

# Sports & Leisure

## Darlington Raceway

In the fall of 1949, when a crisp breeze toyed with the loose soil of an old cotton field on the westside of rural Darlington, South Carolina, Harold Brasington saw more than just dirt dancing around that patch of land. He saw the future. He saw stock cars.

Brasington, a local businessman, had a lofty vision that most of his peers dismissed as utterly ridiculous. His friends laughed at him when he returned home from the 1933 Indianapolis 500 and mentioned the idea of little ol' Darlington having a paved superspeedway, a place to hold big-time stock car events. They nearly committed him when he told them that he was going to build it. Nevertheless, believing that Bill France's fledgling NASCAR just might catch on, Brasington set out in the fall of 1949 on a project known locally as "Harold's Folly" to shape a 1-1/4 mile speedway on land that had once produced peanuts and cotton.

To the chagrin of family and friends, Brasington and his crew toiled for a year, Brasington himself often at the controls of bulldozers and grading equipment. Brasington's plan called for a true oval, but the racetrack's design had to be changed in order to satisfy Sherman Ramsey, the landowner, who did not want his nearby minnow pond disturbed. The west end of the track (Turns 3 and 4) was narrowed to accommodate the fishing hole, creating Darlington's distinctive egg-shaped design.

The first race was scheduled for Labor Day 1950, and when the day finally came the stands overflowed. Brasington expected no more than 10,000 fans, but the crowd of over 25,000 shocked him. Fans practically stood on top of each other and they scaled the fence just for a glimpse of the action.

Californian Johnny Mantz drove to victory that day in the first Southern 500®, which took over 6 hours to complete but set a precedent for a sport that would grow to be one of the largest spectator sports in the country. Many of the teams running in the Southern 500® that day ran out of tires and began buying tires from fans in the infield so they could finish the race. Mantz started dead last in the field of 75 racers, many of whom had never raced on asphalt, but roared to the checkered flag averaging a blistering 76 mph. Mantz showed the first use of a "tire strategy" by using truck tires because he knew car tires of the day would not last long enough to win the race. Over the next sixty years, names like Baker, Flock, Thomas, Pearson, Yarborough, Petty, and Earnhardt became commonplace in victory lane.

Sixty years later the Darlington Raceway is still known as the track "Too Tough to Tame."

It is still remembered as the original superspeedway and as one of the pillars of the NASCAR establishment. There is no other sporting facility in the world more steeped in history and tradition than Darlington Raceway, which has aged gracefully over the years but retained its feisty charm.

Nobody loves the feisty track more than the drivers. "You never forget your first love," said seven-time NASCAR Sprint Cup Series Champion Dale Earnhardt, "whether it's a high school sweetheart, a faithful old hunting dog, or a fickle race track in South Carolina with a contrary disposition. And, if you happen to be a race car driver there's no victory so sweet, so memorable, as whipping Darlington Raceway."

The Darlington Raceway of the 21st century remains true to Harold Brasington's ideas of what NASCAR racing should be about - fast, intense action for the fans and dedicated drivers loyal to the sport that America has come to crave.

The track "Too Tough to Tame" has come a long way since Harold Brasington graded the first turn. It continues to keep pace with the booming NASCAR world of the new century while standing as a monument to the drivers and loyal fans who sowed the seeds of stock car racing sixty years ago. And with its dedication to fans and its continuing physical enhancements, Darlington Raceway drives wide open toward the fulfillment of its ultimate goal – to be the best facility in motorsports.



*"Track Too Tough To Tame"..... In Pictures*





## Williamson Park Quick Facts

- Located just a few blocks from Historic Downtown Darlington.
- Cypress/Tupelo Swamp and other forested natural communities.
- Floodplain of Swift Creek and associated wetlands.
- Over 300 plant and animal species.
- Newly renovated boardwalks and trails.
- Easily accessible wildlife viewing areas.
- 60 acres of fun and learning!





The 18-hole Beaver Creek Golf Club in Darlington, SC is a public golf course that opened in 1968. Beaver Creek Golf Club measures 6400 yards from the longest tees and has a slope rating of 117 and a 70.1 USGA rating. The course features 4 sets of tees for different skill levels.

## Darlington Country Club

The Darlington Country Club in Darlington, South Carolina is a full service facility. The club provides a wonderful area for recreation, sports, and dining for many area families and businesses. There is a beautiful 18-hole golf course, great clubhouse for dining, and bar facilities. This golf course reflects the Southern style and charm of the community. It offers one of the most challenging and scenic layouts around. It also has a knowledgeable and experienced PGA Professional staff that will gladly take care of your needs.

The club also offers four tennis courts, (two hard courts and two clay) adjacent to the clubhouse and equipped with lights for night play. Our swimming pool and baby pool provide a safe and pleasant environment for our families each summer.

Throughout the year, there are a number of social events for all ages as well as clinics in golf, tennis, and swimming for juniors and ladies. The golf professionals, tennis coordinator and swimming instructor are also available for private lessons.

