

GETTING INTO THE GROOVE

A guide to the tracks of the NASCAR Nextel Cup circuit

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Knight Ridder/Tribune

In most sports, the venue is simply a stage where the action takes place. In NASCAR, however, tracks aren't mere backdrops — they're lead characters that influence the drama unfolding on their paved surfaces.

NASCAR venues vary by size and shape. The circuit includes half-mile short tracks, 2.5-mile superspeedways and road courses. They also come in different geometries, ranging from the rectangular Indianapolis

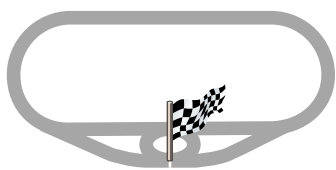
Motor Speedway to the amorphous Infineon Raceway.

Even if tracks share a similar shape, variations in banking and paving materials differ from one facility to another. Teams must adjust their strategy and car setups accordingly, or else they're doomed to lose.

This guide will brief you on the 22 tracks that make up the NASCAR's Nextel Cup circuit as well as introduce you to one of the season's biggest races, the Daytona 500.

ATLANTA MOTOR SPEEDWAY

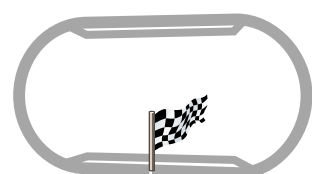
Hampton, Ga.



- **Track stats:** 1.54-mile tri-oval; 24-degree banking
- **First race:** July 31, 1960
- **Fast fact:** Atlanta Motor Speedway is home to Tara Place, a nine-story condominium and office complex.

BRISTOL MOTOR SPEEDWAY

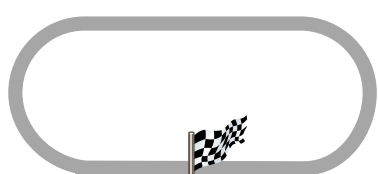
Bristol, Tenn.



- **Track stats:** 0.533-mile oval; 36-degree banking
- **First race:** July 30, 1961
- **Fast fact:** Bristol has the highest banking on the Nextel Cup circuit.

CALIFORNIA SPEEDWAY

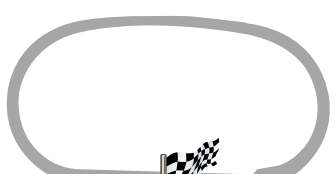
Fontana, Calif.



- **Track stats:** 2-mile oval; 14-degree banking
- **First race:** June 22, 1997
- **Fast fact:** California Speedway features 17 miles of fencing.

CHICAGOLAND SPEEDWAY

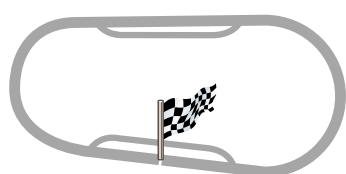
Joliet, Ill.



- **Track stats:** 1.5-mile tri-oval; 18-degree banking
- **First race:** July 15, 2001
- **Fast fact:** Chicagoland's infield is 1,200 feet by 2,850 feet, four times the size of the city's Soldier Field (home of the Chicago Bears).

DARLINGTON RACEWAY

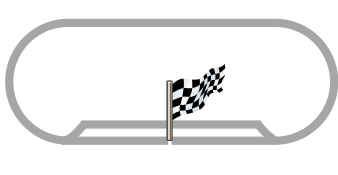
Darlington, S.C.



- **Track stats:** 1.366-mile oval; 23- to 25-degree banking
- **First race:** Sept. 4, 1950
- **Fast fact:** Darlington, NASCAR's first paved track, has been called "too tough to tame."

DOVER INTERNATIONAL SPEEDWAY

Dover, Del.



- **Track stats:** 1-mile oval; 24-degree banking
- **First race:** July 6, 1969
- **Fast fact:** Dover's 1-mile track is known throughout NASCAR as "The Monster Mile."

DAYTONA 500

What is arguably the most anticipated race in the Nextel Cup circuit also happens to be its first. Nicknames such as "The Great American Race" and "the Super Bowl of NASCAR racing" demonstrate the significance of the annual Daytona 500, held at Daytona International Speedway in Daytona Beach, Fla. Winning the annual event is considered a crowning achievement in a driver's career.

FAST FACTS:

- NASCAR's first sanctioned race was held in Daytona Beach in February 1948. The course was run partly on a local strip of highway and partly on the beach.
- In 1979, CBS broadcast the Daytona 500 from start to finish, a first for a NASCAR race. Also notable is that late-race leaders Cale Yarborough and Donnie Allison, who collided on the final lap, wound up in a fistfight on the infield on live TV.

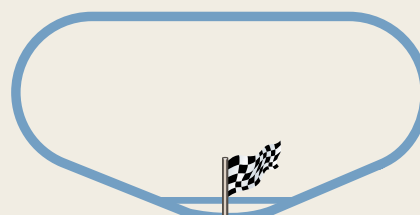


The Daytona 500 has been called "the Super Bowl of NASCAR racing."

DAYTONA INT'L SPEEDWAY

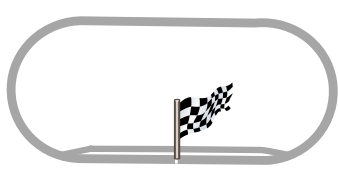
Daytona Beach, Fla.

- **Track stats:** 2.5-mile tri-oval; 31-degree banking
- **First race:** Feb. 20, 1959
- **Fast fact:** The Daytona complex encompasses almost 480 acres.



HOMESTEAD-MIAMI SPEEDWAY

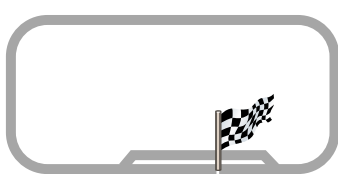
Homestead, Fla.



- **Track stats:** 1.5-mile oval; 20-degree banking
- **First race:** Nov. 14, 1999
- **Fast fact:** The track is active more than 260 days per year with multiple forms of racing, testing, track rentals, driving schools and community events.

INDIANAPOLIS MOTOR SPEEDWAY

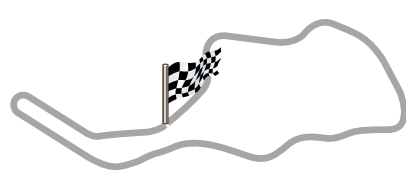
Indianapolis



- **Track stats:** 2.5-mile oval; 9-degree banking
- **First race:** Aug. 6, 1994
- **Fast fact:** The track has been known as The Brickyard since it was paved with 3.2 million bricks in 1909.

INFINEON RACEWAY

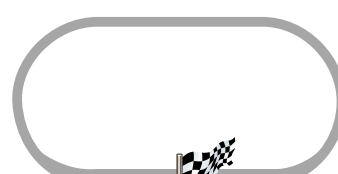
Sonoma, Calif.



- **Track stats:** 1.99-mile
- **First race:** June 11, 1989
- **Fast fact:** Infineon is one of the few NASCAR venues in which the distance of the event is measured in kilometers, not miles.

KANSAS SPEEDWAY

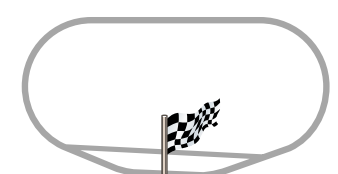
Kansas City, Kan.



- **Track stats:** 1.5-mile tri-oval; 15-degree banking
- **First race:** Sept. 30, 2001
- **Fast fact:** Kansas' infield is dug out, giving fans in the grandstands good sightlines by which to follow the race.

LAS VEGAS MOTOR SPEEDWAY

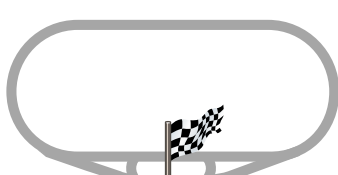
Las Vegas



- **Track stats:** 1.5-mile oval; 12-degree banking
- **First race:** March 1, 1998
- **Fast fact:** A total of 42,000 tons of asphalt was added just on the racing surface, equal to 17 miles of residential roadways.

LOWE'S MOTOR SPEEDWAY

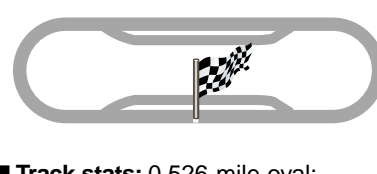
Concord, N.C.



- **Track stats:** 1.5-mile quad-oval; 24-degree banking
- **First race:** June 19, 1960
- **Fast fact:** The track was the first sports facility in the United States to offer year-round living accommodations when it released 40 condominiums for sale high above Turn One in 1984.

MARTINSVILLE SPEEDWAY

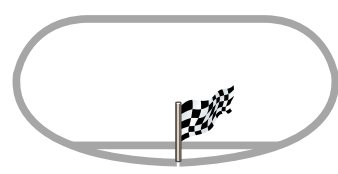
Martinsville, Va.



- **Track stats:** 0.526-mile oval; 12-degree banking
- **First race:** Sept. 25, 1949
- **Fast fact:** Martinsville is the only track in the circuit that was part of NASCAR's first "Strictly Stock" (now Nextel Cup) season. Races were run in Daytona Beach, Fla., and Charlotte, N.C., but not at the same venues where Cup drivers race today.

MICHIGAN INT'L SPEEDWAY

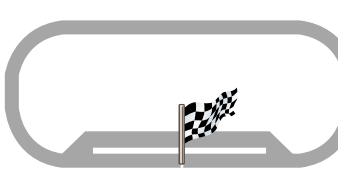
Brooklyn, Mich.



- **Track stats:** 2-mile oval; 18-degree banking
- **First race:** May 10, 1966
- **Fast fact:** More than 2.5 million yards of dirt were moved to create Michigan's D-shaped oval.

NEW HAMPSHIRE INT'L SPEEDWAY

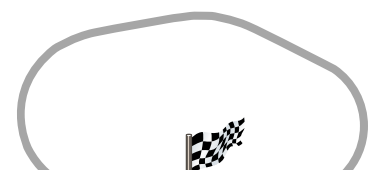
Loudon, N.H.



- **Track stats:** 1.058-mile oval; 12-degree banking
- **First race:** July 11, 1993
- **Fast fact:** The two Nextel Cup races at New Hampshire International Speedway are the largest spectator sporting events in New England, with 101,000 fans in attendance at each race.

PHOENIX INT'L RACEWAY

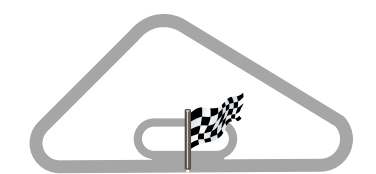
Phoenix



- **Track stats:** 1-mile oval; 11-degree banking
- **First race:** Nov. 6, 1988
- **Fast fact:** PIR is located at the base of the Estrella Mountains, near the Salt and Gila rivers.

POCONO RACEWAY

Long Pond, Pa.



- **Track stats:** 2.5-mile triangular-shaped track; 6- to 14-degree banking
- **First race:** Aug. 4, 1974
- **Fast fact:** Measuring 3,740 feet, Pocono features the Nextel Cup circuit's longest straightaway.

RICHMOND INT'L RACEWAY

Richmond, Va.



- **Track stats:** 0.75-mile oval; 14-degree banking
- **First race:** April 19, 1953
- **Fast fact:** Richmond is the only track to hold all its major events "under the lights" at night.

TALLADEGA SUPERSPEEDWAY

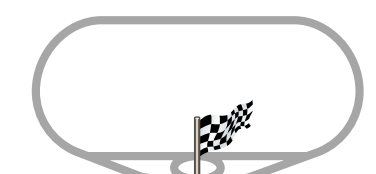
Talladega, Ala.



- **Track stats:** 2.66-mile tri-oval; 33-degree banking
- **First race:** Sept. 14, 1969
- **Fast fact:** In 1987, Bill Elliott set the NASCAR record for fastest qualifying lap (212.809 mph) at Talladega.

TEXAS MOTOR SPEEDWAY

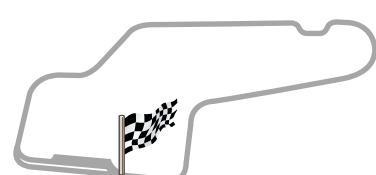
Fort Worth, Texas



- **Track stats:** 1.5-mile oval; 24-degree banking
- **First race:** April 6, 1997
- **Fast fact:** Texas features more than 190 luxury VIP skyboxes in which to view races.

WATKINS GLEN INTERNATIONAL

Watkins Glen, N.Y.



- **Track stats:** 2.45-mile, 11-turn road course; 6- to 10-degree banking
- **First race:** Aug. 4, 1957
- **Fast fact:** Jeff Gordon leads all NASCAR drivers in victories at Watkins Glen with four wins.