

IndyCar Media Conference

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Danica Patrick

Press Conference



THE MODERATOR: We are joined now by Danica Patrick, driver of the No. 13 Go Daddy Chevrolet for Ed Carpenter Racing.

Danica, it's been a busy past couple of days for you here at Indianapolis Motor Speedway, watching some of your teammates yesterday, also getting back in a car for the first time in quite a while today.

When you first walked into the Indianapolis Motor Speedway today, knowing that you were about to get back in an IndyCar, what was going through your mind? What was the excitement level?

DANICA PATRICK: Low. I just kind of wanted to get today over with, not in a negative sense, but just that it's been seven years since I drove an IndyCar here. Yeah, it's been a long time.

So I just, you know, wanted to get through today, get more comfortable, be able to get on with the job. There's been a lot of anticipation on this day for me, not only the years after I left and thinking about it, because I really did try to do it the second year I'd been gone, until two managers said that people questioned my commitment in it in NASCAR, so I didn't do it. I really did believe that I was never going to do it again. After that point in time, I was, like, the further I get away from it, the more I don't want to do it.

But there was no wavering on the decision last year to do it. Once I thought of it, I was, like, Yes, yes, that's what I'm going to do. So it's been since fall of last year thinking about, What the hell is it going to feel like? So now I know.

THE MODERATOR: Now those questions have been pretty much answered. Take us through your laps, how they felt to you, how you built up to getting through your refresher program today.

DANICA PATRICK: Well, I mean, we started off with an install check. It's a brand-new car, so there was a water temperature issue. Took it back to the garage. There's only three hours today, so you burn an hour pretty quickly getting out there and getting back in, getting back out to pit lane again.

Then it was out one time, coming in just to make sure everything was okay. Then the next run was just too slow. It wasn't above 210. The car, it just felt very hard

to drive. The weight of the wheel was very heavy for me. So I don't know what the heck I've been doing because I feel a lot stronger than when I was here before. You have to see the videos, I crushed it like crazy. I can pick some weight up. But I did not feel very strong out there.

My old engineer Matt ran me today. He made it easier to drive. It's still not by any means where I want it, but it was enough that we could complete today. With 30 minutes to go and five laps of the second phase and 15 laps of the third phase together, I'm like, I don't know if I'm going to get through this today.

But I stayed out there and I did all those 20 laps to complete it all. It felt fine. Actually felt fairly comfortable at that point in time for the level of discomfort with the way the wheel felt, things like that, and with the amount of front aero we took out of it to lighten the wheel up for me.

Here we go, my old words, a little bit of understeer out there. I was going to say 'tight' but I corrected myself. It was definitely a little too much understeer to go really, really fast. But it was enough to complete the day and move on for tomorrow.

I felt like I was able to feel the grip limit of the car, especially the front, of course, because took so much front aero out. I was really able to feel the front sliding pretty well, even with the way it felt. That's good for me. Tomorrow it will feel even more comfortable.

But I've been waiting to get this day over with for a long time. I say that with love. I hope there's some understanding for the words that I'm using. I want to get through that so I can get to the fun part, which is really running, making changes, making it faster, feeling really comfortable. It was just a day of anticipation, a level of not knowing.

THE MODERATOR: I'm sure you've been working with all of your team, all of your crew at Ed Carpenter Racing over the past few months. What has that team chemistry been like, ultimately finally getting in that setting with them, the work environment at the track?

DANICA PATRICK: It's been great, really great. I mean, shoot, we even worked together on working out the deal. I don't think I've ever done that before. He's been really nice and easy to work with, very helpful. So it was really cool of him to be around all day today,

be there for the word of reason from time to time, like telling me, You're going to have to do all 20 laps now. But that was all right. I just needed to get through it.

He's been super helpful. Everybody at the team has been helpful. I've been to the shop quite a few times to get the seat made, get comfortable. Of course, there's still some more changes in that department for how comfortable I feel with all those things, the way that the seat is cut out, my helmet, the padding and everything. But I expected that to happen.

Everybody has been really cool. Everybody has been super easy to work with. I wanted a fun May. I'm glad that they are fun and easy to work with. I think that's also part of the deal coming together with them, is that it was very easy. I think that's a good sign of a good group.

THE MODERATOR: We'll go ahead and open it up for questions.

Q. You've addressed this before, but why was it so important to you to come back and do this one last time?

DANICA PATRICK: Well, last year was just kind of an odd year. With having a sponsor leave, which is a scenario I had never been in before, with not really feeling as much hope as I wanted racing. That was kind of a frustrating position to be in. And feeling kind of ready to move on but not in the way of being done at Homestead. It was, like, there's a better way to do this. There's a better way to honor the run in my career as well as, you know, the fans, and especially can't think of a better place to end than here where it all began.

I said to everyone on pit lane, We need a before and after of my 2005 pit road gaggle of photographers, and 2018, because it felt similar. It was really a cool feeling. So just kind of really full circle.

Then, of course, with Go Daddy on the car to top it off, of all my sponsors, they've been by far the most known with me, the best fit overall. So it's just a good story.

Q. After seven years out of the car, I think the most impressive thing was seeing you leaving the pits for the first time, working with the hand clutch, nice big burnout. Ed Carpenter said your goal was not to stall. Talk about reacclimating with this car?

DANICA PATRICK: That's nice. You didn't see me come into the pits the second time, where I was like, Shoot, where is neutral? It's definitely different without a clutch pedal. Taking off is easy. It's the coming in. It's like, Okay, clutch, first gear, then neutral, down a gear. You just got to get in rhythm.

I definitely feel still overwhelmed enough with everything going on, just driving, the helmet moving, all kinds of things going on. I'm not looking in my mirrors, checking my dash all the time, moving buttons around.

Like I'm not there yet. I did move the front bar around a little bit when I was out there. I did do a couple other little things. Just start simple.

I did feel a lot better at the end of the day. We had the debrief, the whole team, then Ed and I went to the garage, grabbed my steering wheel. He was kind enough to take the time to show me literally how to get it in neutral. I mean, just baby steps, right? Baby stepping into Wednesday.

Q. 2005, I was in the pits. Scott basically said you took to this place like a duck takes to water. There was a certain rhythm even then. What is it about this place, for want of another word, that has been a comfortable feel for you?

DANICA PATRICK: I really only come up with two things. I thought about it when I was out there. There were times where I was driving off the belief that everything was so locked down for me that nothing can really go wrong with the back of the car, just drive through it. I thought to myself, I feel like I've built my career on trusting my ass. I think that's very important here at Indy, is to not drive beyond what you feel is possible with the car because it will bite you. Your gut is usually right. The feel of your butt is right.

The other thing is just the level of respect for the facility itself, kind of feeling like it's got its own heartbeat, just got to respect it.

Q. Did this feel similar to 2005?

DANICA PATRICK: No, that felt a lot easier. That felt way easier. I think I breezed through the rookie orientation of doing like 226 on the first day. At least that's what it was in my memory.

No, that did feel a lot easier. But I had also been in the car for four races. So, you know, I mean, I sat on the front row at Motegi the race before it, finished fourth. I mean, I had already been up to speed and comfortable. I wasn't dealing with things like my headrest, my helmet, things like that. I wasn't dealing with that. I wasn't dealing with the weight of the steering wheel and how that felt for me. I was comfortable.

Hopefully once we get all those things comfortable, then more energy and attention will be put forth through the car to how it feels and we go faster.

Q. There's some drivers that are still in the series that were here when you raced originally, Scott Dixon, Tony Kanaan, Helio Castroneves. How comfortable are you to be able to get back on the track? How much does it feel like a little bit of a friendly reunion to be back and racing against those guys?

DANICA PATRICK: I mean, it feels good to see them, say hi, give them (indiscernible). There's been a lot of familiar faces I'm happy to see, for sure. But there's

also been a lot of unfamiliar faces, especially drivers that I don't know, young drivers.

I said in the drivers meeting we had at the beginning of the day yesterday, I sat there, and of course it wasn't till one minute before that the front row filled in with all the people I knew. I guess I was like, Oh, I guess I did the rookie thing and showed up really early. Everybody shut up. Good, I do know some people here.

Q. From a competitive standpoint, it's the first year with this aero package. Do you feel the gap isn't as much against Scott Dixon and all that as it could have been?

DANICA PATRICK: Can't tell you that yet. Don't know. Few of us out there today kind of getting through the simple stuff. I'll let you know after tomorrow or at the end of the month.

Q. Did it feel like riding a bike, like you had hoped?

DANICA PATRICK: God, no. Riding a bike is much easier than that.

Q. Where do you want to be after tomorrow?

DANICA PATRICK: Just flat out and comfortable, making changes, feeling the changes. I think that once I'm flat out the whole way around, I'm feeling comfortable, feeling the changes, you can really work from there.

Definitely for me I forget that it's not really Indy yet, it's just a test, which was supposed to happen a month ago. Of course, shoot, there's still snow on the ground some places, even today. But it was obviously terrible weather so we didn't run a month ago. But this is just a test. We'll be back again in two weeks, and that's when it really starts. There's many days before qualifying.

I feel like tomorrow just a smooth day where I get flat out and feel the changes, have good information leading into two weeks from now where we really are going to have to get down to business.

THE MODERATOR: Danica, thank you very much.

DANICA PATRICK: Thanks, guys.