

## Sonoma Raceway

Sonoma Raceway, like Laguna Seca, allows you to walk in the shadows of current and past heroes like Franchitti, Andretti, Jones, Gurney and many more. Unlike Laguna, Sonoma Raceway is still very similar to what it was when it opened in late 1968.

Sonoma Raceway keeps a driver very busy, in part because it doesn't have much of a straightaway. Other than the exit from the Carousel to Turn 7, it seems that you are always turning the wheel. The first half of the course is like a gymnast's compulsories—the wheel-lifting Turn 2, the top of the hill, blind Turn 3A, the off camber Turn 4 and the centrifuge-like Carousel. All of the corner types are represented. After Turn 7 you experience a completely different side of Sonoma. To again borrow from the gymnast metaphor, this is the free-style portion of the program. Increasingly fast esses that dump you into a gentle Turn 9—all in preparation for a semi-blind, razor's edge fast Turn 10—a corner you do not want to get wrong.

So that's Sonoma, a tale of two racetrack halves—you get rabbit punched in the first half and roundhouse punched in the second. It's a treat!

**Turn 1** is a gentle left-hander that takes you up the hill. Some take a conventional apex with an emphasis on staying to the inside to get a good wide approach to Turn 2. Others go deep into the turn, staying on the outside for a longer period and then cutting back up the hill to Turn 2. Both techniques deliver you to the same point, so it's your choice.

**Turn 2** is a fun, medium speed turn that peaks and goes slightly off camber after the exit. The opportunity (if one can call it that) for coming in too hot and then spinning off is relatively high. Braking can be a little later than usual because the incline is helping you, but be warned that the road's bumpiness can upset the car's balance so much that the gain in entry speed is quickly negated by the car's inability to handle the bumps.

**Turn 3** is a left-hand lead-in to 3A at the top of the hill. You bottom out in 3 and go charging up the hill to the blind, over-the-top 3A. Speed is not critical in 3, but the entry to 3A is.

**Turn 3A** is fun if you pick the correct apex, get your wheels straight and are able to power through it. If you miss the apex, get ready for a Nelson Phillippe moment that leaves you sitting in the middle of the track at exit of the turn at a very inopportune time. Will Power came upon Phillippe without warning and the results were not good.

**Turn 4** is another right-hander that is more downhill than you imagine, though you'll find out soon enough when you hit the brakes. Additionally, it's off-camber and capable of either spitting you off the outside, or making you perform a tight pirouette to the inside. Stay tight and be circumspect with the gas pedal until you know you have enough track available.

**Turn 5** is a gentle, right-hand sweeper that is not an issue for all but the fastest cars. However, take care to use it to position yourself for turn 6.

**Turn 6** is The Carousel, a constant radius, off camber, bumpy test of car and driver. You're in the turn for a long time, plus it dumps you onto the only real straightway on the track, so it's crucial to getting a good lap time. The typical entry is in the middle of the road and you move slowly to the left to make a late apex at the bottom of the hill about two-thirds of the way around. Get on the gas at the right time and you quickly pick up speed on the straight. Get it wrong and either you back off at the exit, thereby killing you're straightway speed, or you spin.

**Turn 7** is a double apex turn that, if you get the first half right, you can get on the gas prior to the second half and shoot down the esses. Be aware of the road on entry. The approach is uphill, but the road goes flat in the braking zone, so what you perceive as a late-braking opportunity can disappear in a haze of tire smoke. In the wet, puddles form in the braking zone on the far left side of the track.

**Turns 8 & 8A** are the esses. Straighten them as best you can and whatever you do, don't go curb crawling.

**Turn 9** is a gentle left-hander that leads into the right hand Turn 10.

**Turn 10** is partially blind and extremely fast. Things can go wrong here very quickly. Enter far to the left and a late apex is suggested until you feel comfortable, If the track is wet, approach with caution.

**Turn 11** is a right-hander with two racing line options. If you're passing a car, you can commit early to the inside, next to the tires and ride it out. Speed along the pit straight will suffer a little. If you're going for a good lap time, approach from the outside, apex about two-thirds of the way around and get on the gas as early as possible. Bear in mind that the outside wall does pinch you a little. Be forewarned.