

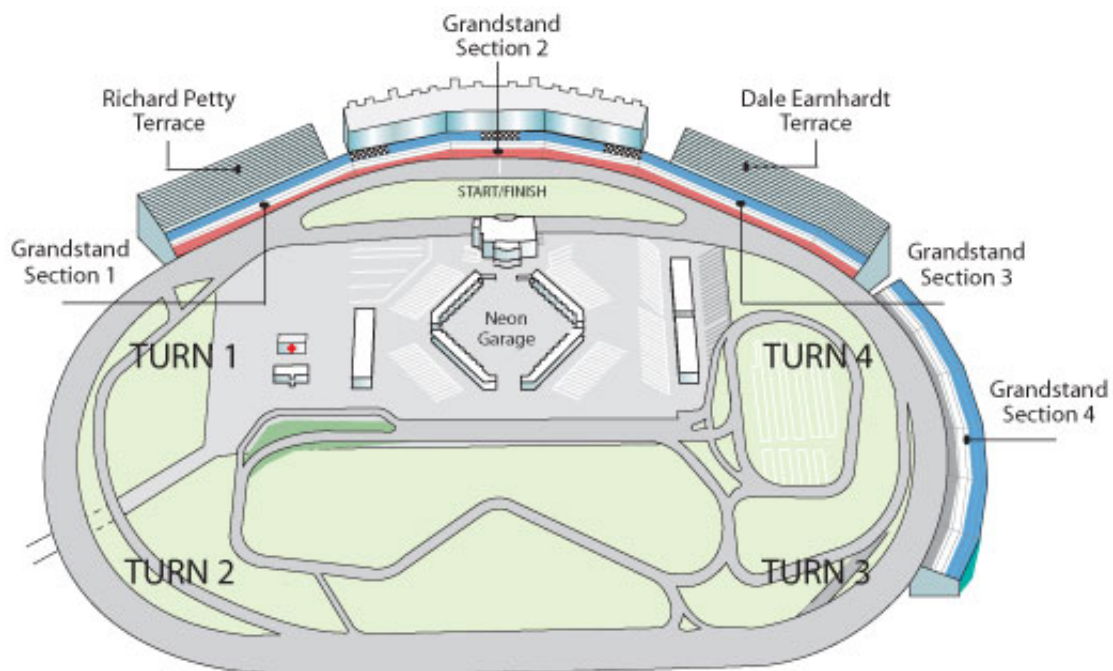
Race Preview: Kobalt Tools 400 at Las Vegas

Want to know who the powerhouse drivers are for the Kobalt Tools 400 at Las Vegas Motor Speedway? Check it out!

Alright, so last week I can happily say that I [totally called it](#) with Harvick winning the race at Phoenix. Okay, maybe not TOTALLY called it, but Harvick was definitely one of my driver's to watch - and so was Dale Jr. Who will Lady Luck visit while we're in Las Vegas?

The Track

Las Vegas Motor Speedway is actually in Las Vegas, Nevada - about 15 miles northeast of the famed Las Vegas Strip. The track opened in September 1996, and the first Sprint (formerly Winston) Cup race was held there in March, 1998. The track was reconfigured in 2006, adding a new progressive banking, with the maximum being 20 degrees in the turns, and 9 degrees on the front and back stretches of the track. Like Phoenix, Las Vegas is also a D-shaped oval, but it's larger, with a total length of 1.5 miles.



The reconfigured Las Vegas Motor Speedway is one of the fastest tracks in NASCAR. Kasey Kahne set the current qualifying record in 2012 with a lap time of 28.353 seconds (190.456 miles per hour).

Drivers to Watch This Weekend

Kyle Busch - #18 M&M's Toyota Camry

[caption id="attachment_837" align="aligncenter" width="648"]



Image credit: www.36races.com[/caption]

Vital Statistics:

- One win, four top fives, five top 10s; two poles
- Average finish of 14.7
- Average Running Position of 10.3, third-best
- Driver Rating of 102.8, fifth-best
- 110 Fastest Laps Run, seventh-most
- 500 Green Flag Passes, eighth-most
- Average Green Flag Speed of 170.333 mph, sixth-fastest
- Series-high 1,904 Laps in the Top 15 (78.5%)

- Series-high 358 Quality Passes

LVMS is also Kyle Busch's home track, and as a kicker, his 2009 win at the track? Won from the pole. The track was also the site of his very first Sprint Cup series start back in 2004.

Carl Edwards - #99 Aflac Ford Fusion

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Image credit: www.star-telegram.com[/caption]

- Two wins, four top fives, five top 10s
- Average finish of 9.7
- Average Running Position of 11.6, fifth-best
- Driver Rating of 98.8, sixth-best
- 155 Fastest Laps Run, fifth-most

- 571 Green Flag Passes, second-most
- Average Green Flag Speed of 170.031 mph, seventh-fastest
- 1,768 Laps in the Top 15 (72.9%), fourth-most
- 344 Quality Passes, second-most

Aside from Kyle Busch above, Carl Edwards is the only other driver to win a race at Las Vegas from the front row (2nd place, in 2008). Additionally, he's one of two drivers to have an average finish in the top 10 at the circuit.

Jimmie Johnson - #48 Lowe's Chevrolet SS

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Image credit: www.naplesnews.com[/caption]

- Four wins, five top fives, seven top 10s
- Average finish of 9.5
- Series-best Average Running Position of 9.6
- Series-best Driver Rating of 112.3

- Series-high 316 Fastest Laps Run
- 499 Green Flag Passes, ninth-most
- Series-best Average Green Flag Speed of 170.622 mph
- 1,825 Laps in the Top 15 (75.3%), third-most
- 311 Quality Passes, fourth-most

I know a lot of people are getting sick of hearing about Jimmie Johnson, but you can't deny the success he's had at this track. Highest average finish, highest driver rating, highest number of fastest laps, highest average speed... the man knows his way around this track, and he's going to be a force to be reckoned with in Vegas.

Matt Kenseth - #20 Dollar General Toyota Camry

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Image credit: www.pyradmidracing.com[/caption]

- Three wins, six top fives, seven top 10s; one pole
- Average finish of 11.6
- Average Running Position of 14.4, 10th-best
- Driver Rating of 98.7, seventh-best
- 193 Fastest Laps Run, second-most
- Average Green Flag Speed of 170.475 mph, second-fastest
- 1,551 Laps in the Top 15 (64.0%), ninth-most
- 253 Quality Passes, ninth-most

Aside from Johnson, nobody knows their way around Las Vegas better than Kenseth. As a testament to this fact, you see that image above? That's his car winning this very same race one year ago. Look for him to do everything in his power to make 2014 a repeat performance.

Las Vegas Motor Speedway Trivia

- Kyle Busch is the youngest driver to have ever won a race here (2009 - 23 years, 9 months, 27 days)
- Sterling Marlin is the oldest driver to win at Las Vegas (2002 - 44 years, 7 months, 32 days).
- The furthest back in the field a race winner has ever started? 25th. The driver? Matt Kenseth - 2004.
- Only three of 16 races (18.7%) have been won from a top-5 starting spot.
- The narrowest margin of victory in NASCAR history was reported at LVMS when Jimmie Johnson won the 2006 race by just 0.0045 second.

My Wild Card Pick

Dale Earnhardt, Jr. - #88 Mountain Dew Kickstart Chevrolet SS



- Two top fives, seven top 10s
- Average finish of 15.6
- Average Running Position of 14.9, 12th-best
- Driver Rating of 88.2, ninth-best
- 90 Fastest Laps Run, eighth-most
- 532 Green Flag Passes, fifth-most
- Average Green Flag Speed of 169.982 mph, eighth-fastest
- 1,590 Laps in the Top 15 (65.6%), eighth-most
- 284 Quality Passes, sixth-most

He's never won here at Vegas, but I don't think there's a single person in the sport who can deny the sheer momentum that Dale Jr. is carrying into this race. I think that, for the second week in a row, he's going to be my wild card pick. Will Junior Nation have something else to celebrate this week?