



DRIVERS, RESTART YOUR ENGINES

BY KEVIN FRITZ

LOOKING NORTH FROM THE THIRD LEVEL OF AN OPEN-AIR TIERED “NEIGHBOURHOOD” ACCESSIBLE BY ONE OF 40 NEW ESCALATORS, WE CAN SEE THE BEGINNINGS OF ONE DAYTONA TAKING SHAPE ACROSS THE STREET.

This destination of shops, restaurants, residential units and hotels, slated to open in 2017, is a mere stone’s throw away from where we stand at the iconic Daytona International Speedway, which reopened in early 2016 after a spectacular US\$400-million renovation. The results are quite fitting for a facility that has been the flagship of NASCAR since 1959.

THE ALL-AMERICAN RACE

It is the eve of the venerable DAYTONA 500, the Super Bowl of car racing. The speedway would welcome 101,500 fans the next day witnessing the closest and most exciting finish in the 500’s 58-year history. Before this weekend, I was never much of a race car fan, but after experiencing the excitement and the roaring engines first-hand, I am a convert.

Heralded as the first motorsports stadium, the Daytona International Speedway has five fan injectors (or entrances) that stretch for nearly a mile down International Speedway Boulevard. Yes, one mile. In fact, the stadium is so long that architects had to account for seven inches of the Earth's curvature.

Think of it as a stadium in which everything is all on one side. While the track may be oval, the grandstands are all on the west side of the track as are the injectors, four of which showcase the brands of the injector sponsors—Chevrolet, Sunoco, Florida Hospital and Toyota. The fifth injector sits in the centre of it all, beneath the 108-metre-long Daytona International Speedway sign sporting impressive four-metre-high letters.

As you enter the stadium, your attention is continuously diverted. The four injector partners went all out to create experiences and wow factors for the fans. Florida Hospital welcomes race fans with a waterfall tumbling over boulders, while Sunoco's

26-metre-tall kinetic victory flag made of 83,300 aluminum discs flutters in the wind.

Each injector leads patrons to a series of escalators and elevators, guiding them to four concourse levels, all of which sport new football-field-sized "neighbourhoods" offering all sorts of interactive displays meant for visitors to linger, learn and have fun. Have a seat behind the wheel of Chevrolet's latest Camaro or Corvette. Marvel at race cars suspended from the ceiling. Get up close and personal with DAYTONA 500 winning cars from the past. Cool off in a cascading misting wall or virtually wave the checkered flag at a big race.

As you make your way to your seats, grab a bite at the concession stands or take a break during the race; there is always something that will catch your eye. Above Toyota's injector, we discovered a replica of a Columbia Space Shuttle nose cone.

Beyond the injectors, Joie Chitwood, president of Daytona International



Speedway, says special attention to amenities is what makes this makeover a success. The powers that be, including Chitwood, listened to their fans. The aforementioned escalators are part of that feedback.

"We need to provide for an aging fan base," he says, noting there are also 17 elevators, 11 more than before. "They expect vertical transportation. We made this place comfortable. We did not use that word 'comfortable' before. This is our Super Bowl, our flagship. I wanted neighbourhoods where people could hang out. And you can't walk anywhere without seeing a video screen." He's right: There are 1,600 monitors, one everywhere you turn.

Plus, there is triple the number of concession and merchandise stands, and Wi-Fi and cell service was improved considerably. The food and beverage menu was significantly enhanced. Gone are the days of simple hot dogs and beer. Turkey wrap and a craft cocktail, anyone?

Executive chef Michael Pappas was brought aboard to create menus for all concession stands and suites. From perfectly cooked beef tenderloin to the flavourful empanada, Pappas has you covered. Still want



OPPOSITE TOP: Daytona Beach draws people from around the world. Daytona Beach Area Convention & Visitors Bureau

ABOVE: The Toyota Injector is one of four branded entrances to the new Daytona International Speedway. Christi Fritz

LEFT: The DAYTONA 500 race begins. Christi Fritz



TOP: One of 60 luxury boxes from which to watch the action in comfort.

CENTRE: The Florida Hospital Injector at the new Daytona International Speedway.

ABOVE: The Main Injector at the entrance to the new Daytona International Speedway. Daytona Beach Area Convention & Visitors Bureau

OPPOSITE: The Main Street Pier @ Boardwalk is the epicentre of Daytona Beach, day or night. Daytona Beach Area Convention & Visitors Bureau

a hot dog? Try his Infield Dog, a foot-long creation smothered with macaroni salad, chili, cheese sauce and crushed Doritos.

Although more luxury has been built into the new stadium—there are 60 track-side luxury suites plus the Rolex Lounge offering inside and outside seating while you dine and enjoy your beverage—Chitwood made sure he did not take away the true fan experience.

“We still let them bring in their own coolers and beer,” he says, adding the infield area on the backstretch remains open to campers and race fans who enjoy watching from the grass. You can also leave and come back—but these days you probably wouldn’t want to go anywhere.

While the DAYTONA 500 is the main event at the Daytona International Speedway, the stadium was constructed to be a multi-purpose facility, hosting concerts and possibly other sporting events. And why not? The infield grass area is also called the ballfield: it’s an actual football field that welcomed college gridiron matches in the 1970s. An annual Memorial Day (end of May) concert is already on the books as is the Ferrari World Finals each December.

If an event is not taking place, the Speedway’s Motorsports Hall of Fame of

America (MSHFA) features more than 40 racing and high-performance vehicles, including Indy cars, stock cars and sprint cars, as well as powerboats, motorcycles and racing snowmobiles. The museum also showcases racing videos, driving simulation, games, driver uniforms and memorabilia displays. After imagining yourself as a speedster, try your luck with the Richard Petty Driving Experience to enjoy real-life racing thrills. There are also tours offered throughout the year giving you a chance to see the all-new Daytona International Speedway for yourself. Choose from the Speedway Tour, All-Access Tour and VIP Tour. The tours are well worth it, offering a glimpse into the massive renovation to enhance the fan experience.

From the maiden car race on the beach in 1903 to the original footprint of the race-track in 1958, the Daytona International Speedway has come a long way with its new multi-million-dollar facelift, but its reason for being remains.

“The track is still the same,” says Chitwood. “The fun is in the track.”

BEYOND THE TRACK

The DAYTONA 500 is definitely a bucket-list item you should embrace if you plan to be in the Daytona Beach area the second month of

the year. If not, there are still many other sites and adventures to enjoy at the Speedway and Daytona Beach year-round.

From new hotels and restaurants to quaint boutiques and the Ale Trail, Daytona Beach and its four distinct downtown neighbourhoods create a family destination you don't want to miss. Choose from brand-name resorts and hotels, independently owned small inns or perhaps a bed and breakfast. Like to camp? Look into one of the city's many campgrounds. And once One Daytona comes online, your choices and experience will be further enhanced.

Daytona Beach's 37 kilometres of sandy, drivable beaches are the main attraction here. Take in the warm sun and let the ocean breeze blow through your hair as you relax on one of the world's most famous beaches. After a tranquil day on the sand and in the surf, a stay is not complete without a visit to the boardwalk and a ride on the Sandblaster Roller Coaster. Or try your skills at the Grand Prix Go-Kart Raceway. At the nearby Main



Street Pier, take a seat far out in the ocean at Joe's Crab Shack and indulge in fresh seafood (reservations recommended). Drive to the tallest lighthouse in Florida, the historic Ponce de Leon Inlet Lighthouse and

Museum or head over to LPGA International to play a four-star course.

Never a dull day here, Daytona Beach is known as the "Festival Capital of Florida" with events scheduled throughout the year. **US**

TRAVEL PLANNER

For more information, visit:

Daytona Beach Area Convention & Visitors Bureau: daytonabeach.com

Daytona International Speedway: daytonainternationalspeedway.com

NASCAR Sprint Cup Series: nascar.com

One Daytona: onedaytona.com



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