



An American Tour: 115



Sonoma's *Sears Point International Raceway*

The 2.52-mile road racing course was constructed on 720 acres by Marin County owners Robert Marshall Jr., an attorney from Point Reyes, and land developer Jim Coleman of Kentfield. The two conceived of the idea of a race track while on a hunting trip. Ground was broken in August 1968 and paving of the race surface was completed in November. The first official event at Sears Point was an SCCA Enduro, held on December 1, 1968. Over the ensuing years, the track has changed ownership several times. American Motorcycle Association national motocross races in the hills north of Turn 7 became popular with Bay Area fans, but were phased out by the end of the decade because of rising insurance costs.

In 1994 more than \$1 million was spent on a beautification project and construction of a 62-foot high, four-sided electronic lap leader board in the center of the road course. In the following years, a major \$3 million renovation plan included VIP suites and a two-story driver's lounge/emergency medical facility. In 1995 Trans-Am and SportsCar races returned to Sears Point and the NASCAR Craftsman Truck Series was added to the major-events schedule.

The first-ever running of the American Le Mans Series took place at Sears Point in July 1999. In 2000, Sears Point Raceway gained unanimous approval from the Sonoma County Board of Supervisors by a 5-0 vote to begin work on a \$35 million Modernization Plan that included 64,000 Hillside Terrace seats, repaving of both the road course and drag strip and increased run-off around the entire track.

Sonoma Raceway has a permanent seating capacity of 47,000. This includes the grandstands and terraces around the track. During major races, hospitality tents and other stages are erected around the track, which brings the total capacity up to 102,000 seats. The facility underwent a major expansion in 2004 which resulted in 64,000 hillside seats, 10,000 permanent grandstand seats, a wastewater treatment facility, 100 acres of restored wetlands, permanent garages, new retail space, a go-kart track and a new drag strip.

[Wikipedia]

