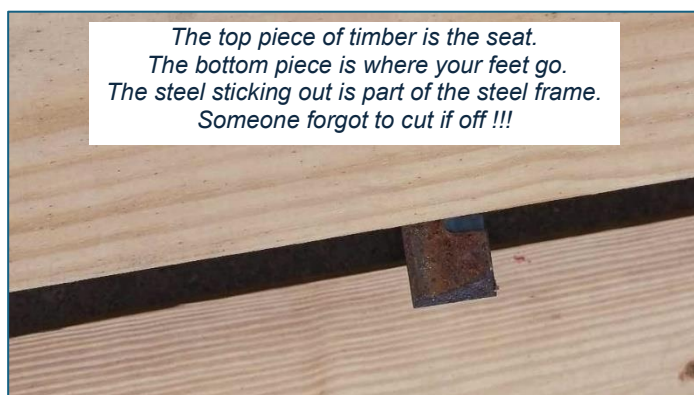
Bloomington Speedway was our objective for the **Josh Burton** Memorial. Held every season to commemorate the life of a young 22 year old sprintcar racer who was killed at the track in May of 2013. It used to be a time consuming drive to and from Bloomington, but since I-69 has been extended from Indianapolis it now pretty much goes straight past the ¼ miler with distinctive orange clay. **Steve Kinser** lives just around the corner and I bet he too wishes that he had had a freeway on his doorstep for the thousands of times he drove out of his race garage to a distant track somewhere across the country.

For the record the 2024 Josh Burton Memorial was lost by **Ty Mihocko** when he was passed by **Robert Ballou** on the final lap! Ballou took home \$10,000 while **Steve Perry** kept \$55 from the GST sweep.

Day 6 / Saturday May 25th

It turned out to be quite an eventful day. Planned was the always fabulous Indy 500 Parade through the streets of Indianapolis. That was at Midday. Then it was lunch amongst 100,000 others at a restaurant somewhere in the heart of Indy. The city eateries love this day. Their prices expand as much as the guests' girths who dine there. The next event was the Little 500 at Anderson, 29 miles or so north up I-69. That's right, 500 laps for 33 non-wing sprintcars on the high banked ¼ mile paved oval.

Unfortunately there was also an unplanned event that took the gloss of a potentially good day. For the tour host anyway. Having arrived at the bleachers (*small grandstands*) that had been temporarily constructed on either side of the city streets forming the parade's route, I leapt up onto our top row to make sure there was no one already sitting in our reserved seats. (*Some Americans have a nasty habit of doing that and then refusing to move.*)



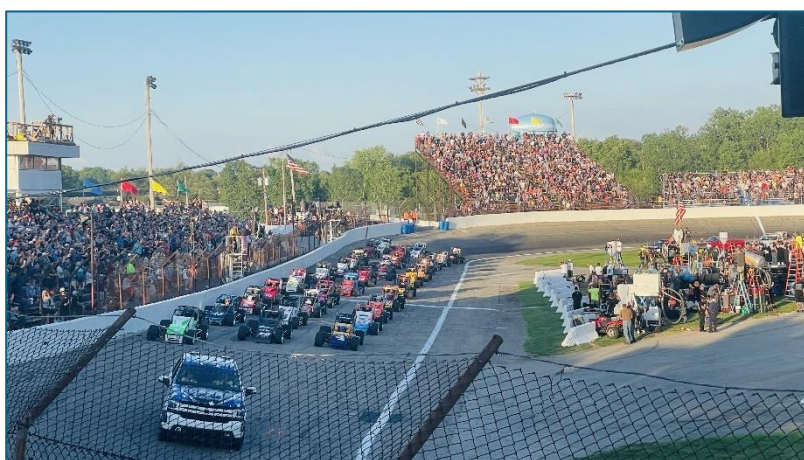
The good news was "*no there no one in them*". The bad news was that I failed to see the rusty slab of steel sticking out at calf height. After it was too late I had a gash in my leg that was 10 cms long, 2 cms wide and 2 cms deep. There was a significant amount of spilt blood and it wasn't long before a horde of first responders arrived to attend to the bloody Aussie in the Pennsylvania Avenue bleachers.

Fortunately management from the Festival 500 office also arrived. It was they who had the bleachers built. **Shayne** thoughtfully showed them the offending item, along with many others in the bleachers, none of which had been cut off as they should have been. In the end all they could do was put America's favourite drinking cup (*the plastic red ones*) on each jagged piece, crumple it and tape it up so it was very evident to others walking along. Crude but effective.

Me? I was carted off to the Indiana University Hospital firstly in a "*side by side*" buggy (similar to a golf cart) to get through the increasingly crowded streets to a waiting ambulance which took me the rest of the way. In the hospital I was taken straight to the Emergency Room, plopped on a table and examined by a senior doctor who proclaimed that although very deep, the jagged and rusty steel had not severed any tendons.

I was stitched up, given a tetanus shot, a cup of coffee and a biscuit plus numerous scripts for antibiotic tablets. I was warned that there was every possibility this could go haywire with infection. Even so, I had little choice but to continue the tour with my leg in a compression sock to help keep the wound together. Plus, undertake what felt like daily visits to the nearest Walmart pharmacy for more antibiotics and bandages.

Our visit that night was to Anderson Speedway and the Little 500. An iconic event which completely sells out the high banked ¼ mile paved track. On a regular Saturday night they would be lucky to get 1,500 through the gate. But bring in 33 non wing sprintcars, start them three abreast and let 'em go for 500 laps captivates the crowd and they come in their thousands. There is not a spare seat in the house.



There's not much room on the track either as this video well demonstrates.

Caleb Armstrong stole the victory from his cousin **Dakoda** on the 500th lap to win by 0.261 seconds. Our **Shayne** was very happy about the sweep result, but **Jarod** wasn't ...

Day 7 / Sunday May 26th

Waking up this morning was easy. Accepting that it was 5.00am was the difficult part. You see, on previous tours our outings to the Indianapolis 500 have resulted in us sitting in traffic jams for three hours and more as the roads around the track became utterly gridlocked. The absence of any public transport means everyone travels by private car. Houses for miles around open up their front and back yards and park vehicles in there for fees up to \$80.00. This amount can reduce to \$20 if you're prepared to walk five miles to the track carrying kids, coolers and cans.

We drove out of the hotel parking lot at 5.30am armed with a boxed breakfast and other things we figured we might need for the next six hours before the race started. To the surprise of all (*mostly the tour host*), we drove into one of the monstrous track parking lots (*on 16th Street directly across the road from turn 4*) just 35 minutes later. The traffic was minimal. Had we outsmarted everyone by taking a never before discovered route? Or were we just lucky to get a five minute window of opportunity? I guess we'll never know.

We set up camp behind our nosed in Chrysler Pacifica in a grassed area that esteemed journalist **Kevin Eckert** calls the "*Australian uncrowded parking area*". Yanks prefer "*access lane*". But today everyone broke the unofficial parking lot rules by also setting up gazebos, tents and marquees wherever there was a spare patch of grass. There was zero chance of moving your car while these pop up parties were in full swing. By midday however most will have scattered into the speedway to take up their seats for the 12.45pm race start.

So what to do at 6.05am in the morning sitting in a fold up chair with feet on the esky watching an incredible scene unfold. Of course you do what everyone else was doing. Eat and drink. A boxed breakfast followed by a Bud, or an Old Crow. Unfortunately, although it looked like Carb Day all over again, this time no one came out of the woodwork to offer us a cooked breakfast.

What we did see however was a game which I would call “*Spear a beer*”. But it’s real name is simply “*beer darts*”. Once you have sufficient beer on board to feel impregnable to anything, you find seven other similarly charged individuals and form a circle sitting in your fold up chair. Positioned between your spread out feet on the grass is a full can of beer. Briefly shaken, but not opened. There are two steel tipped darts.

The objective is to throw the darts at anyone you want. Except the closest person next to you. Well, not really at the person, but at their beer can hoping that you can puncture it. If you do, the can will erupt instantly with beer spurting out through the wound in the can. The person sitting over the top of the can now has the responsibility of shot gunning the sucker through the hole until the can is empty. The crumpled can is then replaced with another suitably shaken, but unopened Bud. And the shot gunner then aims the two darts at another subject in the circle. And so it continues

By the way, if the thrower misses the can, he / she is required to take at least a reasonable swig from the open can in their left hand. Assuming they are right handed! Yes, just like cornhole you must hold a beer while throwing

Whilst all this was going on **Shayne** sent his drone up for a look around. The result was an introduction for one lucky American gent to a young lady who he had fancied from afar for some time. Yes, quite cryptic I know, but it happened.



By 11.30am the carpark had virtually cleared. Of people that is - there were still 4,000+ cars, trucks and motorhomes parked there, but the owners had either packed their shelters, seats and garbage away, or left it there, all depending on how their parents brought them up. They then trooped across 16th Street and into the colosseum that is the Indianapolis Speedway.

Except for the back straight, enormous grandstands ring the track to accommodate the 235,000 who want to see what happens when the checkered flag drops for the first of 200 laps. Or, if you don’t care what happens, go onto the infield just to say you were part of the additional 150,000 who spread the rug out and lay down for a sleep after breakfast. But things didn’t quite go to plan today folks

You see the gi-normous grandstands are made of metal. Which is fine when it’s not a day like today. Around 11.00am the weather began to dictate what would happen next. Clouds rolled in to satisfy the forecast prediction of t-storms at race start time. With those clouds came the wind and with the wind came the temperature drop, which in turn meant RAIN. Those who had already left the carpark came

running back when the authorities evacuated everybody from the “aloominum” stands, not because of the thunder, but the jagged bolts of lightning beginning to streak across the sky were fierce.

Those whose parents didn't teach them well, found their gazebo a long ways away from where they left it. The wind had swept up the chairs and blown the rubbish into next door. The rain cascaded down, but to be honest no one really worried that there would be a rainout and the race held tomorrow. Confidence was high that it would blow over (*which it did*), that the track crews would dry the racing surface (*which they did*), that they had enough beer to last until the delayed start (*which most did*) and that the concessions would have enough food to feed everyone until 8.45pm, instead of the original finishing time of 4.45pm. (*They didn't.*)

By the way in case you were wondering about the cost of the track cuisine. I bought food for Russell, Steve and myself around 4.30pm. The cost for three hot dogs & three waters was AUD\$76.39. That's all they had left and subsequently pulled down the shutters just after I left. (*The race hadn't yet started!*)

The diehards stay 'til the end, never leaving their seat. Others get bored and go for a walk then return. Around 25% leave early and don't go back, either because they are tired and grumpy, or they want to avoid the horrendous traffic jams when the race finishes. Or, it was your Tour Host, who was keen to move the Ford from its resting place since 6.05am this morning to a (*now vacant*) spot in the front row of the parking lot right up against the fence bordering 16th Street. This would be the six lanes wide street that race fans are channelled out onto tonight. In an hour's time it would be a mass of humanity.

There was no need for Global Speedway Tours folk to rush anywhere, anymore. Our original Plan A was for everyone to run from the stands to the car park so we could get away to tonight's sprintcar races at Kokomo before they closed the streets to vehicles. But alas, Kokomo had earlier announced they had cancelled. Of course their decision probably had nothing to do with the fact that for the first time in living memory the Indy Speedway permitted the 500 to be televised live into the state of Indiana. With Kyle Larson in the field attempting to win the first leg of the Indy 500 / Coke 400 daily double and a finish predicted to be 8.45pm, no one was gunna go to Kokomo tonight.

So began one of the best things you can do on Indy 500 day. And that is “*people watching*”. The Ford had been backed up to 16th St, the rear doors were opened, the esky was unleashed, the chairs were positioned line abreast and there we sat watching an amazing spectacle unfold. The Australian flag is the centrepiece every time. Americans know it's not their flag, but most aren't sure at all just what country we represent. Hence many and varied conversations take place as they parade in front of us.



In the time we sat there at least 100,000 people walked past. Not all of them said hi of course, but hundreds did. We created a good image of our country and so did they with their generous American hospitality instincts fuelled by way too many beers. It was a day that resulted in a back to back 500 victory for **Josef Newgarden** who won the race after passing **Pato O'Ward** in turn three on the final lap. It was the fourth Indianapolis 500 to end in a last lap pass after 2006, 2011, and 2023 finished the same way. [Check out this video link for a quick look at the day.](#)

Day 8 / Monday May 27th (Memorial Day)

Time to leave Indianapolis after seven fabulous days and nights in the “*Speed Capital of the World*”. We now have two vehicles to transport people and luggage after acquiring a u-beaut Chrysler Pacifica which **Shayne** and **Jarod** will drive from now until the end of Midget Week. The beauty of the Pacifica is its ability to stow any or all of the five seats behind the front row in the floor, thereby making it into a cargo van.

Fremont was calling our names, but before we could get on the interstate to Ohio we had the important task of collecting **Tom** from the Fishers’ Community Hospital on Shadeland Avenue. He was being released after spending the last 36 hours in a ward being tested for all sorts of things. We had taken he and **Norma** to the Emergency Room early on Sunday morning (*before we left for the 500*) after Tom had complained of a sore neck whilst at the Little 500 on Saturday night.

He was admitted and tested for everything, as per the American Hospital system’s procedure manual. He had a private room and as you might imagine the TV was tuned to the Indy 500 for the duration. Tom never knew how lucky he was that, because of the rain delay Penske Management made the decision to lift the live TV blackout across the state. Otherwise he would have missed it altogether. Tom & Norma gave their tickets to the doctors treating him but, as we at the track know, they didn’t turn up.

Indianapolis to Fremont is 225 miles and takes 3 hours 32 minutes. But on a public holiday it can be so much longer. Today was no different. We left about 11.30am but not before some slapstick scenes at the local pharmacy trying to get Tom’s tablets. I’m not sure that **Barry Lane** looks much like Tom, but apparently his passport photo does.

To save time while waiting for Tom to be discharged, we (*incl Norma*) drove to the nominated Walgreens to get his prescriptions filled. Barry was elected to provide in-store assistance to Norma. First attempt failed because they weren’t e-mailed to the correct pharmacy. Back to the hospital to sort that out. Returned to the same Walgreens and they were now there. But the dispensary wouldn’t release the pain relief tablets because, as they said, “*it was a narcotic and Tom was not an American citizen*”.

Back to the hospital to argue the point with Matron who tried to explain the circumstances over the phone to said chemist. Tom still hadn’t been released and time was marching on for us to get to tonight’s World of Outlaws sprintcar race at the Sandusky County Fairgrounds. With assurance that the medicines would be released to his wife, back we went. “*Do you have your passport Mrs Evans?*” “*Ah no.*” *It’s back at the hospital.*” At this point Barry’s composure was being sorely tested. He thought quickly and said “*look I’ve known Uncle Tom all my life. Can you use my passport?*” And voila, just like that the tablets were handed over and we left the store. (*Let’s hope Baz is allowed to leave the country.*)

And where was I while all this was happening? Well there is some good news about the events of the morning. I was able to buy 3.5 litres of Old Crow bourbon, plus a carton of Bud Light, for a grand total of US\$54.98. The purchase was made inside the chemist shop, from the aisle next to the dispensary, without a passport and I was served by the same dude who wouldn’t give Norma her husband’s medicine! I reckon 3.5 litres of bourbon is a way better pain relief substance than Tom’s tablets!

Fremont Speedway is a unique place. It regularly races 410 winged sprintcars most Saturday nights and they have a loyal following who flock to the Fairgrounds each time the gates open. Tonight was special though. Adding lustre to the program were the World of Outlaws and their presence meant 48 cars in the pits and thousands of extra fans through the gates. We had reserved seating in the old covered grandstand and they were excellent seats, as evidenced by the fact that some interlopers chose to sit in them, totally ignoring the fact that we had tickets. No amount of cajoling would move them. A couple of round arms to the jaw might have done the trick, but that wasn’t the answer. Nor was a visit to the track’s security office. All males who couldn’t have been more disinterested in helping.

The final choice was to appeal to the World of Outlaws ticket office and I must be very careful how I word this next bit. They were all young ladies. The males had left to attend to other duties on the track. Having explained my position I wasn't for a moment expecting any of the girls to confront the oversize males in the stands, some of whom looked as though they had just got off the set of WWE.

The girls all looked at each other and said nothing and I was just about to walk away when one young lady said, *"Sir, whereabouts are you exactly?" "Top row of the covered grandstand". "OK, you go back to your seat and I'll come up in about two minutes."* As I arrived back in my 'seat' (which was the top step of the stairs) I received dirty looks from the offenders. I just smiled back, hoping like hell 'Miss World of Outlaws' was on her way. And she was

She announced herself magnificently by striding up from the bottom to the top, never once taking her eyes off the culprits concerned. It was as if she had done this before! And she picked a great time to do it too. Right when there was a track grade, so the crowd around us could stand to watch and applaud. They knew we were having problems.

She really took over from there. Asked for everyone in that row to produce their tickets, sussed out pretty quickly who the intruders were, and promptly kicked them out. The cowboys, wearing their \$700 pig skin leather boots, gathered their 10 gallon hats and begrudgingly had to walk all the way to the bottom to the jeers of those around us. Gone forever.



Fremont Speedway inside the Sandusky Fairgrounds in Ohio

It was crash and bash tonight in the stands and on the track. A World (of Outlaws) record was created tonight when after the 12th flip **Gibbo** announced over the PA that the previous record of eleven in one night had just been broken. One who didn't get upside down was **Carson Macedo** who won his first WoO race since March 23rd. It was the start of something good for Carson because at the time of writing (*October 10th*) he has now won 10 and lies 86 points behind **David Gravel**.

Day 9 / Tuesday May 28th

A night off tonight from racing and in a perverse sort of way, people looked forward to the break. We left Fremont around 9.00am after packing up the Pacifica with luggage for just the second time. There are another 19 occasions left to go, so I'm tipping they will get very good at it. Tonight we'll be sleeping

in Elizabethtown, Kentucky and dinner will be at the always popular Texas Roadhouse. I put that out well ahead of time because Global Speedway Tours will be paying using the funds included in the overall tour price for admission to Kokomo Speedway after the Indy 500. That didn't happen as we know, so our policy is to put the ticket price towards dinner for every race missed because of rain.

But that was still some hours away. In the meantime we headed south down I-75 stopping briefly in Lima at the excellent Howard Johnson hotel where the Month of Money tour group had 55 room nights booked across five nights in July for the Kings Royal. There was a bill to be paid and we needed a leg stretch. From Lima it was down through Dayton where we saw a truck on I-75 whose driver was forced into trying for a right leg stretch on the brake. Literally.

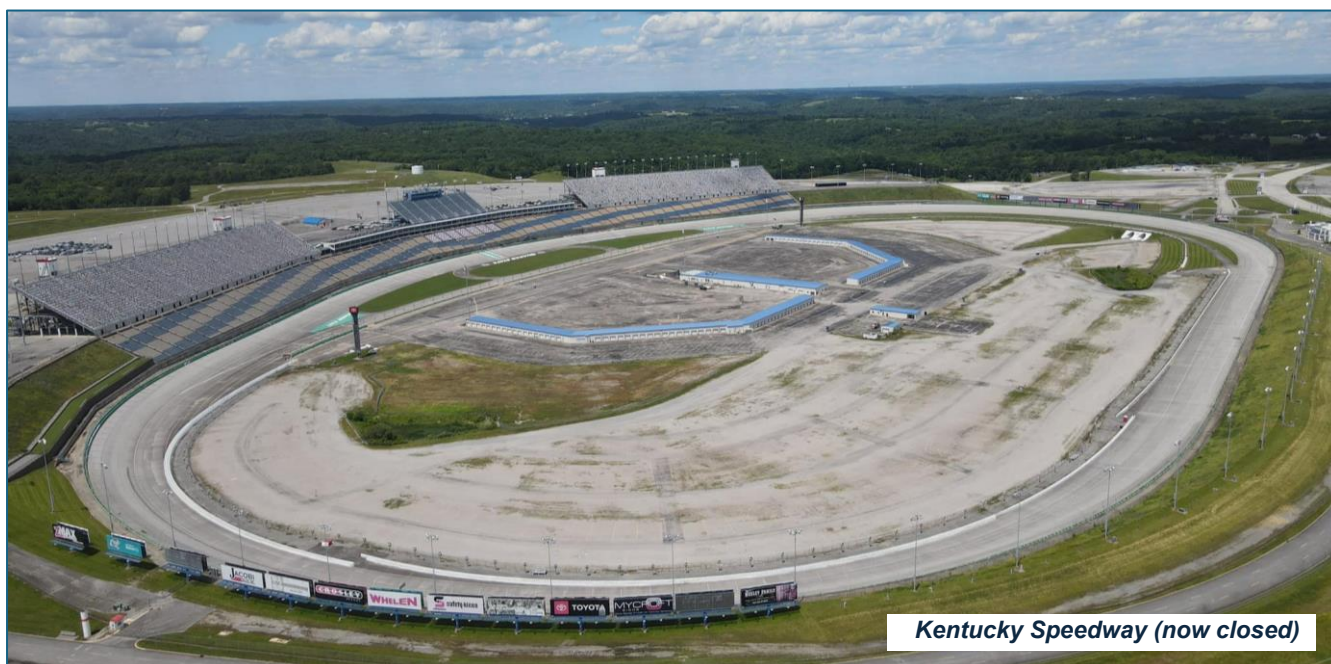
He had jack-knifed at speed (*a minute or so before we arrived*) to avoid a car that pulled in front of him. The end result was a 90° left hand collision at speed into the cement barrier that stopped him from flying off the top of the overpass and onto the freeway below us. It would have been catastrophic if the barrier hadn't stopped him dead. As it was the prime mover had mounted the barrier and was part dangling over the edge. We snuck through because the emergency services hadn't yet arrived, but any later and we would have been sitting there for hours on that overpass.



Cincinnati was next up, but no stop. It's here we crossed the mighty Ohio River which, as it meanders along, also forms the border between Ohio and Kentucky. The centrepiece at this exact point on the banks of the old Ohio is Paycor Stadium, the home of the Bengals in the NFL.

Further down 71 at Sparta is Kentucky Speedway, the ex and now disused NASCAR stadium.

It appeared to be in immaculate condition and (*to our eyes*) looked like it could have hosted a race tomorrow. But no, Speedway Motorsports the owner of nine such NASCAR tracks doesn't see a current need for this one. But it won't sell. Every now and then a bunch of tourists arrive, send up a drone for pictures and then move on. In our case it was to the Jim Beam Distillery.



Anticipating a tour with sampling of complimentary bourbons included, our appetites were considerably whetted as we drove into the wonderful named address of 568 Happy Hollow Rd, Clermont, KY 40110. Yep that's where you can find the distillery along with 72 seven storey rickhouses storing 1.5 million barrels of bourbon. By the way that amounts to 240 million litres. All laid out on a majestic and immaculately manicured 800 acres. But alas, it was Tuesday and the tours ended on Monday night and start again on Wednesday morning. I certainly missed that note on their website

Oh well. We then made the short drive to Elizabethtown and the Country Inn & Suites. Fortunately they were open on a Tuesday and the booking was secure. After settling in, the Texas Roadhouse received our custom and a fun night eventuated. Topped off by watching the High Limit sprintcars from Grandview in Pennsylvania in the carpark of the hotel from the back of the Chrysler. Streaming the vision onto my laptop from the phone. *(It was this scenario that made me think about how we could do that better should the occasion arise.)*



Day 10 / Wednesday May 29th

380 miles (608kms) lay ahead of us for today as we drove out of Elizabethtown on our way to Bowling Green, also in Kentucky. When folks around the world think about Kentucky, it's fair to say they assume that horse racing and bourbon are its best two claims to fame, but spelunkers would say otherwise. A spelunker is also known as a speleologist. And if you're still confused they are cave dwellers.

Mammoth Cave, the largest cave system in the world with 400 miles of explored caves is in Kentucky. Experts estimate there are still 800 miles left to explore! The reason I'm relating these facts is because of where we first stopped today. The **National Corvette Museum** is a phenomenal place to visit. Admission was included in the tour price and away we went immediately splintering off into separate groups with some needing more time than others. The Museum's greatest claim to fame are the Corvettes of course. However the rich porous limestone that punctuates most of this region of Kentucky *(hence the caves)* played a huge part in the legend that is now the National Corvette Museum.

[This link describes everything you need to know about the sink hole. It goes for 3 mins 32 seconds.](#)



If an owner wants to, they can have their **new Corvette delivered to them at the Museum**. And right under the gaze of whoever is visiting there at the time. Like us. Four cars were delivered and dispatched while we were there. We could only drool and take pictures in the foyer. The 2024 convertible corvette is drive away at just over US\$75k. The same car when it lands in Australia will start at between AUD\$175k -200k.

Lunch was a quick one on the run at a Subway in the middle of absolutely nowhere. *(Fun fact. Subway has more shops around the world (37,000) than any other take away including Maccas and KFC).*

The small town of McKenzie, Tennessee is the home of J&J Sprintcar chassis where **Bonnie** and **Jack Elam** are the well-liked and very proud owners. Thanks to **Terry Barry's** connection we started touring the J&J workshop several years ago and it still remains as one of the warmest welcomes a pesky Australian tour group can have. Jack continued to toil away building (or fixing) sprintcars for owners while Bonnie gave us a highly educational hour touring their facility and seeing the whole process that's involved in putting a chassis together. It ain't as simple as some would think. Nowadays they build 'em to customer specifications. But at the same time adhering to their own safety standards.

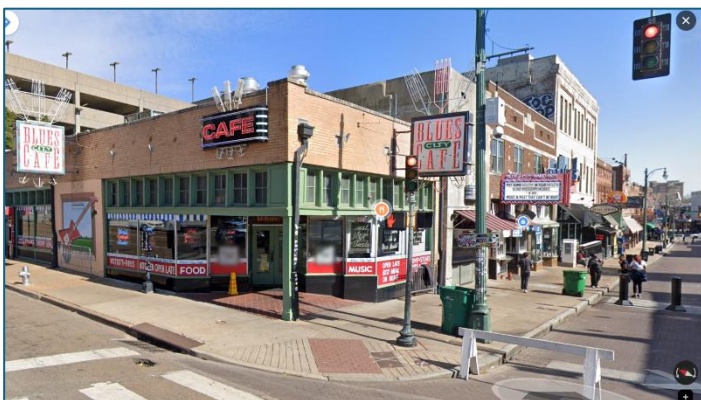
"Walking in Memphis" was for later when we take a stroll along Beale Street, but for now we had 130 miles (208 kms) to drive southwest from McKenzie to Elvis' adopted city. Time was on our side so we decided to take some enjoyable backroads until we once again met up with I-40 to take us directly to the Comfort Inn on Front Street overlooking the mighty Mississippi.



The triangular building is the Memphis Bass Pro store.

I admit I should've known about yesterday's faux pas at Jim Beam, but I can't take the blame for the Memphis police shutting down Bike Night on Beale Street every Wednesday. Just a matter of days ago they had finally lost patience with the bikers who turn up each week and although they behave on Beale Street when the static bikes are the main drawcard, apparently they don't when arriving and leaving.

So the authorities cut Bike Night to one Wednesday each month starting last Wednesday!! So despite no bikes, we still had a good time *'walking the streets'* with beer in hand and dinner at Blues City Café, as per **Bonnie's** recommendation. It advertised the *#1 Ribs on Beale*, so that was all the incentive our beef connoisseurs **Steve**, **Deryk** and **Shayne** needed. The rest just tagged along. It was lucky we did because everyone was needed to hold the car up from falling on **Tom** and **Norma**.



Day 11 / Thursday May 30th

Back to racing tonight. Almost nightly now for the next three weeks. But first, there were those who quite understandably wanted to see where Elvis put his head down whenever he was in Memphis. And that was at # 3764 Elvis Presley Boulevard. This is the view from EP Boulevard. Graceland is set way back from the street on 14 acres of prime real estate.



Across the road is the commercial operations of the Presley empire. An enormous area with car parking, merchandise shops, ticketing booths, cafés, restaurants, his car museum and oh, nearly forgot. His plane. A Convair 880 named the 'Lisa Marie'. In order to see Graceland the house, ticket prices start with the full monte of everything at US\$240.00 and go downwards from there eliminating other options until you get to the basic Elvis Experience tour at US\$82.00 for an adult. Convert that to Oz and it's AUD\$126.15.

Those who took that option were more than happy they did.





Our timing was perfect today. Arriving at Graceland at 8.55am ready for the ticket office at 9.00am. No waiting, no delay. We left Graceland bang on 1.00pm for Farmington, Missouri the closest town to Doe Run Raceway where the Extreme Midgets from the World of Outlaws stable are running tonight. It was four hours away, but that included a 15 minute stopover in Arkansas for a look at Riverside Raceway (*aka The Ditch*) just  across the Mississippi from Memphis.

It's a staple in the Memphis area and is the only remaining track of the four which used to operate harmoniously on consecutive nights. Built specifically for the sensational "flavour of the month" midget cars of the 1950's they each operated in turn on Thursday, Friday, Saturday and Sunday nights. Riverside, surfaced with **gumbo clay** and it's well known moisture retaining properties, had the prime Saturday night. It's always tacky at the Ditch. Note the proximity to the Mississippi, which probably helps considerably, seeing as how the mighty river used to be five miles wide in that area.

Now Doe Run Raceway is an entirely different proposition. It has no river nearby, Elvis lived 225 miles away and it appears that the catchment area for midget followers is also far, far away. There weren't too many fans there at all. But the midgets always put on a great show and even without the fans in the stands they put everything in to it. **Ryan Timms** in particular made the art of wheel banging look easy, he did it so often. As **Chase Briscoe** found out in Heat 2.

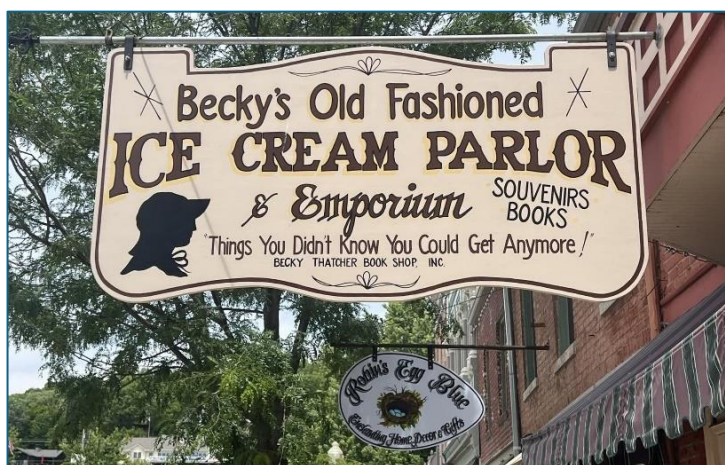
Cannon McIntosh took the win from **Michael Pickens**, an added bonus we didn't know about until a few days before the race.

Day 12 / Friday May 31st

The big city that sits between the not so big Farmington and Knoxville is St Louis. It has heaps going for it by way of sightseeing, but today there was no time to stop. What we did do though was take the slightly longer route of I-55 and I-44 to drive through the middle of it to at least provide a look at the Gateway Arch and the Busch Stadium, the home of the Cardinals. After that it was due west on 70 until we found 61 north to Hannibal.

No, it has nothing to do with that other guy called Hannibal who crossed the alps with his 37 African war elephants in 218 BC. It's pretty flat all the way to where **Mark Twain's** home town sits right on the Mississippi. Hence why **Tom Sawyer** spent so much of his time floating on the river.

His girlfriend **Becky Thatcher** however was a clever businesswomen it appears, because she established an ice cream shop on the main street which is still there today!



Lunch was early today and we chose an Irish pub next door to Becky's Old Fashioned. We sat up at the bar to eat and shepherd's pie was the favourite. Followed closely by bangers and mash. And of course every single person went into Becky's after the meal and ordered a double cone.

Knoxville Raceway is best known for its devotion to winged sprintcar racing. 410s, 360s and 305s. A staple diet on nearly every Saturday night. But once each year the USAC non wing cars come to town. Seeing as how this is predominantly a non-wing open wheel tour it was appropriate to compile an itinerary which included a visit to the Sprintcar Capital of the World to watch these non-winged warriors tackle the big half mile. The race is reasonably well supported anyway by the travelling USAC fans, but just to make sure of a healthy crowd the promotion included the winged 360s on Friday night and the 410s on Saturday. We were tickled pink because we saw the best of all three classes of sprintcars.

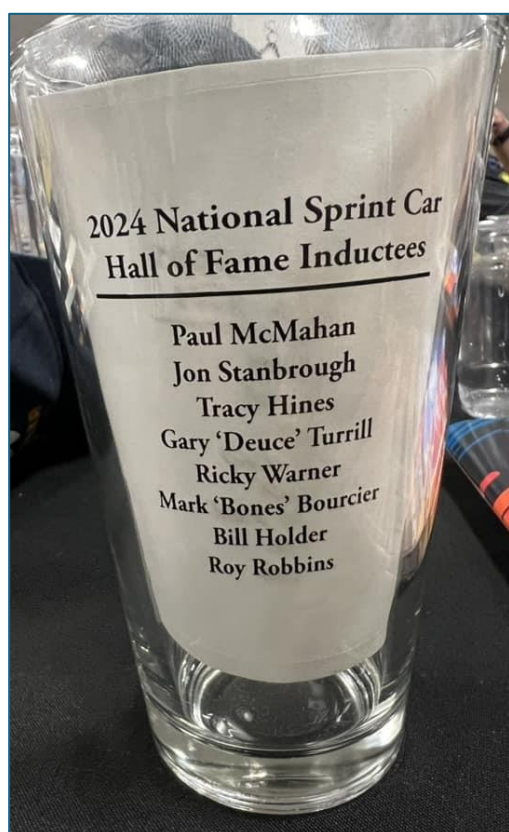
We checked into the Baymont Inn & Suites, a hotel we drive past 20 times every year when we stay in Pella at the Royal Amsterdam. So this time I decided to add the Baymont to the ever growing list of hotels we have used and reserved six rooms there for this tour. A mistake I shan't make again. I won't list the things that went wrong because this is a family Blog, but suffice to say the sewerage system in the Baymont needs a massive overhaul.

For parking in Knoxville we took advantage of the RV park that **AJ** (*owner of the Dingus Lounge*) has developed behind his licenced premises. Very handy indeed, not just for tonight but on the next tour as well when the Nationals come round. AJ is more than happy with the arrangement given he will have 35 Aussies drinking in his establishment across six days in total.

On the track, night 1 saw **Justin Grant** reverse a "*three week long slump*" without a victory when he beat home perennial rivals **Brady Bacon** and current hot shot **Daison Pursley**.

Day 13 / Saturday June 1st

No long haul drives today with a total of 28 miles covered for the entire day. 14 miles from Pella to Knoxville and 14 miles back! After a hectic week of traversing the countryside with over 1,200 miles (1,920 kms) covered it was a sleep in today for everyone, along with the washing machines getting a workout as well. The sign says the single machine and dryer operate between 9am and 9pm. Well that went out the window with the washing line up commencing at 6am and right up to 11am when we left for the Sprintcar Hall of Fame induction banquet in Knoxville.



A banquet I hear you say? Yep. About six weeks ago I found out this luncheon event was on and enquired through the Hall of Fame for eleven tickets. It was yet another Global Speedway Tours highlight that wasn't planned into the itinerary, but like many such things it just happens spontaneously.

Eight new inductees received their honours in a lavish affair with over 300 in attendance, including the who's who of American speedway dating back over 50 years, up to present day drivers such as Donny Schatz. We asked to be seated on randomly different tables so we could have as many



people meet the travelling Australians as possible. And equally we could meet people that we would not normally get to do. And it worked a treat.

The guests on each table took a great interest in hearing our travel tales. The only people who do more miles than us to get to the races are the teams themselves, which MC **Dave Argabright** publicly acknowledged by giving us the “*long tow award*” in his opening remarks. It didn’t take long for guests to find us. The tour shirts stood out handsomely in charcoal and yellow..



The Aussie Hall of Fame attendees

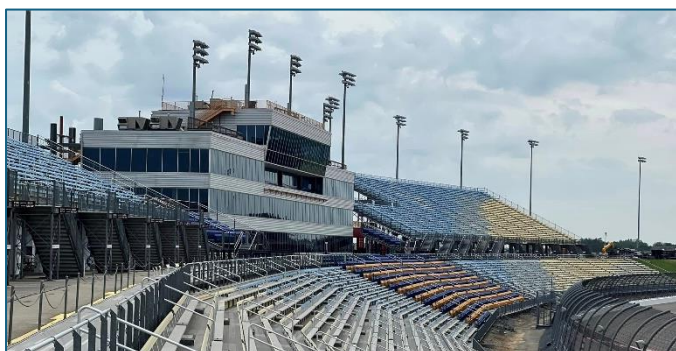
After three hours, including a ripper lunch of brisket and pork thanks to the Rib Shack, most of us took the opportunity to visit the museum before gathering at Dingus for drinks before tonight’s USAC Cornbelt Challenge and the 410 winged cars.

Improving on last night’s third was **Daison Pursley’s** goal for Saturday. You could argue he is still recovering from horrendous spinal injuries received in an Arizona accident three years ago. He was initially pronounced as an incomplete quadriplegic, but now he’s back doing the only thing he ever wanted to do. Race motor cars. And he did improve by winning tonight’s \$12,000 cheque and the plaudits of everyone who has followed his life and career since November 21st, 2021.

Day 14 / Sunday June 2nd

After a leisurely day yesterday with next to no driving, today we returned to a 300 mile (480 km) sprint from Pella in Iowa to Sun Prairie in Wisconsin so we could attend tonight’s race meeting at Angel Park Speedway. But it was punctuated by three separate stops along the way.

Initially we took the backroads out of Pella until we arrived in Newton right on I-80, the busiest Interstate in the US. The reason being was to take a gander at Iowa Speedway where the NASCARs make their debut in two weeks on an oval that up until now has been only used for Indycars. It’s nearly ready for the big dogs on and off the track as the infrastructure in these pictures demonstrates.



There were hundreds of portable dunnies!

Back on to I-80 for 90 miles until we turned off towards Dyersville. To most people it’s a town of no real significance, except for a random baseball diamond in the middle of some cornfields. This is the site of the movie “*Field of Dreams*” with Kevin Costner. For some it was a second visit in two years with the biggest difference being that in 2022 we were there in August. Today in early June, the corn was only two inches high, whereas in August it’s at adult height and suitable to walk in as we know from the movie. Hence we couldn’t re-enact the thrill of walking out through the corn onto the field in 2022. But if you click on **these three words** you’ll see a fun video that describes exactly what we did. But first look at the photo below from 2024. Then compare it against the 2022 video from exactly the same spot.



The lunch rule was invoked again today. To save me from deciding where we eat each day while on the road, a different person is delegated to choose the type of food we will eat, but not where. It's up to the driver to decide on when and where we stop to suit the scheduling of the day. Sometimes we have time to stop and eat with a knife and fork and for others it's a fast food joint "on the run". Today it was KFC which usually doesn't get any complaints from anyone.

Onwards with the journey and after passing through Madison, the capital city of Wisconsin, we soon arrived at our digs in Sun Prairie, quickly dropping off our bags before heading to Angell Park Speedway to our reserved seats on the party deck overlooking turn 1. After talking to **Kent Orfan**, the publicity man for Angell Park some months earlier, we reached agreement on a price to occupy the party deck, eat all his BBQ food and drink everything he had in the coolers (*eskies*) on the deck. Coolers which were refilled more than once I might add.

Mind you, we didn't have any help to empty the coolers from **Barry** and **Jarod**. Both only drink rum and there are no pre-mixed Bacardi bottles in the USA. So Kent went to work and spoke to the public bar behind the deck. Arrangements were made for two separate wrist bands which when shown would entitle the bearer to unlimited Bacardi and coke. Each one made in a cardboard milkshake cup filled with three miniature Bacardi bottles topped with coke and a straw provided to drink it through.

Angell Park drips history off every sharp edge in the joint. Midgets, non-wing sprints and 360 winged sprints were the program. It couldn't have been more perfect. And we were finished at 10.00pm.



Day 15 / Monday June 3rd

No speedway tonight and therefore no commitments to be anywhere at any time. Except that at some stage we needed to be at the Best Western Plus hotel in Woodland Drive back in Indianapolis. In fact just up the road a bit from the Ganassi Indycar Raceshop. Who, by the way, have now been struck off the GST visitation list as they simply won't answer e-mails, pick up a phone or indeed let me talk to anyone, even when calling in personally.

We had 355 miles (568 kms) to do today. It sounds a lot (*and is*) but most of it is on the Eisenhower Interstate Highway system, so named after the man who pioneered it. In 1919, a young Lieutenant Colonel named **Dwight D Eisenhower** participated in the first Army transcontinental motor convoy. This expedition consisted of 81 motorised Army vehicles that crossed the United States from Washington DC, to San Francisco, a venture covering a distance of 3,251 miles in 62 days. The convoy was to test the mobility of the military during wartime conditions. As an observer for the War Department, Eisenhower learned first-hand of the difficulties faced in travelling great distances on roads that were often impassable resulting in frequent breakdowns of the military vehicles.

In 1945 as Supreme Commander of the Allied Forces in Europe, Eisenhower also witnessed first-hand how the German autobahn system worked. Incidentally it was Hitler who authorised those autobahns to be built in the early 1930's, not for cars, because there weren't many of them, but for trucks to move military and supplies in and out of Germany quickly. If ever that was needed

The autobahn vision was strong in his mind when he became President in 1953, eventually convincing Congress that their country should also have '*autobahn like highways*' to increase productivity in post war USA. Years later, he would explain that *"after seeing the autobahns of modern Germany and knowing the asset those highways were to the Germans, I decided, as President, to put an emphasis on this kind of road building. The old [1919] convoy had started me thinking about good, two-lane highways but Germany had made me see the wisdom of much broader ribbons across the land."*

Thank goodness he did drive the project because the US Highway System is without doubt the most wonderful infrastructure development in their country and possibly the world.

But back to 2024. We initially skirted around Milwaukee on their beltways (*we would call them ring roads*) built to encourage through traffic to stay out of the downtown area. Always an interesting exercise when you're battling with drivers on their daily commute. Just as a point of interest these roads can be anywhere from five to eleven lanes wide in both directions! If someone wants to change lanes there is rarely an indication in the form of blinkers, which incidentally on American vehicles are actually the brake lights and not individual orange lights like our cars. They merely change lanes without warning and just expect you giving them room. Especially the trucks. It keeps you on your toes!

After Milwaukee the journey continued toward Chicago and the plan for those who hadn't been before was to travel straight through the centre of the city and its 2.5 million inhabitants. This involved driving down the Magnificent Mile with all its designer shops, then over the Chicago river beside Trump Tower before driving under the L train system that had featured in many movies over the years, including the Blues Brothers.

Once clear of the CBD it was back onto the massive (*up to 16 lanes*) I-90 south out of the city. We soon struck a traffic jam that Google Maps informed us was causing a *"15 minute bank up"* outbound, while the local radio was telling us it was due to a truck crash that was blocking all inbound lanes. We eventually drove past the incident (*slowly, the way all rubber-neckers do*) which was a truck that had jammed itself under a railway bridge and if you thought our two mile hold up was significant, then it paled into insignificance compared with the 10 mile line up of stationary vehicles trying to get into Chicago. Some photos follow of our time in the windy city.



No road system, despite how well it is designed and built, can cater for idiot drivers who ignore signs of maximum height restrictions.

Anyway we soon forgot about that and made a luncheon pitstop at Hooters in Merrillville that woke everyone up. 🙄 **Tom**, in particular, excelled by giving several of the girls the benefit of his wisdom about their make-up. Or at least the thickness of it. The remaining 130 miles to Indy passed without incident apart from the **thousands of trucks that continue to play Russian roulette with us**. A change in time zones added an hour and we were settled into our hotel for the next two nights. The pool looks tempting. Tomorrow we are back into racing with the first of 13 successive nights in a row.

Day 16 / Tuesday June 4th

Today afforded a sleep in, or washing duties if needed, as we had no commitments until 11.00am. Consequently the hotel didn't have to serve breakfast to at least 11 people today as they surfaced in dribs and drabs during the course of the morning. Once all assembled at 10.30am we piled into the Ford and headed to Noblesville to meet up with renowned US Motorsport journalist and TV presenter **Dave Argbright** at the **Bryan Clauson** memorial in Forest Park at Shelter #5. Dave gave us a very informative talk on Bryan Clauson who was one of the stars of winged and non-winged sprintcars as well as NASCAR and INDYCAR until his untimely death in 2016 at a race in Belleville.



Next up Dave joined us for lunch at a Perkins restaurant in Noblesville where he gave a great talk on the evolution of sprintcars from cageless, to roll bar to non-winged to winged. His wealth of knowledge is second to none and his ability to be able to deliver that knowledge in the manner he does is why he a very well respected figure in the motorsports world here in the US. Thank you Dave as always.

After lunch and under ever menacing clouds that threatened to spill their load any minute, we made our way back to the hotel before for an hour or so before leaving for night 1 of Midget Week at Circle City tonight. What made it even more concerning was the persistent pinging coming from our phones warning of severe storms expected for where we had just come from.

At the hotel, the sky still looked less than pleasant so those with a minimum of at least three different weather apps on their phone were constantly checking them to find one which said it wouldn't rain. That's the one we'll believe. But the clouds continued to build and lightning whizzed across the sky, particularly to the southeast. Exactly where Circle City was.





The scene at Circle City.

Soon after news came through that tonight had been cancelled despite the skies having now cleared and the sun was shining. The news wasn't very well received, particularly on social media where the track team were going to great lengths to explain that it wasn't them who made the call, but USAC the governing body of Midget Week. **Mike** and **Laura**, who were already there in the parking lot, confirmed there had only been a small

dump of rain and anyway, there was still three hours before the race was due to start. Things could have been easily sorted. I expect that we haven't heard the end of this yet.

With nothing to do tonight now, yours truly the Tour Host said *"let's go to Walmart. There's something I've always wanted to buy. We'll use it tonight by the pool."* So a flying trip to Walmart on 86th St saw me as the proud owner of a high quality Vankyo 4K video projector, with inbuilt Dolby sound. At US\$299 + tax it was ridiculously cheap. It works across all voltages and will be super value at home as well. Just need to carry it round with me until bloody August! Plus a 25 metre extension cord.

We soon had it set up and hooked into Flo Racing in the outside courtyard next to the pool. The picture was projected onto a handy light brown wall that gave a great image. *"This is better than watching a lap top in the back of a Pacifica"*, I said to nobody in particular. Only problem was that High Limit at Davenport in Iowa was also rained out, so instead we watched the entire 2½ hours of the 2022 Month of Money tour video. We had the place cranking with the great songs that are included in that video.



Day 17 / Wednesday June 5th

Some months ago I received a phone call from **Greg Foster**, (a confirmed traveller on the forthcoming Month of Money tour), to tell me about **Grant King**. I knew the name and knew he constructed Indycars, sprint cars and midgets, but didn't really comprehend his influence on racing in his era. If you click on his name above, you will find an excellent summary of his life up until 1994 when he was inducted into the Hall of Fame on Canada's Vancouver Island, where he grew up.

Statistically King constructed over 250 sprintcars, champ cars (today's silver Crown cars) and midgets. As well as having a strong say in the development of Indycars. A Grant King sprintcar was one of the most beautiful things you could ever see on a race track. Or on an open trailer going to the track. The **Sheldon Kinser** Genesee Sprinter was a case in point. The first photo below is the car in the Ray Skillman museum in Indianapolis. The second is mine from 1976 at Eldora when **Sheldon Kinser** won the first USAC race of the season in the #56 Genesee sprinter. The other car in the photo, with the driver climbing out wearing the trade mark cowboy hat, is **Jan Opperman** who ran second that day.



Eldora Speedway : March 28th, 1976. #56 Sheldon Kinser (winner) and Jan Opperman (runner up)

Today started under cloudy skies and remained that way until bedtime. The threat of rain was all around the region including at Lawrenceburg, our final destination for racing tonight. But a task remained to be done before then though. Thanks to Greg Foster's request for the MoM tour group to go to Grant King's race shop, the Indy group went as well for an early morning looksee. A jewel in the crown could be one way of describing this totally original garage tucked away behind residences on Crawfordsville Road. And as it happens, right next door to the shop occupied in that era by the one of kind **A.J. Watson** who's story is remarkable reading as well. Both King and Watson have long since passed away, but their history is being kept alive by **Bill & Stephanie Throckmorton**. Bill was King's nephew and is an enormous supporter of vintage racing.

The shop has many original Grant King fabricated Indy cars, midgets and sprintcars. Along with a treasure trove of photographs lining the walls, dozens and dozens of race suits collected over the years from all the big names hang from the ceiling. And a couple of areas where cameras are barred, such as the contents! It was 90 minutes of history that thankfully is still in existence to this day.



As we ventured out of the delightful air conditioning to say goodbye to **Bill and Stephanie**, the humidity hit hard. Conditions which generally mean that impending T-storms (*as the Americans call them*) would hit us on the way to Lawrenceburg. The keyboard experts were all saying don't bother travelling it'll get rained out. But rain or no rain, we had to go as our accommodation in the town that sits on the banks of the old Ohio was already paid for.

A pitstop was made at Shelbyville for lunch at an American institution. The big plus is that you get to use a knife and fork. Yes it was Cracker Barrel. **#3 on this list was the popular option with our folks.** Further down I-74 was Lawrenceburg with threatening skies and a very humid 30 degrees. A 90 minute break at our hotel and then it was a two minute drive to the track.



With rain forecast the promoter brought forward the program by 30 minutes and to their credit started racing at 7.00pm with rain falling all around, but not at the speedway. The spectator attendance was dismal with most assuming "*it won't happen, but if it does, "well we'll watch it on Flo."*"

All the heats and finals were run and won by 8.30pm with a few spots of rain starting to fall as the final chequer fell. 10 minutes later, as we were leaving in our van, the heavens opened.

Once back at the hotel it was a short hop next door for an ice cream at Burger King. Followed by an unusually early end to the evening at 10.00pm.

PS: The girls in Burger King (just 30 metres from the hotel front door) promised to make an even bigger one when we come back in August with the Month of Money crew.



Onya Steve

Day 18 / Thursday June 6th

Today was always going to be a relatively short trip from Lawrenceburg to Putnamville, a total distance of about 220 kms (138 miles). So with that we headed off around 9.00am up the highway to Indianapolis. Initially we crossed into Ohio for a short period with the massive stacks of the Miami Fort Power Station visible in the distance with their usual blue steam appearance missing. Often mistaken for a nuclear plant (*by me*) because of its cooling tower, Miami Fort is in fact coal fired. The very visible cooling tower was built in the 1972 in order to meet emission control mandates imposed by the state of Ohio. Research indicates that the plant will be retired before the end of 2027.



Further up the road there was a pit stop at a Starbucks for morning tea and once again the lemon cake was a popular choice washed down, not by coffee, but a Vanilla Bean Frappuccino. Possibly the nicest item on the menu. It's like a smoothie made with milk, vanilla bean ice-cream, vanilla extract and crushed ice all mashed together in a blender and topped off (in the glass) with whipped cream. Go on make one. You'll love it.

The group split for a bit at this point. I took the Pacifica and detoured to the ER at Indianapolis Hospital to have the stitches in my leg removed. (*Finally. And yes, I was advised it is now infected.*)

The rest paid a visit to Lucas Oil Stadium in downtown Indy to occupy some time. Wished they could have gone on a tour (*absolutely worth it if you're ever in town anytime*) but it's currently not open for tours as the US Olympic swimming trials are on there. Team selection is on in earnest for Paris. "How could they swim in an NFL gridiron stadium", I hear you ask. Well in one of those "only in America" stories they have dropped a full sized Olympic swimming pool into the stadium ...go figure.

Next up they drove past Victory Field, home of the Indianapolis Indians baseball team. We hope to be able to take in a game in a few weeks to kill time between tours. With it now being lunchtime, the Walmart Supercentre in Avon was the destination for us all to meet up again. It houses a Subway as many Walmart's do.

It was also a chance to restock the esky with water, soft drinks and stronger liquids. If you have a look at the photo you will be shocked at how cheap hard liquor is over here, just like their cigarettes that you can get for about \$6 compared with our \$50 plus.....

Those Jim Beam bottles are 1.75 litres by the way for US\$29.98.



Fed and restocked it was a further 40 mile drive down to Cloverdale and our hotel for the night. Tour members were warned they were staying in a hotel with a number in its name, much against my better judgement! We left for Midget Week night 3 in plenty of time to make our acquaintances again with **Mike** and **Laura** at Putnamville. That drive took about 12 minutes

A big car count (38 midgets) and a very sizable crowd were in attendance tonight as well. This track in many people's opinion is located in a most picturesque setting for both campers and tailgaters as the pictures show. Particularly the drone shots. We tailgated in the beautiful sunshine and the night was set up for a ripper race in ideal weather conditions.

Emerson Axsom last won a USAC National midget race in 2021. Since then he has finished second nine times without a victory. No wonder he was stoked on the microphone when receiving his trophy.



Day 19 / Friday June 7th (Nappy Gate)

Pulling back the curtains and peeking out the hotel window at the morning's first opportunity is a necessity when chasing speedway races across mid-state USA. It's very important to know what the weather is and, if it's no good, will the rain move on? No such worries this morning though as Friday dawned to cloudless skies and warm conditions.

Warmth wasn't really what Norma wanted (*or expected*) at 5.00am when her feet felt something lumpy under the sheets, right down at the bottom of the bed. Not sure of what it was, she and Tom pulled the linen back to reveal a soiled nappy lying there waiting to be discovered from goodness knows how many days before. The front desk clerk at that time of the day wasn't too interested in Norma's find. His disinterest would cost him his job later the next day. As did the housekeeper assigned to that room and also the Marketing manager who wrote a shocking reply to my complaint e-mail sent to the Hotel owner. Which by the way was **Super 8**. See what I mean about having a number in your name?



With only about 120 miles to cover today it was a much appreciated day of leisure, unless you are into retail therapy. Paragon Speedway is about 20 miles up the road and upon arrival we chatted to one of the crew getting the site ready for a rodeo of all things this coming weekend. They are expecting between 3-6 thousand people: that's a lot of giant belt buckles and stetsons! But no sprintcars

We were soon back on the country roads and bound for the Edinburgh outlet stores for a few hours of shopping. Several of the group took the opportunity to buy some shoes and clothes and then worry about getting them in their suitcases later. The rest, with little interest in shopping, wandered over to Cracker Barrel for lunch where once again the meatloaf proved to be the winner.

Suitably fed, our next destination was the city of Bedford where we would be staying tonight. And what a scenic drive it was too, on some beautiful rural roads taking us through little towns that have regained all their charm having lost enthusiasm years ago when the freeways came to Indiana. **Shayne** was sure he could hear banjos playing

Once booked in to the Hampton Inn by Hilton (*no nappies here*) it was a mere 19 miles to Bloomington for another night of racing on night 4 of Indiana Midget Week. We were sitting around idly talking tailgate speak as usual, and I could tell that the 11 of us, plus **Mike** and **Laura**, needed some livening up. So the game of "*I'll give you the car number and you name that driver*" was introduced.

What followed was easily the funniest afternoon of the tour and probably the next one too.

It is usual for people to naturally sit in a circle while tailgating and today at Bloomington was no different. No one needed to move to start the process, which is for someone to be randomly chosen to start the game with the #1. (*You might think this is easy, but try it one day with your mates.*) All this person has to do is name a driver who has ever driven a sprintcar numbered 1. He or she does so, usually pretty quickly, and their answer must be verified by someone else in the group before it moves to the next person in a clockwise direction. They have usually already worked out an answer for #2.

The early picks are easy and move smoothly, but say that whoever has #7 (*for example*) can't answer it within whatever time period you designate (*60 seconds is more than enough*), then #7 moves to the next person. Doing this completely stuffs up any system someone might have to work out their next number well in advance. And on you go, until you reach 99. If it gets too hard you can allow speedcars

(midgets) to be included as well. This is where, given that 67 was the average age of the Indy Tour members, things started to get right out of hand.

Young **Tom Evans** (he's 80) got the hang of the game later than most. Up until then he didn't know many sprintcar numbers / drivers and looked dejected. But boy didn't he brighten up when we allowed midgets to be included. He knew every driver and every speedcar number from the days of the old Sydney Showground speedway, the Sportsground, Westmead, Liverpool, Kembla Grange, Newcastle you name it. Even if it wasn't his turn when the number was called, he answered with a name and usually two or three more. No one had seen **Tom** like this before on the tour. Since his stay in hospital he had been quiet, but on June 7th at Bloomington Speedway in Indiana, **Tommy Evans** got a new lease of life and didn't look back from there! It was one of the nicest moments of the tour.

If you want to know who won tonight, ask **Tom**, or **Shayne who always watches through his iPhone**.

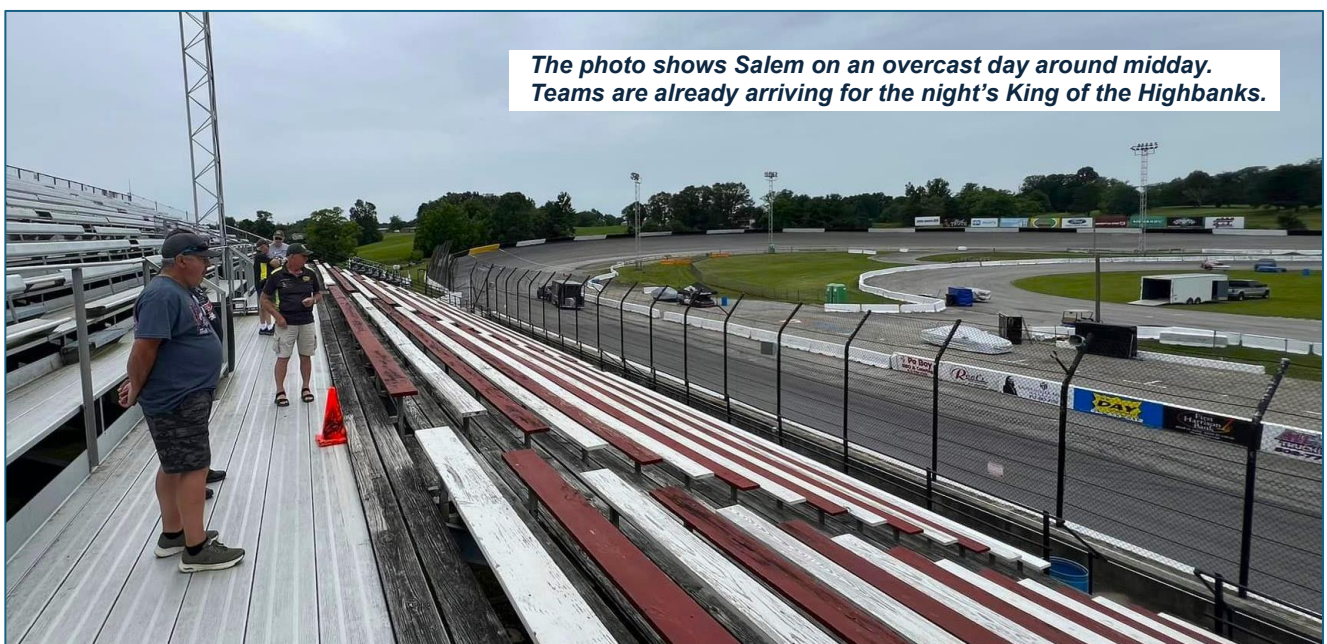
[Last night's winner was actually **Daison Pursley** (#86), from **Justin Grant** (#2) and **Jacob Denney** (#25). Pursley now leads the Midget Week points by 31 from **Ryan Timms** (#67) and he also leads the USAC National Midget points by 27 from **Cannon McIntosh** (#71).]

(Car numbers are shown for Tom's benefit. 🤪)

Today dawned rather gloomily with rain forecast at our final destination of Haubstadt which is not ideal for a night of racing on dirt. Anyhow, we left Bedford after a delightful breakfast and initially made our way to Brownstown to have a look at the (mainly) Late Model track of the same name. Unfortunately an antique tractor display at the Fairgrounds prevented us from checking out the surroundings.

20 miles further along the marvellous two lane roads of rural Indiana lay the sleepy town of Salem. Some may think of witches and black magic but no, that's Salem up in Massachusetts. This southern Indiana town is most notable for its **evil 1/2 mile high banked paved oval speedway**. Known as the sister track to Winchester in northern Indiana, both came to be referred to as the 'Treacherous Hills'. Both tracks grew their legend by becoming training grounds for future Indianapolis 500 hopefuls. It was said that if successful at the Hills in a sprintcar, then you were ready for Indy.

If you survived that is. Sadly both tracks killed more than their fair share over the years. 18 racers have died at Salem and an unbelievable 30 at Winchester.



The photo shows Salem on an overcast day around midday. Teams are already arriving for the night's King of the Highbanks.

We had our own racing to get to tonight in Haubstadt which resides so far east in Indiana that it sets its clocks according to Central time. Not like the rest of Indiana. Hence we had an hour “*up our sleeve.*” We made good use of that extra 60 minutes by lunching at the Panda Express Chinese Kitchen in Evansville. Always a favourite on tour, it gets high rankings from folks when choosing their lunch spot. We always try to have our main meal at lunchtime on a race night as the food that’s dished up at racetracks is very ordinary to say the least.

Then it was off to Tri-State Speedway in Haubstadt for night 5 of Midget Week. It ranks in the top three speedways in Indiana such is the loving care the staff put into the complex and in particular the racing surface. **Tri-State Speedway track is ‘more than just dirt’.**

The predictions of rain did not eventuate and in fact the night finished as a steamy humid evening. And of course we got the inevitable sunset over turns 1 & 2 to keep the photographers’ shutters chattering.



Day 21 / Sunday June 9th

It's Sunday in America and being in the Bible Belt, you would normally attend church which is evident anytime you pass a place of worship on a Sunday. Well our religion is speedway, so our sanctuary today would be oval shaped up in Kokomo and that was 230 miles from where we are now.

An 8.00am start soon became 9.00am when we crossed back into Indiana time and gained an hour. On the way to Kokomo we had an appointment that could not be missed in Bloomington on the hour of eleven. As the name **Andretti** is synonymous to Indy car, **Petty** and **Earnhardt** to NASCAR, and because it's Sunday, **Kinser** is God for us when it comes to speedway.

Today we were meeting legendary driver **Randy Kinser**, brother of his even more famous brother **Steve** at Steve's house for a tour of their racing workshop. For the first timers they had eyes like dinner plates as Randy gave a very informative and at times very funny tour of their facility. The workshop is steeped in history with over 40 years of memories and equipment contained within its walls.



From Bloomington we again kept to the "backroads" this time heading for lunch at the famous **Oasis Diner in Plainfield** on US40. There was a bit of excitement when we arrived due to a car accident out the front with all the agencies in attendance. We were surprised that **Shayne** didn't get video of it actually happening seeing as how that is his forte at the speedway. Incidentally, the ROSA group rang

the other day offering good money if I could encourage Shayne and his camera to stay away from all tracks we intend to visit until the end of the tour.

[Incidentally, ROSA stands for Racecar Owners of Speedway America. Or, as we prefer to call it, "Rack Off Shayne Andrews".]

The final 80 odd miles up the highway was soon completed and we arrived at the Holiday Inn Express in Kokomo around 4.00pm to be met by legendary Ohioan **Scott "Stubb" Phillips**. A good friend to all at Global Speedway Tours where we've had the pleasure of his company many times. The Australians had a new tail-gating member when he joined us at **Mike** and **Laura's** RV, the regular hangout for the ratpack from Downunder.

Stubb had motored down from Van Buren in Ohio to catch up with us over the final night of Indiana Midget Week. It was also to be the last day that our new found forever friends **Tom** and **Norma Evans** would be with us. They leave from Indy tomorrow, but Norma stays for an extra four days in LA with relatives while Tom tackles the Pacific passage and flies the rest of the way on his own. Let's hope he doesn't leave anything on the planes, trains or automobiles



Two extraordinary things happened tonight. I'm not sure, but probably it was because Shayne was there. Firstly, our seats in the back straight grandstand gave us a perfect view of the drugged, or drunk, or both, driver of a merchandise van (*with trailer*) who tried to drive his vehicle out onto the track from the pit lane seconds before the B Main would have been given the green flag. Presumably he thought it was an exit from the speedway property.

Clearly incapable of driving the van backwards, he was hauled out of the driver's seat by a very frustrated track official and thrown to the ground. The official then proceed to wiggle the van and trailer backwards down pit road. The faster he went the 'crookeder' he got. At times backing the trailer into the track fence on turn 2. Eventually, to the cheers of the enthralled and laughing crowd he made it.

Secondly, at the start of the A Main all cars were circling the track at slow speed warming engines when suddenly **Daniel Whitley** in the 7M screamed the engine to 9,000 revs and took off. No one was in any doubt he had a stuck throttle. The only choice Daniel had was to come off turn 4 and look for something to hit on the infield. And that he did at tremendous speed. The Lawrenceburg Fire and Rescue Crew's Ford F Series Super Duty truck was his target. He buried the car into the truck, lifting it partially off the ground. Amazingly Whitley climbed out of the mangled wreckage under his own power, but his ride was severely damaged. **The series of photos captured by Shayne are shown at this link.**

The A Main finally got under way and as soon as **Daison Pursley** was pushed off and his starting points were added in, he had won the Indiana Midget Week title for 2024. He actually could have pulled in there and then, but racers don't do that. Pursley decided that another nail was needed and went on to win from position 7. Our boy **Michael Pickens** 😊 in a guest ride for the Keith Kunz stable, was second.

Day 22 / Monday June 10th

The first order of business for today was to drop off **Norma** and **Tom** at IND for their flight to Los Angeles. At LAX, Tom steps onto his American Airlines flight home to Sydney and Norma gets into a car and heads off to the relatives for a bit. We will have lasting memories of this couple who were good fun to have on board with us. I don't think anyone will ever forget the laughter from Bloomington as Tom dominated the tailgating quiz when he came alive with answers from the 1960's!

Originally everyone on the tour would have been going home today, but when POWRi finally released their dates for Illinois Midget Week it was a no brainer that the itinerary could have one more week added to it. Opinions were sought and everyone could do it except Tom and Norma who were locked in to alternate arrangements. Hence today's arrangements. The only 'obstacle' was that Illinois MW didn't start until Thursday.

We couldn't have three nights without racing! But that was 'easily solved' by driving 310 miles on Monday to Orrville, Ohio, 45 miles on Tuesday to Millersburg, OH and a humdinger of 467 miles (750 kms) on Wednesday to Peoria in Illinois. Monday and Tuesday nights were Ohio Sprintweek races at Wayne County and Hilltop Speedways. Wednesday was the opening night of the Hell Tour for Late Models. Things you have to see I'm sure you will agree. 😂

Once clear of Indy, I-70 (a well-travelled interstate highway for us on this tour and the next) became our temporary home until, with time up our sleeve, Cracker Barrel on the outskirts of Columbus provided a chicken pot pie for lunch. Not exactly a Four 'N Twenty meat pie, but an excellent substitute none the less.

Back on the road, we then headed north on I-71 until the Mansfield exit where we swung onto US-30 to Orrville.



A cute hotel called the Cobblestone Inn is where we'll put our heads down tonight and also where I received a rather rude note under the wiper about my parking etiquette! I wonder who put it there? Besides it wasn't my fault the Ford decided to "Stawell" when I swung in to the spot.

Over at Wayne County Speedway (home of the Haudenschield clan) it was a full house for R4 of Ohio Sprintweek. **Exactly 50 410's** and probably 4,000 in the stands. The picture below gives you a terrific drone view of a track that few reading this would have seen before.



If visiting, then make sure you wear clothing that is the same colour as clay dust. The common denominator between Wayne County and tomorrow night at Hilltop is that like all tracks on the Ohio Sprintweek calendar, they are all in Ohio! And Ohio dust is legendary. **Jordan Ryan** battled the cloud and led consistently to take the win. Aussies **Jordan Charge & Brock Hallett** finished 20th and 22nd.

Day 23 / Tuesday June 11th

Lovely sleep in this morning to regenerate the batteries for more continuous racing. Hilltop Speedway in Millersburg was a mere 48 miles away so we went to Canton (*Ohio, not China*) to view the **American Football NFL Hall of Fame**. Not that we would go inside. Multiple sweep winner **B Lane** would have been the only one to afford to get in, such was the price of a ticket. We drove around what looked like a theme park and is very popular with American gridiron fans, which is most of the country. We stopped to allow Shayne to put up the drone and then proceeded to get a free lunch for all, courtesy of Global Speedway Tours for the rained out Circle City race on Day 16.

Now power poles are very important to carry the electricity from the grid to your TV set so you can watch the Super Bowl. We all know that. But the Hall of Fame people go the extra mile with their poles. ➔

The venue was **Tim's Tavern** discovered a couple of years ago on the internet when writing the Covid inspired Virtual Tour Blog. Battered fish and chips is their speciality so naturally everyone chose that except **Jarod** who had just ate the half where the chips were.



Next up we made our way toward Millersburg via some magnificent backroads littered with some very impressive houses on acreage and a large Amish community. There were many small factories fashioning timber products from chairs to windows and cabinet making, all operated by Amish families. There were also many horse and buggies plying the roads as they went about their daily lives just as we would by automobile, as well as tending to their paddocks by the simplest of means.



After booking into our hotel in Millersburg, complete with a Trump 2024 stall across the road, we then headed up more hills to the speedway. The setting is surrounded by forests and paddocks, but the complex itself is completely devoid of any grass, just dusty car parks.

Hilltop Speedway came as a surprise to those who had not been there before. Except for **Russell Blackman**, **Steve (Stawell) Perry** and yours truly, this place was new for everyone. We arrived very early having climbed the hill in the Ford to get to the top because that's exactly where the track is. At the top of a hill. Car numbers were down to 32, so I'm figuring that 18 transporters couldn't make it up there.



The dust at Hilltop was phenomenally bad. Veteran speedway goers we are all. And to a man everyone agreed we'd never seen it so bad. The photos show firstly the picturesque setting when undisturbed by sprintcars, what it was like during the heats and then the disastrous A main. Plus a visitor from Mars who dropped in to find out what was causing the dirt on his spaceship window.



For the record, **Brock Hallett** led the first 13 laps (*at least we think it was him*) until **Danny Sams** took over on the high side tempting disaster inches from the guardrail on every lap. But he remained right-side up and took the win with Hallett in 7th and **Jordan Charge** home in 9th place. If you'd like to see how Flo Racing saw it, [click here](#).

Day 24 / Wednesday June 12th

This morning was meant to be a real early start in order to knock off a few of the 750kms we had to cover today. However extra time had to be allocated for apologising to the housekeepers as to why the sheets and pillow cases had turned brown overnight.

The first part of our Wednesday journey was very pleasant as, like yesterday, we meandered along some fantastic country roads which took us through valleys and hills bathed in the early morning sun. Again we saw Amish communities out cultivating their fields, hanging their washing out (*which surely must be a full time job for someone in the family*), feeding and grooming the horses or building a shed. To my way of thinking the latter is their most popular chore. I reckon they could build three a week if they wanted to, such is their endeavour.

We were making excellent time as we again re-joined our go-to Interstate Highway of I-70 at Columbus. The country roads are replaced with straight as an arrow highways with 3-4 lanes in both directions. For those who have never been here before all these highways have many slip roads where you can get off and feed both your vehicle and yourself. Even the fussiest diner will find something to please their palate. Along with these services there are often numerous hotels for the weary traveller. You never have to travel far to find these conveniences.



It was Barry's turn for lunch today and I knew he would choose a *Dairy Queen*. Alas the driver (me) had only ever stopped at Dairy Queens that served ice cream. Which I figured was not what the others would want as a lunch break. I was blissfully unaware that there are now Dairy Queen's called "*Grill & Chill*" that serve (*what I later found out*) are great meals. So I made it difficult for Baz today by making out I didn't see the DQ, driving straight past each one, eventually stopping at an Arby's in Richmond, IN.

"Dear Barry, I hereby humbly apologise to you via this public document for doubting your ability to locate a suitable place to enjoy lunch. As you know we fixed this issue once I found out there are now 2,500 'Grill & Chill' Dairy Queens across the USA!

Next time you tour with us, we will eat breakfast, lunch and dinner at a DQ". 😊 Yours, Peter Physick

Peoria, Illinois eventually came into sight about 5.00pm. I can confirm at this point that Peoria does have a **Dairy Queen Grill & Chill** which we could have eaten at ... but sorry Baz, it was time to leave for the speedway and the start of the Hell Tour for Late Models.

10 minutes was all it took to get to this track which sits adjacent to a tributary of the Illinois River thus making it a precarious flood prone area when there is heavy rain. But no such chance of that tonight as it was blue skies and sunshine for the first race of the **Dirtcar Summer Nationals** aka the Hell Tour. 29 races in 36 days. Tonight had 31 Late Models with 22 UMP Modifieds as the support. The Late Model winner was **Tyler Erb** who went on to win the Hell Tour championship 36 days later.

Day 25 / Thursday June 13th

It's why we came to Illinois. Speedweek for POWRi midgets supported by the winged 600 cc outlaw micros starts tonight in Mattoon.

To make it easier on everybody we secured accommodation at the excellent Hampton Inn by Hilton in Decatur. A realistic centralised point for all four tracks involved in Speedweek. Coles County, Jacksonville, Macon and Lincoln. Besides when you can get a Hampton Inn at a reasonable price you're mad not to grab it. They had great staff, a great breakfast, a great parking lot for tailgating and great rooms for sleeping in. Which is not that often. Going on tour with Global Speedway Tours means you very rarely go to bed on the same day as you woke up.

It was a short drive of 85 miles from Peoria to Decatur compared with yesterday's marathon. That being the case it was a sleep in with most rising just before the 9.00am breakfast finish so there was some scurrying down to the dining room with minutes to spare. We hit the road at 10.00am with our first stop just a couple of miles away at the Peoria Bass Pro shop. For those who don't know what there are, well it's your go to shop for everything from firearms, fishing, camping, hunting, boating, off roading, clothing and everything in between. You could spend hours in one of these monstrous stores, particularly if you're a shooter or hunter, but today we spent a mere hour with some small purchases made. Only things that would not raise the attention of border security upon our arrival back home!

Next up a short hop next door to Walmart to restock the Ford with hydration products before taking the time to have a knife and fork lunch at a terrific little **Irish pub called Kellehers**. The bangers & mash and shepherds' pie were the popular choices. Plus the bread pudding for **Shayne** that is, not **Steve**.

Once fed we hit the road bound for Decatur with an uneventful 90 minute journey via some smaller roads and some interstates. We arrived to temperatures in the mid 30's and after 45 minutes of testing the Hampton Inn bed, we loaded up again bound for the speedway. Mattoon was under threat of severe evening storms, despite it being a cloudless afternoon.

Again caught up with **Mike** and **Laura** who, as always, were first there. Their usual timing sees an arrival in the late morning of race day, manoeuvre the big RV into the best spot, unfurl the canopy on the top of the bus for the sun protection, open a beer, pull up the favourite fold up chair and check what teams are likely to roll in for tonight.

Believe it or not, promoters here in the US have no idea at the start of the day how many cars are going to come through the back gate. There is no system of "*nominations*" as is common in Australia, but the sport is currently riding high in the saddle in the US and big fields are the norm in all classes. But not for POWRi midgets it appears. Tonight had a meagre 18 cars preparing for battle.

All night we watched as lightning danced across the sky. It was the same direction as our 45 mile drive back to Decatur. It's a funny feeling you know. Most of your brain wants the storm to stay away and not disrupt racing. While the bit that controls adventure is telling you to hope for a massive storm. Simply because US storms are so good!

Well we got one, but not the other. **Karter Sarff** won night one of Speedweek and there was no storm. So disappointing. You can usually set your watch by the weather app indicating what time it would arrive and at what strength. But somewhere out there it got lost and the opportunity of having the Ford washed by high intensity rainfall while driving just didn't happen. Looks like Rusty will have to clean the windscreen again.



Day 26 / Friday June 14th

The weather is warming up. Big time. In the old money it's expected to get to 95°F today, the same tomorrow and top 100° on Sunday. Usually too hot to go the speedway but not when on tour. It's a must to still keep turning up. The only way we won't go is if its cancelled for rain, or heaven forbid, heat.

Besides a good breakfast (*'til 10.00am*) and good beds (*'til 9.50am*), the Hampton Inn has a good laundry. You could tell it had been a while since people washed (*their clothes that is*) because the laundry had a queue.

It was Jacksonville tonight and to get there we have to go right through the heart of Springfield, the Illinois capital. Ever wondered why Chicago isn't the capital? I have, so I looked it up and found that in 1837 when Illinois incorporated and therefore needed a capital city, Chicago had a population of a mere 4,170. It was classed as a village. Of interest though was the services these people had. Seventy-four grocery and dry goods shops, five hardware stores, twenty-one taverns and nineteen lawyers' offices. The latter item must have been to set the scene for when Al Capone hit town later in life.

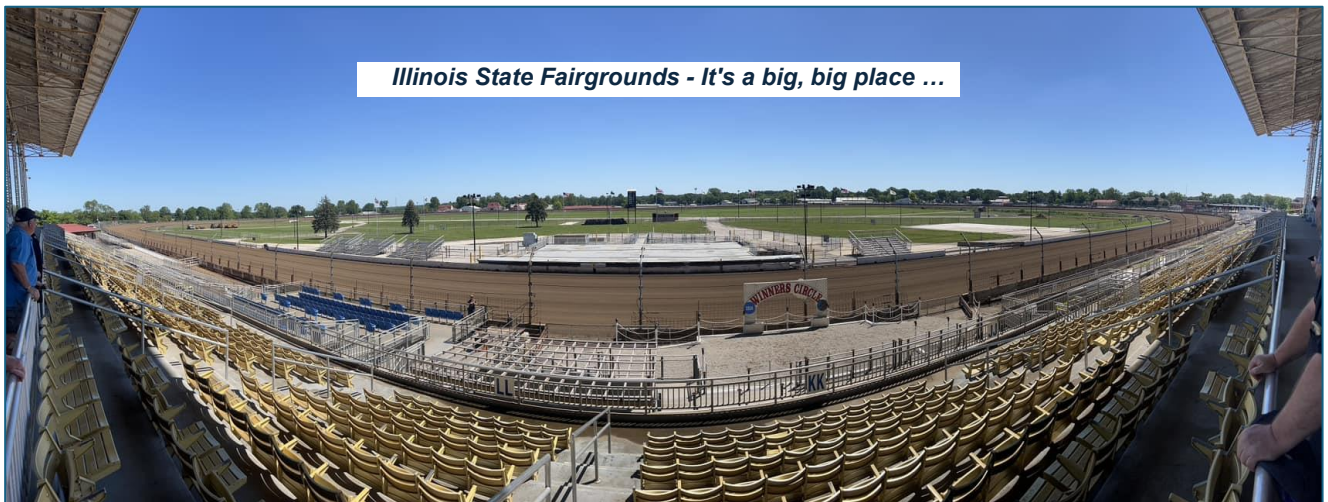
Plenty of scenic views to be seen in **Springfield**. And the Simpsons aren't one of them. It is suggested that their town is modelled on Springfield in Oregon, near where creator Matt Groening was raised in Portland. It has to be true, seeing as how (*except for himself*) all the members of the cartoon family were named after his own parents and sisters. While Bart was an anagram of the word brat.

Our first stop was Oakridge Cemetery on the north side of town. It is here that the 16th president of the USA, **Abraham Lincoln**, lies at rest in his own tomb. With him are his wife **Mary** and three of his four sons -- **Edward**, **William** and **Thomas**. It is a very impressive monument to a man who many Americans will say was the best they've had yet.



This was followed by a visit to the Illinois State Fairgrounds and the one mile race track that many speedway classes ran back in the day. These days it's only the occasional Silver Crown race or the Harley Davidson flat trackers that get to be showcased on a very famous dirt track.

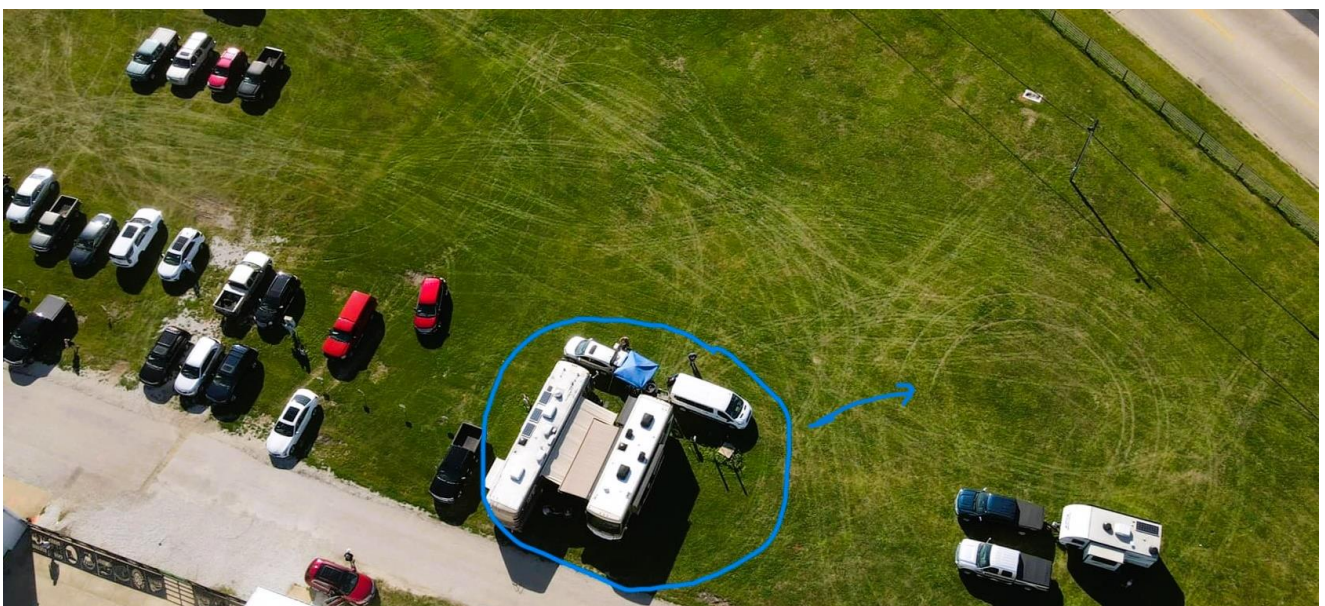
Speaking of motorcycles, around the corner was a local HD showroom so we stopped in to check out their stock. The only interest in this place that "**Kawasaki fan Shayne**" had was searching for where they kept the complimentary trailers that are provided for when the bikes break down



We have crossed the iconic Route 66 several times this tour but hadn't really had a chance to stop at anything. But that was fixed today with a planned lunch at **Motorheads Route 66 Classic car Bar & Grill** just off I-55. The obligatory R66 memorabilia was all there along with a Car Museum and a very well themed 1940's diner which could easily have seated 250 spread across four different rooms. And probably does on occasions when all the Springfield "motorheads" get together to display their classics.



The heat had intensified, but being mad we still went early to the track, this time arriving around 2.30pm. The **Hendersons** were there already of course having arrived from Coles County earlier this morning. They located a convenient pole in the parking lot which had a hook up for big rigs like theirs, hence the air conditioning was going at full noise. We pulled the Pacifica and the Ford in with them, but not before doing some donuts on the grass infield. **Shayne** sent the drone up to see how it looked. 😊



I remember going to a race at Jacksonville 25 or so years ago pre GST. The roll up of cars was good in all divisions, but the spectator attendance was woeful. At the time I remember thinking that everyone in the stands must have been related to a driver. Tonight there were lots of folks that ignored the heat. It was a good crowd, but once again there were only 23 midgets and 21 winged 410 sprintcars. Plus a support program of Street Stocks. Three heats and an A Main for both went quickly. **Jacob Denney** won from **Kale Drake**. After a second and a third Drake should be leading the points.

Day 27 / Saturday June 15th

Macon may as well be a suburb of Decatur it's that close. The temperature hovered in the low 30's, but we reckon it was hotter yesterday at Jacksonville. Walmart was close handy as were numerous eating places of good quality within walking distance. Folks found plenty to do to occupy their time. The Hickory Smokehouse took some cash from us for their excellent ribs, which were followed by a milkshake from the adjacent Steak 'n Shake.

The NASCAR's were racing at Iowa Speedway this weekend so that used up a couple of hours in front of the tele before we all summonsed up the energy to get back in the Ford and drive 15 miles to Macon Speedway. Perhaps the tiniest track most will go to in their lives. Small, but great for midgets. If only more than 16 had turned up. It was a very disappointing number for everybody. Macon is renowned for its racing and people like **Barry** and I were keen to finally see a quality race there having been smashed by rain on three previous occasions.

Our disappointment in the numbers was made worse before racing even started when it was announced that Lincoln Speedway (*tomorrow night's venue*) had just cancelled because of "heat advisories". Today was 86°F (30°C). Tomorrow is expected to be hotter, but our views on this decision were biased, perhaps because of pit gossip that even less cars were going to show at Lincoln.

Racing started and heat 1 (*of only two*) was first out on the track. The promoter must have forgotten to give me a call to request for Shayne to be absent for the night. Consequently he was there with us up in the stands, iPhone camera on the end of outstretched arms. The lights went green, the race started and the eight car field roared into turn 1 with all hell breaking loose in turn 2 right in front of us. Coles County A Main winner **Karter Sarff** decided he needed to test the strength of his car and the fence. **And of course Shayne captured it all.** As usual

Laura made an interesting observation during the night after coming back from a walk. "*You know there are very few speedway t-shirts being worn by the spectators*", she said. "*They are mostly in ordinary Saturday night going-out gear, which to me says they are not race fans, just people who couldn't find anything else to do on a Saturday night.*"

The races for the support sections of multiple different types of sedans and modifieds were lapped up by those in regular clothing mode. The race shirt types had left the building long ago.

Tomorrow's cancellation has scuttled our planned day so our biggest decision will be what's for lunch and is there anything worth watching across the road at the air conditioned cinemas??



The guy that put the telephone tower up forgot to put any transmitters or antennas on it. He'll get a great view of the races when he comes back though.

Day 28 / Sunday June 16th

Thanks to Lincoln Speedway cancelling the final night of Illinois Midget Week due to extreme heat, as they claimed, *(the lack of entries was the noise coming from the jungle drums)* we covered a grand total of zero miles all day. *(That's zero kms too)*. It did reach 36° degrees during the day, but other tracks with meetings tonight still went ahead.

As a result folks were left to their own devices, so with that and a cinema complex across the road, several of us went to watch *Bad Boys* in the morning followed by *The Fall Guy* in the late arvo. At least we had a connection with the Fall Guy. **A** it was filmed in Sydney and **B** it was put together at Fox Studios on the site of the old Sydney Showground Speedway. *(Tom would have known everyone's name.)*

Following the movie we all assembled at the local Mexican restaurant for a farewell dinner as **Steve** and **Rusty** head home to Oz, **Colin** flies to Canada to visit his son in Toronto, **Deryk** is off on a business trip to New York City, **Shayne** has another week in the US, **Jarod**, **Barry** and **Russell** are staying for the forthcoming Month of Money tour and me? Well apparently I finish up in hospital with a badly infected gash in my right leg.

The evening was spent emptying the esky in the parking lot, accompanied by a pretty neat sunset.



Day 29 / Monday June 17th

Today marked the official end of the Global Speedway Tours “Indy 500 and Midget Madness” tour after four weeks and 5,796 miles (9,274 kms) of travelling through eight states.

We left Decatur this morning to make the final journey back to Indianapolis with the temperature already hovering around 30 degrees at 9.00am. With high daytime temperatures and high humidity there are often pop up storm cells which either produce a massive t-storm, or mysteriously the cell disappears like it did on the way back from Coles County last Thursday night.

On this occasion the brilliant blue skies we started out under were soon replaced by threatening dark grey skies with a very pronounced black rain band heading our way. Luckily we managed to skirt around it and the blue skies returned as we made our way to Brownsburg for our final lunch as a group.



Applebees it was. A national chain we have not eaten at on this tour, but it was pleasing to see that there is still a picture of former tour member **Daniel Kirby** up on the wall of every restaurant in the country with the citation noting that:

*“This man ate the most food we have ever recorded in one sitting
at our (now most famous) store in Pella, Iowa.
August 7th, 2013.”*

We dropped everybody off who was flying somewhere and some very sad farewells were exchanged. The camaraderie between all tour members was extraordinary and some great new lifelong friendships have been established and others renewed.

Thank you everyone

Again, extra thanks to **Shayne Andrews** who kept the Facebook blog going day by day and whose photos I have used a selection of to supplement mine in illustrating this lengthier blog which will sit on the **Global Speedway Tours** website forever and a day.

END

