



Lucas Oil Off Road Racing Series Brings Stadium Racing To Arizona

Story and photos by Tim Sharp

For race drivers, stadium off road racing is the ultimate form of motorsports combat. Stadium tracks have colossal jumps which launch the race machines into the stratosphere and then slam them back to the earth, just in time for the drivers to pitch them into the turns.

For the fans, there is also no type of racing quite as exciting to view in person. These race machines catch so much air, you wonder why they don't put ads on their bottoms. The race trucks lean on each other so hard that most are fenderless at the end of the race.

This is AMA Supercross racing, only on four wheels. This is midjet racing, but with wicked jumps. This is NASCAR racing, only with more contact. This is the Lucas Oil Off Road Racing Series, and it recently established its winter home in the Valley of the Sun. If you don't attend at least one of these races in 2011, you will miss some of the best racing in Arizona.

Let's turn back the clock to the 1980s. Do you remember Ivan Stewart? He raced for Toyota, and Ivan was the king of off road racing. This was in the heyday of stadium off road racing when race promoter Mickey Thompson packed the LA Colosseum and San Diego Stadium to capacity. This was the era when the Mears brothers' Nissans ran head-to-head with the Toyota factory trucks. This was the golden age of stadium racing. But then, tragically, Mickey Thompson and his wife Trudy were assassinated at their estate in Southern California, and the sport has not been the same since.

However, recently, the sport has been revived.

Forest Lucas, owner of Lucas Oil, has resurrected stadium off road racing, and two of the five race tracks on the 2011 Lucas Oil Off Road Racing Series schedule are here in Arizona: Firebird International Raceway in Chandler and Speedworld Off Road Park in Surprise. Yes, race fans, seven of the fifteen races on the 2011 Lucas Oil schedule will be run in the Valley.

Of course, you can view the Lucas Oil Off Road Racing Series races on Speed, CBS, Vs. or MAVtv, but these races are far more exciting to see live. Our suggestion: go to lucasoiloffroadracing.com to view the 2011 LOORRS schedule.

What Is It Like To Race In A Stadium Off Road Race?

Being a road racer for most of my career, I have competed in just two desert off road races and only one stadium race. However, I must admit that the most fun I have ever had in a racing machine was in that singular stadium race. Driving by the seat of your pants and power sliding around the track, stadium racing is the ultimate high.

Attending the Lucas season finale race at Firebird International Raceway brought back vivid memories of just how exciting it really was. I learned that, even today, there is nothing to compare with the extreme action of stadium off road racing.

Strolling through the pits, I spotted a Pro Unlim-

ited Buggy with "Fortin Racing" on the side. Could this car possibly belong to Doug Fortin, a kart racer who grew up with me and my brother Steve in San Diego County? Inquiring minds needed to know.

Yes, it was Doug Fortin, and we visited in his pits. He and his son Doug Jr had won the Baja 1000 a half dozen times, but they were now totally embroiled in the Lucas Oil Off Road Racing Series. I learned that Doug Jr was currently third in points and that he had won the stadium racing series a few times before. Great—now I had someone to cheer for.

After reminiscing for a while in Doug's motorhome, it was time to find a good place to watch the races and take some action photos. Per Fortin's suggestion, I proceeded to the top corner of the grandstands.

Fortunately, I sat next to Ernst Renezeder, father of the current master of stadium off road racing, Carl Renezeder. Ernst was a wealth of information about the Series, and his son has won more stadium races than any driver in the past decade. Carl is the logical successor to Ivan Stewart's crown as the king of stadium racing. Now I had two drivers to cheer for.

Unfortunately, Carl had experienced a number of mechanical failures in 2010, so the best he could finish was third in 2010 Series points. Nevertheless, Carl dominated his race until he experienced a mechanical failure. Fortunately for Carl, there is always this next season, and the first race of the Lucas Series is at Firebird on March 19.



2010 Lucas Oil Off Road Racing Series Results

On Saturday, Rick Huseman entered the final points race of the season with an edge over both Kyle Leduc and Carl Renezeder, each driving 800-hp Pro 4 Unlimited trucks. Holding nothing back, Huseman put in a brilliant drive and locked up the 2010 Lucas Championship. Leduc was second and Renezeder finished third in series points.

In the final Pro Lite Unlimited race of the season, Marty Hart held off challengers Chris Brandt and Brian Deegan for the Lucas Series Championship. But the points championship was somewhat closer in this class than in the Pro 4 Unlimited Class.

The Pro 2WD Unlimited truck series championship was won by veteran Rob MacCrachen. Carl Renezeder was second and Bryce Menzies finished third in Series points. Yes, these nasty beasts also sport 800-hp engines, but they transfer their titanic torque to the ground using just two tires, not four. It was the ultimate slide fest.

Cameron Steele edged out Larry Job and Doug Fortin Jr for the Pro Buggy Unlimited Championship. With 649 points, Steele had a mere 13-point lead over Job and edged Fortin by just 39 points. If the fans came to see a nail bitter, they certainly got their wish with this season points finale at Firebird.

But Wait, There Is More

How could Lucas Oil possibly top the exciting points finale races on Saturday? Easy—they would race the agile-yet-fragile Pro Unlimited Buggies against the massive Pro Unlimited Trucks on Sunday.

"But that is madness," you protest. "You cannot

put the little 250-hp buggies in with the massive 800-hp trucks." Nevertheless, Lucas did it. Then they went a step farther. Lucas reversed the grid, making Saturday's fastest vehicles start at the back of the pack. Beyond madness? Absolutely, but it created some very exciting racing.

Starting in 20th place, Doug Fortin Jr's chances seemed to be somewhere between slim and none. But talent, experience and opportunism are a powerful combination. In addition, Fortin Racing built Doug a very fast buggy to make his run to the front.

"It took some luck for Doug to make his way from the back of the pack to first in just 18 laps," Doug Sr remarked after the race. In reality, it was more skill than luck. Fortin carved through the pack like a surgeon. He let the race trucks lean on each other, and he took advantage of every opportunity to pass the heavier trucks on the inside. Quite simply, this is exactly how Fortin earned his \$20,000 first place prize money.

The Pro 4 Unlimited Vs Pro 2 Unlimited truck race, Sunday's heavy-metal event, was equally exciting. Off road racing fans always wonder whether the 4WD or 2WD trucks are faster, but the two classes rarely race together during the regular season. Today they did, and this race was an all-out war.

With 26 trucks on a track just 8/10s of a mile long, the fans got exactly what they wanted: Serious body slamming and lots of passing. When the checkered flag fell, only 14 competitors remained. Kyle Leduc's Pro 4 Unlimited defeated Bryce Menzies' Pro 2 Unlimited truck and Carl Renezeder's Pro 4 Unlimited truck in this shootout for \$35,000.

Try It, You Will Like It

You must attend a Lucas Oil Off Road Racing Series race in person to truly understand what stadium racing is about. It is about racing buggies soaring above your head as you watch in amazement from the stands. It is about heavy-metal trucks running three wide into the corners. It is about skilled race drivers who are in it for the action rather than the big bucks.

Nobody understands grassroots racing better than Forest Lucas, the founder of the Lucas Oil Company. Almost single-handedly, he has resurrected short track off road racing in America. Moreover, he is also a sponsor of the Lucas Oil Motocross Series, NHRA, ARCA, NASCAR, Tractor Pulling and the Lucas SuperClean Modified Series.

In difficult economic times, when corporations talk a good game about "giving back," Forest Lucas actually delivers. Kudos to the Lucas Oil Company for resurrecting stadium off road racing in America and for bringing this exciting sport to Arizona. ■

TIM SHARP is former National Marketing Manager for Toyota Racing Development USA, the company which built the engines for Ivan Stewart's and Cal Wells' PPI Toyota race trucks. That is where he gained his affection for stadium off road racing. While principally a road racer and race driving instructor for much of his life, Sharp also raced off road buggies and 4WD machines in California and Baja. He is a regular contributor to *Arizona Driver*, *Grassroots Motorsports* and *Classic Motorsports* magazines. He is a member of the Motor Press Guild (MPG) and the Phoenix Automotive Press Association (PAPA).