

Tips for watching the races

The Xtream Rock Island Grand Prix provides an exciting weekend of racing action for thousands of spectators each year. Here's how to maximize your enjoyment:

Who to watch: Karts race in a variety of weight, engine and fuel classes. The fastest classes will be the Shifter classes. There are local racers in many of the classes.

What to watch: Some race classes have drawn starting positions at registration and others will run qualifying laps for starting position. On Saturday all will run a heat race to set starting positions for the Finals on Sunday. These races will be sprints, but it is not essential to win. Points are awarded based on finishing position in the heat and how many places you gain.

Safety first: Stay off the track. Under no circumstances should anyone enter the track during racing. Areas designated as spectator crossings will be opened by race officials during breaks in the racing. Cross the track only in designated crossings and only at designated times. Also, please stand back from the fence and do not sit close to it or put your fingers through it.

Rain or shine: Racing goes on rain or shine, so if it rains, grab your umbrella and slicker. Drivers change tires, adjust their chassis and run unless there's a deluge. Wet roads add to the challenge and excitement of racing.

Beat the crowds: Arrive early to beat the crowds. Bring a lawn chair so you can sit and still see over the barriers that line the course. Some fans even bring a pop-up tent to protect them from the sun.

Visit the pits: It costs \$10 per person for a daily pit pass, or \$20 for both days, but you'll get to see the drivers and pit crews up close working on their karts. Most karters are happy to sign autographs and talk about racing. Many bring their families along. Thank them for coming and welcome them to the Quad-Cities. General admission to watch the racing is free.

Attention please: A public address system has been set up throughout the downtown race area, including the pits. It allows the race organizers to communicate with racers as well as track announcers to tell spectators what is going on in the racing.

Protect your ears: Some people will consider these karts loud, especially after a long day of racing. Bring earplugs or take a break now and then from your track-side perch and get something to eat or drink at the Grand Prix Marketplace.

On the internet: Live audio of the Rock Island racing action is broadcast on the Internet by Ekartingnews.com.

No coolers: Race organizers ask that you not bring coolers to the track. Glass bottles can be dangerous to both drivers and spectators, and city ordinances require that beer be consumed only in designated areas. There are a number of reasonably priced food and drink vendors at the Grand Prix.

Learn about kart racing: Local racers from 61 Kartway, Delmar, Iowa will have a booth. They can answer your questions about kart racing as well as how to get involved at both the junior and senior age levels.

Beer Man! Two beer stands are available to quench your thirst. One is in the center of the track, near Circa '21. The other is on the exterior, near U.S. Bank. These are the only places fans may consume alcohol on the race course.

Hungry? The Grand Prix Marketplace features a wide variety of food and drinks. Vendors are located on 19th Street, between 3rd and 4th avenues; Third Avenue between 19th and 20th streets; and, on 3rd Avenue, just west of 18th Street.

Other attractions: There are other things to do at the Grand Prix besides watching racing. On Sunday there is a Car Show on 18th Street near WHBF-TV. In the same area the Bradley University Society of Automotive Engineers will have its race cars on display both Saturday and Sunday. They will be happy to talk about their program and careers in motorsports. In the infield near Circa 21, besides food and beer vendors the Quad City Storm professional hockey team will offer Shoot the Puck floor hockey.

No spectator areas: Several areas along the track have been designated as “No Spectator Areas” because they are potentially dangerous locations. For your own safety, please do not attempt to watch the races from these areas.

Volunteers: Most of the people working at the Grand Prix are volunteering their time. Please be considerate and everyone will enjoy the weekend.

Start/Finish line: It is located on 4th Avenue. This is where the race starts and ends, and the timers, scorers and race director are located. A LeMans-style start is used from the side of the street for many classes, as well as Formula One and rolling starts.

Meet the drivers: During Opening Ceremonies at 10:30 a.m. Sunday, drivers walk one complete lap of the track without their helmets on to meet and greet spectators. Following the Driver’s Parade, spectators are allowed on the track at the Start/Finish line for an autograph session. Some might be the NASCAR, IndyCar and Formula One drivers of the future.

Tracking the races: The races can be confusing because karts can get strung out on the course making it difficult to figure out who is in the lead. Pick your favorite racer and remember the color and number on his kart. Don’t be confused if you see the same driver, or kart, in more than one race. Some have several karts, and they also can race in different classes by adjusting the weight on the kart. Listen carefully to the track announcer for helpful descriptions.

Turn 1: This corner offers the opportunity for lots of action. In the first lap of each race, as many as 40 karts squeeze into this corner together. In subsequent laps, the field will be more spread out, but racers will approach the corner at a high rate of speed coming out of a two-block straight-away and heading into the two-block back stretch.

Back stretch: The two-block long stretch of the course north along 20th Street is where the fastest speeds will be attained. Speeds will reach 80 mph in some classes.

Curvy action: Karters find the S-Curve in the middle of the race course quite a challenge. After taking the right turn at Circa ‘21, they have only a short straight stretch to pass on, before turning left onto 18th Street as they head south. There should be plenty of action through this portion of the course.

Sponsors: Their support helps make this race happen as an admission-free event. Please thank them for their sponsorship and show your support by doing business with them whenever possible.