



## Introduction

### *Racing Isn't Just About Speed*

**T**he stock car racing world is about much more than speed.

When I started researching this book, I knew little about the NASCAR nation. But after spending six months immersed in the NASCAR NEXTEL Cup Series, I learned my way around the sport. I experienced the unique atmosphere of the preeminent tracks—the grandeur of Daytona International Speedway in Florida, the history of Talladega Superspeedway in Alabama, the hominess of Pocono Raceway in Pennsylvania, the heat of California Speedway in Fontana. I also came to understand just how “big time” the sport is.

I had photographed plenty of other prime-time sporting events—the NBA Finals, the World Series, Super Bowls, and college bowl games—but at those games, I felt I was firmly rooted on the sidelines, looking in at the action. At a NASCAR race, I felt like I was inside the sport, especially at Talladega where I stayed in the infield all weekend. No matter where I was on the track, I felt immediately enveloped in the action, experiencing the cars’ incredible speed, smelling the burning tires, hearing the deafening rumble of the motors.

In the hierarchy of the sport, the drivers are the superstars. They are at the pinnacle of what they do—negotiating turns fender-to-fender at 190 miles per hour, making split-second decisions that could cause a serious wreck or lead them to glory in Victory Lane. They receive the lion’s share of the media and publicity spotlight, which has fueled the sport. (It is pretty funny to watch a winning driver do the baseball hat dance, quickly changing hats so that each sponsor gets a picture of its driver.)

Yet the faces of NASCAR go beyond the drivers. The fans, the crews, the drivers’ families, the food vendors, and the track personnel all make up the backbone of this sport.

The focus and precision of the garage crews is particularly impressive. Usually between six or eight of them are working in the heat, noise, and time pressure of a small portable garage, trying to put the best car on the track come Sunday. They look like they are performing a tightly choreographed ballet. One guy goes low, another one goes high, and amazingly, they don’t bump into each other amid the chains, pulleys, and motor lifts. The gearhead in me took a peak in their toolboxes and I was floored at how clean and well organized they were—not a speck of grease anywhere. Truly, there was a place for everything and everything was in its place. It inspired me to go home and reorganize my own garage.

The “over-the-wall” crew is made up of unbelievable athletes. Many fly in the morning of the race after practicing tire changes and gas fill-ups all week at their home bases. The tractor-trailer drivers who transport the cars are consummate professionals. They travel around the country like a circus, always magically managing to have the semis sparkling clean when they pull up to the track.

The fans are the heart of the sport, though. Most of the tracks offer an average of 100,000 seats, and the races are typically sellouts. The fans are passionate and committed. No one is a

casual observer. They can all talk the talk, discussing cars, race history, and drivers’ pedigrees. For a NASCAR fan, all that energy often lines up behind one driver.

The festival atmosphere of each race is a really good time, sometimes a little like Mardi Gras. Often the fans come to the same spot year after year and the races feel like a family holiday gathering. In one area is a millionaire row of \$800,000 RVs with blow-up pools so fans can watch the laps poolside. Elsewhere, tent lots host die-hard fans camping from the back of their cars. No matter what their income level, everyone shares a common passion for the sport and is excited to witness the day’s drama unfold on the track.

The races are full of hopes and dreams, especially among the newer, lesser-known drivers who are playing out a David versus Goliath story. These unknown drivers are doing the only thing they really want to do, but usually with a lot fewer resources than more established drivers. Even though their operations are somewhat ragtag, they all firmly believe that this is the race when they will break out.

*Faces of NASCAR* celebrates all of these people—the true essence of this sport—whether they are the top-skilled drivers, aspiring stars, dedicated crewmembers, or passionate fans. They all make NASCAR racing special—a sport built around family, teamwork, passion, and dedication.

The inherent beauty of the track and its atmosphere is also celebrated in this book. The combination of bright neon colors, sharp shadows, severe angles, and repeating patterns is striking. It also is a place where humor and irony can be found: four empty rocking chairs gathered near a sign promising a “garage vu,” and a glowing food trailer offering “Tobacco” and “Snacks” like a beacon in the night.

Ultimately, this book is a portrait of what I saw during my six months in the NASCAR world. I hope you enjoy the ride.

— Scott Robinson



Drivers like Ryan Newman, Jamie McMurray, and Elliott Sadler are often seen as the face of racing. But even though they have the nerve to face turns at 180 miles an hour, they are only part of what makes racing great.



From rows of \$800,000 RVs to fans camping out in the backs of their cars, no real NASCAR lover likes to miss the action on race day.