

Behind the wheel

All roads lead to Daytona, but the NASCAR season sets up a windy track through 35 races

The 2022 NASCAR season kicked off with a bang in February when rookie driver Austin Cindric placed first in the Daytona 500, NASCAR's first points race of the year. Following the opening event at LA Coliseum, the favourites going into the race were Kyle Larson, Chase Elliott and Kyle Busch, who all ended up in wrecks. With such an explosive start as this, NASCAR's 2022 season promises ups and downs, twists and turns for those who tune in, and Upward Curve has all the need-to-know details for what not to miss.

This year, NASCAR has finally debuted their new generation car, the Technique Inc. spec

chassis with sequential manual transmission, independent rear suspension, a four inch spoiler, 670 horse powers, and a larger 18 inch aluminium wheel that uses a centre-locking lug nut. Put off for the pandemic, the debut of this exciting new model has been anticipated for over a year now and is an exciting addition to the NASCAR season this year.

While the Daytona 500 is always in the headlights, it is but the first of over 35 races in

Below: The Monster Energy NASCAR Cup Series teams take to the track for the Federated Auto Parts 400 at Richmond Raceway in Virginia

the season, and nobody should be counted out. Joining Austin Cindric, who's driving for Team Penske, in the rookie class for 2022 are Todd Gilliland for Front Row Motorsports and Harrison Burton for Wood Brothers. It's Aric Almirola's last season driving for Stewart-Haas Racing, which makes his fifth place in the Daytona 500 an exciting season-opener.

With Kyle Larson (driving no. 5 Chevrolet for Hendricks Motorsports) being the reigning champ from the 2021 season, his place as the top favourite makes sense. With 16 wins in his eight seasons of competing, he's looking for ways to raise

those stats. His fellow Hendricks teammate Chase Elliott also comes in as a favourite, driving no. 9 Chevrolet, with six seasons under his belt and 13 wins, and the title championship of 2021. Joe Gibbs Racing dominates the list of top five favourites with Denny Hamlin driving no. 11 Toyota, Martin Truex Jr driving no. 19 Toyota, and Kyle Busch driving no. 8 Toyota as the driver with the most wins, a record 59 over 17 active seasons. Keep an eye on Michael McDowell, as the 2021 Daytona 500 champion, while racers Ryan Blaney, Joey Logano, Kevin Harvick, Alex Bowman, and William Byron (who also wrecked in the Daytona race) are also ones to watch.

Though the Daytona 500 is perhaps one of the most anticipated races of the year, it is only the start of an exciting season. With only one weekend off, the season from February through November is packed with race after race and very little ▶





time to breathe in between. With the three-race West Coast Swing following Daytona, it's the Auto Club Speedway, the Las Vegas Motor Speedway, and lastly, the Phoenix Raceway where these drivers will be pitted against one another through the first half of March.

The Circuit of the Americas in Austin, TX starts on March 27, with Chase Elliott defending his title as the previous winner of the circuit. In April, fans will get to see Joey Logano of Joe Gibbs Racing defend his title as the Bristol Dirt Race champion, one of the only dirt races in the season. Following on in May is the All-Star Race back at the Daytona track, where the drivers will go head to head once again.

The Nashville Superspeedway on June 26 kicks off a 10 race stretch to end the regular

season, including the final three road courses. Road America, Indianapolis Motor Speedway and Watkins Glen International host the drivers all through July and August, before they face off at the Daytona International Speedway one final time on August 27.

The Darlington Raceway event on September 4 starts the rounds of 16 and hosts the

rounds of 12 and 8, which all finish up on October 30 before the final championship race. The Championship 4, held at the Phoenix Raceway this year, will be November 4, and however the season pans out, this race can't be missed.

While it's a long season full of many tortuous roads, this NASCAR season is shaping up to

be an exciting, once-in-a-lifetime event. With Hendricks Motorsports looking to bring home a third consecutive championship and Busch racing on the heels of Elliott and Larson, the 2022 season promises a dramatic competition for every fan, cheering on the sidelines.

nascar.com ■

Above: Iowa 250 at the Iowa Speedway in Newton Right: Kyle Larson signs autographs before the 2021 NASCAR Pocono Organics CBD 325

