

TRACK TIME

2025 NASCAR Season Preview



Next Chapter Begins

Schedule Changes, Driver Moves Highlight Transformative 2025 Season

NASCAR launches its most ambitious season yet in 2025, combining a groundbreaking international expansion with significant driver movement and a revamped television package that pushes the sport further into the streaming era.

The 36-race schedule ventures beyond U.S. borders for the first time in Cup Series points competition, visiting Mexico City's Autodromo Hermanos Rodriguez in June. The historic addition highlights NASCAR's expanding footprint, building on the success of recent innovative venues like the Chicago Street Course and the season-opening Clash at Bowman Gray Stadium.

The playoff schedule also receives a significant refresh, with Darlington, Gateway and New Hampshire joining the 10-race championship run.

Phoenix Raceway retains its role as host of the championship finale, where a new champion will be crowned under the desert lights on November 2.



NASCAR MEDIA / GETTY IMAGES

FRESH FACES, NEW PLACES

The garage area presents a dramatically different look following one of the most active offseasons in recent memory. The transformation of Stewart-Haas Racing into the single-car Haas Factory Team triggered widespread movement, sending Chase Briscoe to Joe Gibbs Racing's No. 19 Toyota and dispersing other drivers across the grid.

Several teams seized the opportunity to expand, with Michael Jordan's 23XI Racing

adding Riley Herbst in a third Toyota and Trackhouse Racing fielding the No. 88 for international sensation Shane van Gisbergen.

Front Row Motorsports and RFK Racing also grew their operations, adding entries for Noah Gragson and Ryan Preece respectively.

VIEWING EXPERIENCE EVOLUTION

Fans will navigate a new broadcast landscape as Amazon Prime Video and TNT join traditional partners FOX

and NBC. The streaming presence expands significantly through Prime Video, Max and Peacock, reflecting NASCAR's adaptation to changing media consumption habits.

The season structure includes additional intrigue with the introduction of an in-season tournament, fastest lap bonus points and modified practice procedures. These changes, coupled with an adjusted damaged vehicle policy, promise to inject new strategic elements into

competition.

The combination of schedule innovation, team transformation and broadcast evolution makes 2025 one of NASCAR's most pivotal seasons.

As teams prepare for the Daytona 500, the sport stands at a crossroads between tradition and innovation.

The next ten months will determine whether NASCAR's bold vision for its future resonates with both longtime fans and new audiences drawn to its evolving presentation.

Television Landscape Shifts

Four Networks, Streaming Services Split Coverage For 2025 Season

NASCAR's television presence undergoes its most significant transformation in two decades as new media partners join traditional broadcasters for the 2025 season, marking the sport's continued evolution into the streaming era.

FOX maintains its grip on the season's opening stretch, broadcasting 14 events including the Busch Light Clash and All-Star Race across FOX and FS1. The veteran team of Mike Joy returns to the booth, joined by recently retired champion Kevin Harvick and fan favorite Clint Bowyer for analysis.

The landscape shifts dramatically in late May when Amazon Prime Video makes its NASCAR debut with the Coca-Cola 600. The streaming giant's five-race package introduces a new way for fans to consume the sport, while bringing the experienced broadcast team of Adam Alexander, Dale Earnhardt Jr. and Steve Letarte to the platform.

That same announce team transitions to TNT and Max for the mid-summer stretch, beginning June 28 at Atlanta



NASCAR MEDIA / GETTY IMAGES

Motor Speedway. The five-race stint includes the Brickyard 400, marking TNT's return to NASCAR coverage after a decade-long absence.

NBC closes out the season with 14 races, starting Aug. 3 at Iowa Speedway. The network spreads its coverage across NBC, USA Network and streaming service Peacock, with motorsports veteran Leigh Diffey handling play-by-play duties alongside analysts Steve Letarte and Jeff Burton. The package includes all 10 playoff races, concluding at Phoenix Raceway on Nov. 2.

The multi-platform

approach reflects broader changes in media consumption habits. While traditional television remains central to NASCAR's strategy, the addition of Prime Video and expanded streaming options through Max and Peacock provides new access points for viewers.

For longtime fans, the broadcast schedule represents the most complex viewing arrangement in recent memory. The sport's leadership believes the trade-off between complexity and expanded reach will ultimately benefit NASCAR's growth, particularly

among younger audiences who primarily consume content through streaming platforms.

The success of this new media strategy could influence future rights agreements across motorsports. Other racing series will likely watch closely as NASCAR navigates the balance between traditional television coverage and emerging digital platforms.

The expanded streaming presence also opens new possibilities for supplemental content and alternative broadcast options. While specific plans haven't been

announced, the digital nature of Prime Video, Max and Peacock creates opportunities for additional camera angles, driver-specific feeds and interactive features.

As the season approaches, the challenge for NASCAR and its broadcast partners lies in creating a seamless viewing experience across platforms while maintaining the production quality fans expect.

The sport's ability to execute this complex media strategy could set the template for motorsports broadcasting in the streaming age.

NASCAR Debuts Tournament Format

Summer Racing Series Highlights Major Changes For 2025 Season

NASCAR's latest evolution takes a page from the NBA playbook, introducing an unprecedented in-season tournament for 2025 among several significant rule changes that promise to reshape competition across the sport's premier series.

The bracket-style tournament, mirroring March Madness format, will feature 32 drivers battling head-to-head during TNT and Max's summer broadcast window. Three seeding races at Michigan, Mexico City and Pocono will determine the tournament field, marking NASCAR's boldest format experiment since the playoff system debut.

Beyond the tournament, NASCAR continues tweaking its competitive framework. Practice sessions will now extend to 25 minutes per group, giving teams additional time to dial in setups. Qualifying procedures have been streamlined to a single round format, abandoning the group system used in



NASCAR MEDIA / GETTY IMAGES

recent years.

The sanctioning body has also softened its damaged vehicle policy, allowing cars to return to competition after garage repairs – a significant departure from previous rules that ended a car's day once it reached the garage area. The change could dramatically impact race strategies, particularly at incident-prone tracks like Talladega and Daytona.

NEW POINTS STRUCTURE

In a nod to Formula 1's influence, NASCAR will award a bonus point to the driver posting each race's fastest lap, regardless of running position. The move adds another strategic element for

teams to consider, especially during races where track position might be compromised.

The series also introduced an "Open Exemption Provisional" creating a 41st starting position for special circumstances. Four-time Indianapolis 500 champion Helio Castroneves will be the first beneficiary, using the provision to make his NASCAR debut with Trackhouse Racing at the Daytona 500.

The provisional spot will not be eligible for points, prize money or any other benefits of finishing position. Additionally, NASCAR modified its playoff waiver system – drivers receiving waivers will now forfeit

regular-season playoff points, a rule that would have affected Kyle Larson in 2024 after missing the Coca-Cola 600 for the Indianapolis 500.

These changes reflect NASCAR's ongoing effort to balance tradition with innovation as the sanctioning body explores new ways to enhance competition. The success of the in-season tournament, coupled with modified practice and qualifying procedures, will likely influence future decisions as NASCAR continues adapting its format for both competitors and fans.

The revamped damaged vehicle policy could prove particularly significant at superspeedways, where multi-car incidents often thin

the field. Teams now have additional opportunities to repair their vehicles and return to competition, potentially leading to more cars running at the finish.

As teams prepare for the 2025 season, they face the challenge of adapting to these various modifications while developing strategies to maximize points under the new fastest-lap system. The combination of extended practice time and simplified qualifying procedures will also require teams to adjust their weekend approaches across different track types.

The in-season tournament kicks off in the summer, adding a new dimension to NASCAR's traditional championship chase.

Massive Shakeup Rocks Cup Garage

Major Teams Expand, Contract In Biggest Offseason Move Since 2020

A seismic shift in NASCAR's competitive landscape unfolded during the offseason, headlined by the dramatic downsizing of Stewart-Haas Racing into the single-car Haas Factory Team and triggering a domino effect of driver movements across the sport.

The transformation of Stewart-Haas sent four established Cup Series drivers searching for new opportunities. Chase Briscoe landed perhaps the most coveted seat, stepping into the No. 19 Toyota at Joe Gibbs Racing to replace retiring veteran Martin Truex Jr. Josh Berry secured the iconic No. 21 Wood Brothers Ford after Harrison Burton's move to the Xfinity Series, while Noah Gragson and Ryan Preece found homes in new entries at Front Row Motorsports and RFK Racing respectively.

Cole Custer emerged as the sole survivor of the Stewart-Haas reorganization, remaining with Gene Haas to pilot the No. 41 Ford under the new Haas Factory Team



NASCAR MEDIA / GETTY IMAGES

banner. The dramatic downsizing marks the end of an era for an organization that captured multiple championships and dominated headlines during its 15-year run.

GROWTH AND CHANGE

While one powerhouse contracted, other teams seized opportunities to expand. Michael Jordan's 23XI Racing added a third Toyota to its stable, tapping Xfinity Series veteran Riley Herbst for the new No. 35 entry. Trackhouse Racing also grew its footprint, creating the No. 88 team for international sensation Shane van Gisbergen, who stunned the NASCAR world by winning

in his debut at Chicago's street circuit in 2023.

Front Row Motorsports demonstrated its growing ambitions by adding Gragson's No. 4 Ford while reshuffling its existing lineup. The team orchestrated a unique swap with Spire Motorsports that sent Michael McDowell to the No. 71 while bringing Zane Smith to the No. 38.

Kaulig Racing revamped its driver roster, installing road course ace A.J. Allmendinger in the No. 16 full-time after using multiple drivers in 2024. The team also welcomed Ty Dillon to the renumbered No. 10 Chevrolet, replacing Daniel

Hemric who moved to the Truck Series.

The extensive shuffle represents the most significant offseason transformation since 2020, when the COVID-19 pandemic sparked widespread changes across the sport. The movement affects nearly every manufacturer and competitive tier within the garage, from championship-caliber organizations to developing teams.

As teams prepare for the season-opening Daytona 500, the garage area's new configuration presents fresh storylines and competitive questions. The success of

expanded operations at 23XI, Trackhouse and Front Row could reshape the sport's competitive balance, while the streamlined Haas operation faces the challenge of maintaining performance with reduced resources.

The 2025 season opens with one of the most diverse driver lineups in NASCAR history, featuring an international champion, a returning veteran, and several young talents stepping into high-profile opportunities. Their performance in these new roles will likely influence future driver market movements and team expansion plans across the sport.

NASCAR's Flag System

Officials Use 15 Different Flags To Direct High-Speed Ballet

Every NASCAR race unfolds under the watchful eye of officials wielding a sophisticated system of colored flags, each carrying specific instructions that govern the high-speed action below.

These signals form the foundation of race control, directing everything from starts and stops to individual driver instructions.

The most frequently displayed flags guide the basic flow of competition. The green flag signals the start of racing and releases drivers to full speed, while yellow flags slow the field under caution for incidents or debris.

When conditions require a complete halt, the red flag brings cars to a standstill, typically for weather or major track cleanup.

Individual communication often comes via the black flag, requiring specific drivers to pit for consultation with officials or to address mechanical concerns. A black flag with crossed white lines carries more severe implications – failure to heed initial instructions within five laps results in the driver no longer being scored.

Track position awareness



NASCAR MEDIA / GETTY IMAGES

relies heavily on the blue flag with yellow diagonal stripe, warning slower cars that faster traffic is approaching. This “move-over flag” proves especially critical when leaders encounter lapped traffic, helping maintain competitive flow while reducing collision risks.

Road course competition introduces additional signals to the system. A solid blue flag warns of hard-to-see problems ahead, while yellow and red stripes indicate debris on the racing surface.

These specialized flags help drivers navigate the unique challenges of left and right turns.

The final laps bring out racing's most recognizable signals. The white flag waves with one circuit remaining, followed by the iconic black and white checkered flag declaring the winner. A green checkered flag serves a different purpose, marking the end of a race stage rather than the full event.

Several flag combinations serve specific purposes. Red

and black flags displayed together end practice or qualifying sessions, while two simultaneous checkered flags can optionally mark a race's halfway point. The green-white-checkered sequence manages NASCAR's overtime procedure, allowing up to three attempts at finishing under green flag conditions.

Entry to pit road operates under its own signal – a red flag with yellow stripe indicates closed pits until all cars line up behind the pace car. This systematic approach to

pit access helps maintain order during caution periods when multiple teams need service.

For competitors, spectators and officials alike, this carefully orchestrated system of flags provides immediate, unmistakable communication essential to safe competition at speeds exceeding 200 mph.

The flutter of fabric above the speedway tells the story of each race, from hopeful green to triumphant checkered.

NASCAR Honors Its Legends

Rudd, Edwards, Moody Join Hall of Fame's 15th Class In 2025

NASCAR's rich history gains three new chapters in 2025 as Ricky Rudd, Carl Edwards and Ralph Moody earn their place in the NASCAR Hall of Fame, with pioneering safety engineer Dr. Dean Sicking receiving the Landmark Award for Outstanding Contributions to NASCAR.

Rudd, nicknamed "NASCAR's Ironman," dominated the Modern Era ballot with 87% of votes – one of the highest percentages in Hall of Fame voting history. His legendary durability produced 788 consecutive starts, a record that stood until Jeff Gordon surpassed it in 2015. Over a 32-year Cup career spanning 906 starts, Rudd collected 23 wins, 194 top-five finishes and 374 top-10s, ranking seventh all-time in the latter category.

Perhaps most impressively, Rudd scored at least one victory in 16 consecutive seasons from 1983-98, tied for the third-longest streak in Cup Series history. He also proved successful as an owner-driver, claiming six wins while



NASCAR MEDIA / GETTY IMAGES

operating Rudd Performance Motorsports from 1994-99, including a memorable triumph in the 1997 Brickyard 400 at Indianapolis Motor Speedway.

Edwards' meteoric rise from substitute teacher to NASCAR star captured voters' imagination, earning him selection with 52% of Modern Era votes. His trademark victory backflips punctuated 72 wins across NASCAR's national series. Over just 13 years in Cup competition, Edwards amassed 28 victories including crown jewel wins in the Coca-Cola 600 and Southern 500 during his final full season in 2015.

The Missouri native's Xfinity Series career proved equally impressive, with 38 wins and five consecutive top-two points finishes, including the 2007 championship. Edwards twice finished runner-up in the Cup Series, most notably in 2011 when he lost the title to Tony Stewart on a tie-breaker in what remains the closest championship battle in NASCAR history.

Pioneer ballot selection Ralph Moody helped revolutionize NASCAR's technical evolution through multiple roles in the sport. After serving under General George S. Patton in World War II, Moody moved to Florida in 1949 to

pursue year-round racing opportunities. He found success as a driver, winning five Cup Series races in 1956-57 before shifting his focus to team ownership.

Moody partnered with John Holman to form Holman-Moody Racing in 1957, building the foundation for one of NASCAR's most influential teams. Over 16 years, the organization claimed 96 wins and 83 poles in 525 starts, including consecutive championships with David Pearson in 1968-69 and the 1967 Daytona 500 with Mario Andretti. The team's driver roster read like a who's who of NASCAR legends, including Hall of Famers Joe Weatherly, Fred Lorenzen, Fireball Roberts and Bobby Allison.

Dr. Sicking's Landmark Award recognizes his crucial safety innovations, particularly the Steel and Foam Energy Reduction (SAFER) barrier. Following Dale Earnhardt's death in 2001, NASCAR partnered with Sicking and the Midwest Roadside Safety Facility at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln to better understand crash dynamics and prevent future tragedies.

The collaboration produced the SAFER barrier technology, which combines steel tubing and foam blocks to absorb impact energy. Sicking studied each track's incident history to identify the most dangerous areas for immediate barrier installation. Today, all

NASCAR national series tracks feature SAFER barriers, and the technology has been adopted by other racing series worldwide.

His contributions earned both the Bill France Award of Excellence in 2003 and the National Medal of Technology and Innovation from President George W. Bush in 2005. The ongoing partnership between NASCAR and Sicking's team continues to advance motorsports safety.

The Class of 2025 emerged from a distinguished group of nominees through votes cast by an expert panel including representatives from NASCAR, tracks, media, manufacturers, competitors and industry leaders. Fans also participated through NASCAR.com voting, supporting Edwards and pioneer candidate Ray Hendrick. Harry Gant and Jeff Burton were the next highest vote-getters on the Modern Era ballot, while Hendrick finished second in Pioneer voting.

The new class celebrates three distinctly different paths to racing immortality: Rudd's iron-man persistence, Edwards' meteoric success, and Moody's technical innovation.

Together with Landmark Award winner Sicking, they represent NASCAR's continued evolution from regional curiosity to technological showcase while maintaining the grit and determination of its earliest days.

Speaking NASCAR's Language

Key Terms Help Fans Navigate This High-Speed Sport

From the garage to the grandstands, NASCAR has developed its own unique vocabulary over decades of competition.

Understanding these key terms helps fans follow both the action on track and the strategy behind it.

The way a car handles remains central to racing success, with drivers constantly communicating about whether their vehicle is “tight” or “loose.” A tight condition, also known as understeer, means the front end pushes toward the wall in corners. Conversely, a loose or oversteering car sees its rear end wanting to swing out – a condition that can quickly lead to spins.



NASCAR MEDIA / GETTY IMAGES

TRACK TYPES AND RACING LINES

NASCAR categorizes its venues into distinct groups. Short tracks measure less than a mile in length, including historic facilities like Martinsville and Bristol. Intermediate tracks span 1.5 to 2 miles, while superspeedways like Daytona and Talladega exceed 2.5 miles and produce distinctive pack racing. Road courses add left and right turns to the mix.

Drivers search for the optimal “groove” around each

track – the fastest route that may run high near the wall or low near the inside line. This preferred path can shift throughout a race as track conditions change. On superspeedways, competitors use drafting techniques, running nose-to-tail to punch a bigger hole in the air and create higher speeds.

TECHNICAL ELEMENTS

Modern NASCAR relies heavily on aerodynamics. Downforce helps plant cars to

the track through a combination of the front splitter and rear spoiler, while drag works against forward momentum. The balance between these forces proves crucial to performance.

Teams adjust camber – the angle of tire tilt – and make chassis adjustments like wedge to fine-tune handling. The rules package dictates horsepower levels, with cars running either 670 or 510 horsepower depending on the track type.

STRATEGIC MOVES

Several terms describe key tactical decisions. “Short pitting” involves stopping for service before running low on fuel, hoping to gain track position when others pit later. The “choose rule” allows drivers to pick their restart lane, adding another layer of strategy to track position battles.

Safety innovations include the Steel and Foam Energy Reduction (SAFER) barrier, which uses foam-backed steel

tubes to absorb impact energy. This technology has dramatically improved driver protection at tracks across the schedule.

For new fans, this vocabulary opens up deeper understanding of the sport's complexity. From aerodynamic terms like side drafting to strategic concepts like the wave around rule, NASCAR's language reflects the intricate dance of speed, skill and strategy that defines modern stock car racing.