

## **Dougie & Rickie's Dickies 500**

I had a Myracetravel.com ticket package fall into my lap thanks to a co-worker Jennifer Lee. This \$1400 package for 2 included 3 nights at the Hilton DFW Lakes Executive Conference Centre and grandstand tickets to the O'Reilly 200 and Dickies 500 NASCAR races at Texas Motor Speedway. She had planned to go with her boyfriend, but several things went awry and they were unable to, leaving her little time to sell the package on EBAY. So she was offering them up to anyone for free! I heard about this from another work pal Troy who contacted me. It was perfect timing for me because I wanted to take a trip and had never seen a NASCAR race so I jumped at the opportunity. My co-worker Doug was all up for it after others failed to join me, so we bought a pair of flight tickets and started packing.

We elected to go a day early since the cheaper flights would have gotten us there late Friday night so we took an AA flight early Thursday morning to Dallas Fort Worth airport.



The weather was sunny and warm when we arrived and shuttled to our Hotel in nearby Grapevine Texas.



Shortly after checking in we went to the mall next door to buy a few things, then later spent the afternoon out on one of the Hotel patios having beverages and listening to tunes. I had a nap, and later we went out for dinner. It was my call to go to a Brazilian restaurant some 7 miles away. The food was awesome, but it was a \$40 cab ride and \$137 dinner bill plus tip - ouch. We needed to do better than that.

The next day we decided to rent a car to afford us some freedom. So after another trip to the mall to get a couple more things, and a meal and milkshake spill at the Steak and Shake, we picked up a Ford Focus at the Budget RAC nearby and headed down to Dallas for some sight seeing - enjoying the stunningly beautiful weather. I wanted to check out Dealey Plaza where JFK was shot.

As soon as we drove under the bridge and into the area I was amazed to so recognize a place I had never been to before. We parked the car and walked around to take pictures and explore the area.



I found it quite moving and melancholy to be in this sacred and unsacred place. It was an immense feeling to be there. A group is always gathered at the pergola next to the famous grassy knoll.



A local who was there on that day in 1963 named Michael Brownlow shared some very candid thoughts with me. He carried a tattered picture of him standing with his grandmother that day as Kennedy drove by. Also there was Robert Groden, a JFK assassination expert and contributor to the Oliver Stone film. He was hawking books and DVDs and was amazing to speak with.



So many people come to this place to try and understand what happened and maybe to find closure they will likely never get, in fact, a mounted officer told me there are people there 24-7. There is the sixth floor museum in the old Texas Book Depository building which we heard was far from compelling so we passed on it. You can't even go into that room where Lee Harvey was to have shot from. But, in the image below, you'll see a window open slightly where there's a webcam set up. <http://www.earthcam.com/jfk/>



We then walked about a little more looking for shops and such, but there's not much to see in downtown Dallas, at least not what we could see, but we found a nice little bar and had a beer.



On the way back we rolled into the little town of Grapevine. This is a really pretty little town. They have a vintage train ride that goes down to Fort Worth, definitely a nice tourist excursion that we didn't have time for. At a place next door to the museum and Grapevine Station, I had 12 oysters for a buck a shuck, big meaty SOBs. But since Doug can't eat fish, we were directed to a nice BBQ place up the street, Bartley's. Now there was some really tasty southern smoky food.

When we got back to the hotel things were revving up as race fans were arriving to check in with the tour captain Jeff. He gave us our goody bag (headache powder, earplugs, Tums, etc) and the itinerary for the weekend. Then it was off to Bonnie & Clyde's hotel lounge to hang out with other race fans. There were even a couple fellows who came from Austria for the race.

Saturday morning, we passed on the early group bus departure and decided to take our time and drive to the track instead. The drive there was easy with little bad traffic, and man that Speedway is HUGE with yet a short track next to it. We found our way into the parking area on the north side and were able to drive up and park virtually right at our entrance gate. There wasn't even a parking charge! After a trip down through the merch isles, we made our way to our seats for the Nationwide race. Kyle Busch won it in fine form. Here's his smoke show.



Our seats were right across from his pit stall too. That was pretty cool to be at, and it's not often we as Canadians see an air force flyby for a support race too. The sound of the cars was wonderful, but you were more comfortable with ear protection. Very handily, Doug had two sets of track radio headphones he bought at the near deafening Bristol event this year, and those worked great.

I was also able to see my first NASCAR wreck in person too, as Joey Logano put the chrome horn under Morgan Shepard's # 89 car as he passed us. I spotted it and watched as they went screaming past the start nose to tail until Morgan's car gave in to the push and banged the outside wall. Yeahaw – wild stuff.

After the race ended, at about 3pm, we decided to drive down to Fort Worth and check it out. We followed the signs to the Historic Stockyards. This is a must see for tourists interested in historic Texas. It's a little cheesy, and overpriced (\$1500 cowboy boots!), but they had a cattle drive that they walk down the main drag every half hour which is somewhat anti climactic, but fun none-the-less.



The old station was a souvenir mall, that receives the excursion train from Grapevine. The streets at Exchange St and Main were lined with old time buildings and saloons and shops.



We were directed that the best steaks in town were at the Cattlemen's Restaurant. So we popped in and sat down then our eyes popped out when we looked at the prices on the menu, but what a selection of cuts of beef - at least 15 steak entrees to choose from ranging from 12.99 to \$60. But you could have a sirloin for under 20. Sadly, just as my steak arrived my appetite went away in a curious moment of ill feeling, I have no idea

where it came from – just one of those things. So I had to doggie bag my dinner. But the place is busy and really honest, simple, rugged and old timey.



The waitress informed me there were several NASCAR drivers there the night before.

They have a really neat parking payment system in the lots down there. You pull into the parking lot, with numbered spaces. Then you walk up to the payment box that has all these tiny numbered slots. You simply fold your money and put it in the corresponding slot, and that's it! I guess they check the box every hour or so to see if your honest. The Stockyards district would also be a great place to visit at night as it seemed to have a lot of live music venues, but we had a really early start the next day so we split just after sun-down.

We took a drive from there through downtown Fort Worth, and there seemed to be quite a lot of nice neonie places to visit. I got us a little cocked up for the drive back to the hotel, but we made it OK.

Getting back to the hotel was fun as there were quite a number of people hanging out in the lobby and the lounge. There was a young girl's dance competition going on that weekend and each morning when I went down for a coffee there were all these cute little sparkly girls with their tap shoes running around. But Saturday night was a gathering of the Barbershop Harmony Society. Too funny. Groups of gentlemen all over the place singing in barbershop harmony, harmless nerdy folks for the most part. This was my fun party night as I had many drinks, in turn hanging out with singers, race fans, and dancing girl moms.

I had another great sleep that night. Those beds are so comfortable. We were up and ready for our bus to the Speedway which left at 9:00am. It's really the only smart way to go if you are not already at the track camping. The traffic for race day was really heavy as expected, but yet I think it only took us a little over an hour to get into the Speedway.

Unfortunately, we didn't have the luxury of a short walk this day – but no matter. Doug carried the gear and I carried the beer as we made our way to our gate. It's still not as far as you have to walk to get into Isle Notre Dame for the F1 race. That walk is always epic. We hunted through more of the race vendors, but there wasn't anything that interested me. They really only have race team or speedway merchandise, not much else. But they do have a LOT of food with fat and salt. So much so, Tums seem to be an equal part of the diet to food! We climbed up to our seats, which were now farther east of the day before, half way between turn 4 and S/F. Also, this was the first time the sun had not poked out. I left Doug in capable charge of the beer as I went for a walkabout. I came out in time just to see the SPEED crew come out and begin their Raceday Live program. That was kinda neat. Kenny Wallace sure knows how to get the crowd worked up before they go to air. I'm sure I was likely on camera at some moment – whoopee. I went on looking for other interesting stuff, but there wasn't much that impressed me. The usual simulators, and sponsors showcasing their products. Great for the youngsters and real NASCAR fans. I just kept quiet and walked around. I really felt out of my element, and didn't see many people that I would like to meet. Some of them were right snakey looking. Maybe it was just my frame of mind, but there also seemed to be a lack of excitement in people's faces. I wondered if it had something to do with the shootings that happened at FT Hood three days before? Even people that were doing hospitality work seemed really just jaded half the time. But, on the bright side, ZZ Top was going to do a concert at 12:30 on the front straight, so I headed back to the stands with a tram, which was really handy.

After checking in with Doug, I moved over to the middle section to be in front for ZZ. A watched them for about a song until I got evicted from my seats. The sound was terrible, but the guys still look so damn cool.



They played a solid one hour too.

Now it was time for the pre race stuff.

And wow, after seeing a big ass bomber fly by low and slow, I thought that was it. But shortly following that, a twin rotor military transport helicopter flew in over our heads and across the front stretch and set itself down on the grass at pit out. I thought Elvis or Dale Sr. would climb out, but the rear cargo door opened and out rolled the Camaro Pace Car. Too cool, and sadly, only in America.

Finally it was race time.



The excitement sure does build as you see all these famous colours & numbers drive by. Then the flag waves and they lumber and groan up to speed. The end of the first lap is raucous. But the next time by they are REALLY roaring. But that wasn't to last too long, because just as I predicted, Jimmy Johnson the points leader crashed out to everyone's wild cheering in amazement, joy, or disappointment. Now it would be an interesting race. I don't need to go into the race details, but my first impression of this Sprint Cup stuff? It's really cool to see live. Its beautiful loud, and just right. Here the cars and engines really get to stretch their legs. And the shimmering echo of them through the stands is really special, it's an aural delight that I can't quite get on my simple stereo TV at home. It is also interesting to see all the different lines the various cars take.



The #7 Menards car was up against the fence the whole way. I think in the same way that a night at Flamboro blew me away when I was very young, I kinda got that same feeling again at this amped up race venue. I'm not sure it will grab my heart like sports car racing does, but it's really good entertainment, and completely valid racing.

There, I said it.





With a nail biting fuel gage finish, Dougies #2 favourite driver, #2 Kurt Busch, took the win and celebrated with a backwards lap around the track. Not bad.

I was a little sad it was over, I was just getting into it with the sun going down and the lights up – oh well, I guess I'll have to go back to Sebring sometime.

We slogged it back down to the bus, and relaxed with a movie as we crawled through traffic back to the hotel.

After a little rest back in the room to watch SPEED report & Wind Tunnel I decided to have that leftover steak from the night before. But due to health regulations, the kitchen couldn't heat it up for me. So I pondered how to do it with a couple of gents in the elevator. One said, "well you know, there is an iron in your room". YES! I started giggling manically as I carried the beef back to my room. I opened the Styrofoam container, grabbed the clothes iron from the closet, turned it on and rested it on the steak and gave it a wool setting. It hissed and sizzled as I still was giggling, happily eating the mash potatoes cold. After a press to the other side, it juiced up really nice, and I can finally say that the Cattlemen's really makes a damn fine pepper sirloin. Yuuuuuum yum.

Satisfied with that, I cruised down to the lounge to debrief the days with Doug and Jeff, a dope smokin snowboardin SPEED cameraman from Colorado who joined us.

The next day was checkout time, but we had the luxury of a late flight home so we had time for another outing. Doug wanted a pair of cowboy boots, so we headed down to Arlington. There was a store called Cavenders that have all the western wear you could dream of. Doug picked up a nice pair of booties for \$100 - great deal. Then we headed just down Division Road to visit the new Cowboys stadium.

<http://stadium.dallascowboys.com/>

Wow, what size and opulence. The place is ginormous. The tour costs \$17, but you can't bring a video camera into the place. NFL policy, they hold ALL the rights baby.



I don't have the space here to show all my pictures, but there's plenty to see about it at their website and additional interesting facts at

[http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Cowboys\\_Stadium](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Cowboys_Stadium)

This picture I stole from the internet shows it best.





Aside from a convertible roof, it has the world's largest HD TV screen, actually two, if you remember that it can be viewed from both sides. And, since people don't like to be confused, you see the camera shots taken from your side of the screen. I think the tour guide said they have like 50 permanent HD cameras set up for the field. It's just astounding. The luxury of some of the club suites is stunning. Not for the design, which you could easily find in night clubs, but for the price! According to our guide, The one we checked out with leather recliners only costs an arm to rent, compared to others that cost arm leg and kidney.

After that we went to another smoke shack called the Bodacious Bar-B-Q. And again delicious home smokey beef & ribs. Yum again.



So now time was just about up. Fearing impending traffic chaos, we headed off to the airport early. We dropped off the car and shuttled over to our terminal and killed time in the hotel lounge as we waited for our flight. Hotel? Uh, yes. There's a Hyatt right at the terminal. You literally take the elevator down to the terminal and walk 50 ft in to check in for your flight!

Texas, what a place.

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