

Walls Roofing UCAR Clash makes history, visits North Wilkesboro  
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I've never been distracted while driving a racecar. Usually I'm so focused on the task at hand, that I never notice anything beyond the fences. However, making my first laps at North Wilkesboro was different. I couldn't help but look around and take in the history.

I participated in a practice session as a driver in the Walls' Roofing UCAR Clash for Cash Series at North Wilkesboro, as part of the track's attempt to get back to competitive racing after more than a decade.

The UCARs, front-wheel drive, four cylinder stock cars have never raced on an oval track quite as big as the 5/8 mile North Wilkesboro, so a test session was scheduled to see how the cars handled the increased speed.

UCAR Clash Regulars Mike Chapman, Robert Arch, Randy Prillamen, Barry Wilson, Mike Strickland, Jim Bounds, Jason Miller, David Wiggins and myself all took laps on the historic track.

As I pulled out onto the track for the first time, I should have been paying attention to how my car ran, my line around the racetrack and how many RPMs I was turning down the straightaway. However, I found myself looking at the Junior Johnson grandstand on the backstretch and the old wooden fence that was built in the 1940's, before NASCAR existed.

As I drove through turns one and two, I couldn't help but remember the race Ricky Rudd and Dale Earnhardt ended a yearlong feud against the very same wall I was flirting with every lap. Of course it wasn't hard to notice the uphill backstretch and the downhill front stretch, something unique from any other track from the NASCAR schedule.

Larry Walls, who heads up the UCAR series, said the historic nature of the track is what drove him to seek a date for his drivers here.

"It was a great day for the UCARs at North Wilkesboro," Walls said. "All this history. I can't wait until all of my drivers get to come up here and race in October."

Yes, the UCARs were fast, but not dangerously fast. Larry told me my average lap speeds were around 85 mph, and he said the other cars were roughly the same. Someone with a radar gun at the track clocked some of the drivers running 90 mph at the end of the backstretch, something all of the drivers seemed to manage well.

Another reason for the test was to get a grasp on how the cars' tires would handle the abrasive ancient surface at North Wilkesboro.

The track was bumpy and slick, but not much worse than other UCAR Clash venues like Wake County, East Carolina and Hickory, which all have older pavement that make the tracks more challenging.

That being said, the speeds were considerably faster at North Wilkesboro and the abrasive surface did take its toll on some of the drivers who missed the proper setup. One driver, who ran too little air pressure, blistered his right front tire in a handful of laps. More air solved the wear problem.

However, I personally experienced the worst problem of the day — a blown tire that may have cost me a racecar.

The combination of scuffed tires, inadequate air pressure and too little negative camber caused the right front tire on my car to blow exiting turn four, causing me to hit the wall at about 70 mph.

Of course the safety equipment mandated by the UCAR clash kept me safe, even if my car was thoroughly trashed.

There is a silver lining to the story. On my way home from a morning at one of NASCAR's original tracks, I realized that I'm probably the first person to hit the wall at North Wilkesboro since 1996, and the first to christen the wall since the track's revival. I guess that officially makes me a part of North Wilkesboro history!

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Thanks

Larry P. Walls

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