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FAST FRIENDS

Be it movies, music or TV, showbiz and NASCAR are collaborating like never before

By Gail Schiller

"NASCAR 3D: The Imax Experience" banked big bucks in 2004.

"If we can be relevant to those moviegoers or television watchers and NASCAR becomes sort of hip and cool to them as well, we'll stand a lot better chance of creating a new fan by marketing against that audience."

— Brian France, NASCAR chairman and CEO



Since nearly the dawn of NASCAR, racetracks and teams have sought out TV and movie stars to turbocharge their stock car races with the allure and excitement of Tinseltown. As far back as 1949, actor Edward Everett Horton, who was the narrator on "The Bullwinkle Show," served as the grand marshal for a race at Lakewood Speedway in Atlanta. "Gunsmoke" star James Arness made an appearance at Darlington Raceway in 1957, and Clint Eastwood showed up there in 1962. Elizabeth Taylor and Zsa Zsa Gabor attended races at Lowe's Motor Speedway — then called Charlotte Motor Speedway — in the mid-1970s.

Charlotte's legendary track owner Bruton Smith and its president and general manager Humpy Wheeler were known to be more aggressive than any of their competitors in pursuing and paying Hollywood celebrities to appear at their races.

"Bruton wanted to make his NASCAR races bigger than the other 30 or so on the schedule at that time," says Jerry Gappens, vp events at Lowe's Motor Speedway. "Our facility was years ahead of its time in trying to tie into entertainment."

Decades later, the sanctioning body for stock car auto racing has clearly caught on to the power of associating its sport not just with celebrities but with all things entertainment — from music performances to film and TV promotions to producing content about NASCAR racing.

Films including "Superman Returns," "Click," "The Longest Yard," "Star Wars: Episode III — Revenge of the Sith," "Ice Age: The Meltdown," "Shrek 2," "Spider-Man," "The Incredibles" and "Pirates of the Caribbean: Dead Man's Chest" have been promoted at races the past several years through movie-themed paint schemes on cars or having stars take on official race positions such as grand marshal.

TV shows including "The Sopranos," "According to Jim" and Cartoon Network's "Scooby-Doo" and "Tom & Jerry" have gotten in on the act as well.

HOME IN HOLLYWOOD

Since 2001, when the National Association for Stock Car Auto Racing became the only major-league sport to open a Los Angeles office to work with the entertainment industry, the

number of entertainment tie-ins has soared while the scope of NASCAR's association with everything Hollywood has broadened tremendously.

"In the discipline of marketing, you want to be as aggressive in as many smart areas as you can," says NASCAR chairman and CEO Brian France, who orchestrated the opening of the Century City office in 2001 when he was executive vp of NASCAR. "To us, this is a no-brainer. Think of how many millions of people go to the movies, are entertained by the movies and are motivated by their favorite stars, especially young people.

"If we can be relevant to those moviegoers or television watchers and NASCAR becomes sort of hip and cool to them as well, we'll stand a lot better chance of creating a new fan by marketing against that audience."

Since the L.A. office opened, numerous music artists including Sheryl Crow, Lenny Kravitz, Jewel, Black Eyed Peas, Three Doors Down, Mariah Carey and the Red Hot Chili Peppers have performed at NASCAR races, served as grand marshals or promoted albums with race car paint schemes.

Just since 2004, NASCAR has been involved in the production of three movies revolving around stock car racing — "NASCAR 3D: The Imax Experience" (distributed by Warner Bros.), Disney's "Herbie Fully Loaded" and Sony Pictures' "Talladega Nights: The Ballad of Ricky Bobby," released Aug. 4. NASCAR served as executive producers on "Talladega," producing partners on "NASCAR 3D" and producing consultants on "Herbie."

In June, NASCAR's internal production company NASCAR Images announced that it is partnering with Viacom's CMT Films to produce "Dale," the first authorized documentary about the late racing icon Dale Earnhardt. It will be narrated by Paul Newman and released theatrically early next year.

NASCAR has co-produced a number of TV series and specials including the reality series "NASCAR Drivers: 360" — which moves to new broadcast rights-holder ESPN from FX this fall — and Biography Channel's "NASCAR Driven to Win." For syndication this fall, it's a partner in "NASCAR Angels," which features drivers and crew chiefs helping families and communities fix their vehicles. TV analyst and former driver Rusty Wallace hosts.

NASCAR has also steered its drivers to regularly appear on such programs as "Saturday Night Live," "The Jimmy Kimmel Show," "The Tonight Show With Jay Leno," "Regis & Kelly," "Total Request Live" and "Today," and drivers have surfaced on "Las Vegas," "The West Wing," "24," "Days of Our Lives" and "Guiding Light," among others.



MOTORSPORTS ARCHIVES

PICKING UP SPEED

While filmmakers have made movies about NASCAR and stock cars as far back as 1953 with "Roar of the Crowd" starring Howard Duff, studios, networks and producers have never been more revved up to partner with NASCAR amid the growing popularity of the circuit and its steady shift into mainstream culture.

While its popularity was once limited to its southeastern roots, NASCAR now claims it is second only to the NFL in TV ratings for regular-season sports and first in attendance at sporting or other live events, with crowds of 150,000 at a race and 300,000 at a racing weekend.

"It's the impressions, it's the eyeballs in the stands and the eyeballs following the sport week in and week out on TV," George Leon, executive vp worldwide consumer marketing at Columbia TriStar Consumer Marketing Group, says of Hollywood's attraction to NASCAR. "It's the qualified impressions of a loyal fan base and it's another way to get your property alive and out in the marketplace."

"I think NASCAR has gotten smarter about entertaining its fan base and I think we're better at understanding the power of NASCAR as well."

Like all of NASCAR's corporate sponsors, Hollywood is particularly attracted to the circuit's 75 million avid fans who have a reputation of supporting their favorite drivers by buying the products of their teams' sponsors. Studio, network and music industry executives say that sponsor loyalty translates into the purchase of movie tickets and CDs as well as additional TV viewers.

"I think what we have proved is that our fan base, which is the most loyal fan base in all sports, will support a product whether it's Home Depot or the movie 'Click,'" says Sarah Nettinga, managing director of film, television and music entertainment for NASCAR.

"The studios have understood that having an association with the sport causes a fan to go buy a movie ticket. I think that's the real reason the studios are coming — because they believe it's working."

According to Imax, NASCAR fans who saw "NASCAR 3D" in theaters continue to support Imax films. And according to research commissioned by NASCAR, its fans are three times more likely to buy a product from a NASCAR sponsor than purchase a product sold by a nonsponsor.

Dick Glover, a former ABC/ESPN executive who now oversees the L.A. office as vp broadcasting and new media for NASCAR, says studies indicate that brands that have a single-digit market share within the NASCAR audience jump to a 50% market share when they become NASCAR sponsors.

"Our fans have always rewarded our sponsors and are very brand loyal to NASCAR sponsors," he says. "Study after study shows that.



What the entertainment media has discovered is that it works for entertainment product as well."

NAME THAT RACE

In fact, an association with NASCAR is seen as such an asset that Warner Bros. became the first studio to buy the entitlement rights for a NASCAR Nextel Cup series race — which typically sell for about \$1.2 million — when it named a June 2005 race at Michigan International Speedway the *Batman Begins 400*.

In May, Disney hosted a star-studded "Cars" premiere attended by 40,000 fans at Lowe's Motor Speedway. The premiere, the first held at a NASCAR track, featured a 12-lap auto race, a fly-by from a clutch of F-16 fighter jets and performances by Brad Paisley and Chuck Berry.

In 2001, Warner Bros. — through its advertising relationship with Chevrolet's Monte Carlo division, which was featuring the Tasmanian Devil in its ads — got its Looney Tunes brand featured in a race title: the *Monte Carlo 400*

FAST LANES CONVERGE

Clockwise from top: Edward Everett Horton amid the masses in Atlanta in 1949; Elizabeth Taylor with husband John Warner and Richard Petty and wife at Charlotte in '77; Roy Rogers with NASCAR founder Bill France Sr.; James Garner at Daytona in '72; Jayne Mansfield and driver Junior Johnson at Hillsboro, N.C., in '63; and Clint Eastwood at Darlington in '62.

VEERING

NASCAR drivers
talk about making
moves into
Hollywood circles

DALE EARNHARDT JR.

PROJECTS: "Cars,"
"Talladega Nights,"
"Yes, Dear,"
"Playboy Celebrity
Photographers"

Sometimes I get nervous because I don't think of myself as being that famous. So, like going on "The Tonight Show" or Letterman, my PR guy has to drag me there like a kid who doesn't want to go to his first day of kindergarten. But I do enjoy and appreciate the chance to do some really cool things and be involved in some neat projects. ... The Pixar folks were great when I did a small part for "Cars." I got to tour their facilities and really was impressed. They made me feel welcome, and doing the voice-over was pretty quick and easy. The same with "Talladega Nights." We shot that at the track here in Charlotte, so it was near my home and it was a simple scene. Will Ferrell was really nice to me and we just hung out between shots and talked. ... I like doing the commercials for Budweiser and the cameos like on "Yes, Dear." But I'd like to do some acting roles where I'm not playing myself. You know, instead of being Dale Earnhardt Jr., I want to be an actual character. We've had a few offers, but the NASCAR schedule is so grueling, we've had to turn 'em down. It's hard to be in L.A. or Vancouver on the same day I'm practicing my race car at a track on the East Coast. ... The Playboy photographer thing was set up by my publicist. How could I turn that down?! They told me I could pick any Playmate I wanted, that was the hard part. I got to know the Dahm triplets at some Anheuser-Busch events. They worked for Michelob, and my biggest sponsor has been Budweiser since 1999. Since I knew them already, it made sense to ask. They were really happy to do it. I was nervous about it, but once we got started, it was pretty laid back and a lot of fun.



With Looney Tunes. It was a huge event at the Richmond International Speedway, with nine cars painted with Bugs Bunny and friends and a large merchandising program of die-cast cars, apparel and accessories. According to Nettinga, the program showed the industry what NASCAR could do and paved the way for the large-scale entertainment tie-ins that followed.

Every year since, Warners has done a major promotion with a NASCAR race. In 2002, it returned to Richmond for the Monte Carlo 400 With Looney Tunes: The Rematch, with more drivers, cars, races and merchandise involved. In 2003, the studio did a promotion at the Phoenix International Raceway tied to the "Looney Tunes: Back in Action" movie, which featured driver Jeff Gordon and his car in a cameo role.

In 2004, Warners cut a deal with the Michigan International Speedway to name the entire racing weekend the Justice League Racing Weekend Presented by Hot Wheels, with a huge promotional and merchandising event tied to the superhero brand and the "Justice League" animated series. Last year, the studio upped the ante; in addition to the naming rights for the Batman Begins 400, the Caped Crusader served as the grand marshal and the Batmobile led the pace car.

And this summer, through its relationship with PepsiCo, a promotional partner for "Superman Returns," Warners ran a "Superman" paint scheme on Gordon's car at the Pepsi 400 at Daytona International Speedway and had actor Brandon Routh as grand marshal.

"I think we all realize the value and the tremendous marketing exposure that NASCAR brings to the party," says Dave Hedrick, senior vp global promotions and branded foods for Warner Bros. "It's a fairly new opportunity that the studios are all looking at and trying to maximize. Tapping into NASCAR's huge audience base and event marketing initiatives makes them a great partner for Hollywood."

Apparently, not only Hollywood has caught on. In 2004, Ben Affleck was scheduled to be grand marshal at the Daytona 500 to promote "Jersey Girl" but got bumped by President Bush and was made "honorary race official" instead.

For many studios like Warner Bros., the attraction of staging events at NASCAR races stems not just from the promotional value for the entertainment property but the additional revenue resulting from the sale of die-cast cars based on movie-themed paint schemes as well as from additional movie and NASCAR-themed merchandise. Die-cast cars are a hot collectors item and constitute about 25% of NASCAR's \$2.1 billion in annual licensing revenue.

"Tying entertainment and NASCAR together has been extremely successful on the merchandise sales front," says Blake Davidson, managing director of licensed products at NASCAR. "A lot of promotions have stemmed from merchandise. It is part of the appeal of the program. It's a great way to promote your film or TV show and then extend the life of that through the sale of the merchandise."

When Nickelodeon got the entitlement rights in 2004 to a Busch series race, the SpongeBob SquarePants Movie 300 at Lowe's Motor Speed-



"Sopranos" photo: Harold Hinson; Sandler-Kahne photo, Tarantino photo, "Today" photo: Getty Images; Channing-McMurray photo: courtesy of NASCAR



way, the track waived its usual fees and Nickelodeon waived its typical demand for an advertising commitment on the network in exchange for access to its characters.

"It was great exposure for us to be connected to NASCAR," says Eddie Hill, vp marketing for Nickelodeon. "That was the value of it to us, and on their side they got access to SpongeBob to make licensed product. So it was a win-win on both sides."

The first entertainment-based paint scheme and corresponding die-cast cars appeared in 1997 at the Charlotte Motor Speedway to promote the movie "Jurassic Park." A year later, there were Elvis and Batman-themed cars as well as a paint scheme to promote "Small Soldiers," and in 1999 "Toy Story 2" themes appeared on three cars at the Atlanta Motor Speedway.

"Those paint schemes made the lights go off in people's heads about the opportunities in NASCAR," Davidson says. Today, purchasing a paint scheme for a movie or TV show from a race team's primary corporate sponsor costs \$200,000-\$500,000, depending on the popularity of the driver. While some studios pay teams directly, many get access to paint schemes for free through film promotional partners that are also regular NASCAR sponsors, like Kellogg's, General Mills and McDonald's.

CARS AS CHARACTERS

But it's not just the marketing and promotions departments of the studios and networks that perceive NASCAR as a vital partner. With its soaring popularity, NASCAR is becoming an increasingly common theme for entertainment fare.

According to Nettinga, all the content NASCAR has helped develop and produced so far has come from outside pitches from producers, networks and studios. In fact, the industry has proved that it is willing to pay NASCAR handsome consulting fees for its participation in its productions.

Imax reportedly paid NASCAR about \$1.6 million for its assistance in making "NASCAR 3D," and it handed over another \$800,000 to four tracks to film at their facilities, with the fees going to the pool of drivers' prize money.

"Whatever we paid them they earned," says Greg Foster, chairman and president of Imax Filmed Entertainment, who declined to confirm a figure. "NASCAR brought their fans out to our theaters. They were incredible partners. We paid NASCAR and NASCAR brought all the tracks, all the drivers and at least one TV commercial per race every single weekend for 25 weekends. I think that is worth way more than anything NASCAR was paid for the film."

Imax says "NASCAR 3D," which was the second-highest grossing documentary in 2004 after "Fahrenheit 9/11," has grossed nearly \$25 million at the boxoffice.

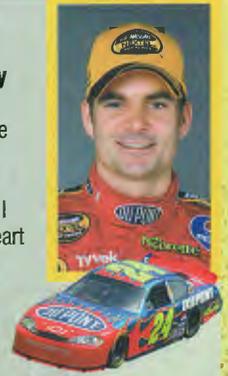
For its part, Disney reportedly paid about \$1.2 million for NASCAR's involvement in "Herbie," and Sony Pictures is believed to have paid about the same for "Talladega Nights."

"We all know that NASCAR represents this incredible audience and demographic and that people turn out in droves for these races," Columbia Pictures president of production Matt Tolmach says. "The ratings are spectacular. We're a NASCAR nation. If you're selling movies for a living, having a great comedic actor

JEFF GORDON

PROJECT: "Saturday Night Live"

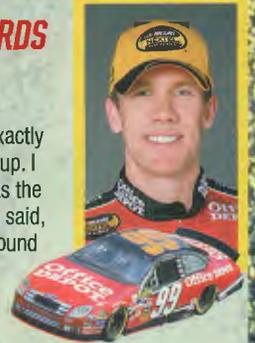
While that was one of the coolest things I've been able to do away from the track, I still remember my heart pounding out of my chest as they were introducing me. The skit where I was "Ricky Funk" definitely was my favorite. It was a funny sketch that was fun to do, mainly because I was so much out of character.



CARL EDWARDS

PROJECTS: "24," "The Disciple"

I don't know exactly how "24" got set up. I showed up, and as the day went on, they said, "Can you stick around a little longer? We'll give you a couple of lines and we'll do some neat stuff." That's how it was explained to me: I may have a part. I think they just kind of wanted to talk to me first, because they had never met me, and see how it goes. That kind of deal. I played the director of Homeland Security. It was really nice of them to give me a part like that. They only gave me one line, so I didn't have to do very much. Maybe if they have me back, I can do something with Kiefer (Sutherland). He's a really cool guy. I had never seen the show, but it seemed like everyone I told was super-pumped when I said, "Hey, I'm going to get to visit the set." I didn't realize how many people watched it. It was a different experience, but I really enjoyed it. It was pretty neat to see my face on the screen in a dramatic moment. ... The same week in L.A., I got to do a small part in an independent film ("The Disciple") that my buddy is the lead in. I played, I believe it was a male nurse, a hospital worker/nurse checking on a patient and talking to the people in the waiting room, telling them about the condition of their friend in the hospital. The person who was supposed to play the nurse got into a car wreck that day. The director looked at me and said, "What are you doing today?" So it worked out good. It was pretty funny. He had no clue I was a race car driver. He thought I was a guy just off the street.



STAR POWER MEETS HORSEPOWER

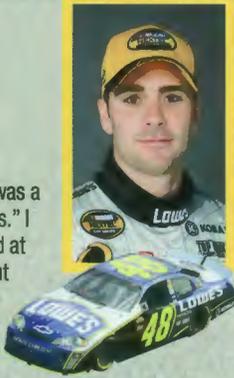
Clockwise from top: "Sopranos" stars mug with driver Clint Bowyer outside the show's set in New York; Adam Sandler clicks with Kasey Kahne during a Michigan race promotion; Quentin Tarantino gets set to direct traffic at the Petty Driving Experience; Stockard Channing does the wave with Jamie McMurray on "The West Wing"; and Matt Lauer rubs shoulders with Tony Stewart.

JIMMIE JOHNSON

PROJECT:
"Las Vegas"

Nikki Cox really helped me when I was a guest on "Las Vegas." I was really surprised at everything that went into making just one scene. It is definitely not as easy as it looks.

Everyone is so good at what they do. I really like doing things like that, but I think I'll stick to driving race cars for a living.



CASEY MEARS

PROJECT:
"Days of Our Lives"

I played myself. They've got a lot of twists and turns and crazy stories. Basically, the character on the show — I guess her name was Belle — her boyfriend was missing. It sounds kind of corny, but sponsorship in NASCAR

is huge, and a friend of hers bought the hood of my car and put a message on it for her boyfriend. He's a big NASCAR fan and she was hoping wherever he was, he would see the race and they'd be able to get the message to him that they wanted him to come home. She was thanking me for running it on the hood and wishing me good luck. It wasn't very long. It was a three- or four-liner and that was about it. ... Actually, when I shot my part, I thought we were doing a practice run. And I got done and they go, "All right, that's good." I thought, "Heck, I would have put a little more into it." But it's probably how they wanted it, a little more natural. ... I like doing different things. You get exposed to a totally different market, and you reach different crowds. At the same time, there's a lot of female fans that are already involved in NASCAR who watch that show. As soon as we did it, the very next race I got a lot of attention. A lot of the female fans knew I did it. ... I think it's fun to do things like that. All our focus and all our time here is on the racing side of things, and obviously that's our priority. But when little things like this come up, I thought it'd be fun to do and something kinda different. And it would be an excuse to go to California and hang out and have a good time. I'd love to do something like that again.



like Will Ferrell set against the world of NASCAR, against this incredibly popular sport, feels like a pretty golden opportunity."

Tolmach says that soon after Ferrell and Adam McKay pitched the idea for the film along with producers Judd Apatow and Jimmy Miller, it quickly became evident that working closely with NASCAR was critical. "It became clear from a production standpoint that they were incredibly valuable partners to have because of the access they could give us," he says. "It gave the movie a whole other level of scope and credibility."

Adds Apatow: "Anytime we were debating could you do this or that, they would give us some nugget about the sport, its history or characters that led us to some other really funny joke."

NASCAR drivers Jamie McMurray and Dale Earnhardt Jr. made cameo appearances in "Talladega Nights," and scenes were shot at Lowe's Motor Speedway, Talladega Superspeedway in Alabama and North Carolina Speedway in Rockingham.

GREASING THE SKIDS

"Herbie" producer Bob Simonds says integrating a "cultural phenomenon" like NASCAR into his Disney film helped the filmmakers "reinvigorate an old franchise." In exchange for its consulting and production fees, NASCAR arranged for the filmmakers to set up more than 20 cameras at the California Speedway and to film there for three days.

"They let me stick Herbie out on the track with the race cars as they were doing warm-up rounds. I couldn't believe they were letting us do that," Simonds says. "Our goal was not just to get at their marketing and their audience but to have credibility in their world. They were really sticklers in a very good way for authenticity."

NASCAR drivers Gordon, Jimmie Johnson and Dale Jarrett had cameos in the film.

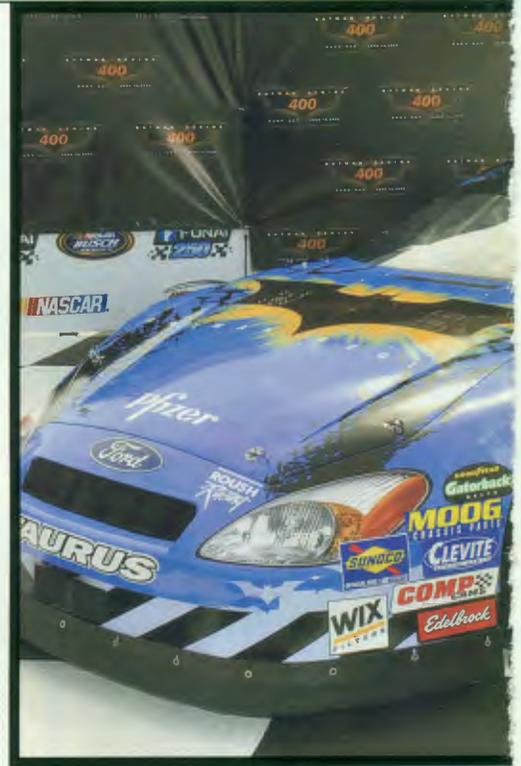
Making movies about NASCAR also gives studios access to the circuit's corporate sponsors and licensees as potential promotional and merchandising partners. For "Herbie" and "Talladega Nights," most of the promotional partners were also NASCAR sponsors, and for "Talladega" merchandising, Sony handed the whole program — which it wanted to mirror the licensing campaigns of real-life NASCAR drivers — to NASCAR's licensing division (they split the royalties 50/50).

In television too, NASCAR has benefited greatly from the enormous interest in developing content about the sport. It has either co-produced or consulted on series and specials that have aired on A&E, Biography, FX, MTV, VH1, E!, CMT, Animal Planet, Travel Channel and OLN.

"Our strategy for television is hitting all the cable networks and different slices of life," Nettinga says. "It isn't just about getting the largest total audience in one shot but programming to different segments to grow our audience."

While the TV programming has helped NASCAR market the sport to new audiences, networks like Animal Planet and Biography believed the NASCAR-themed programming would help make new viewers out of NASCAR fans tuning to their networks for the first time.

"Our goal was to talk to a new audience, a



"The ratings are spectacular. We're a NASCAR nation. If you're selling movies for a living, having a great comedic actor like Will Ferrell set against the world of NASCAR, against this incredibly popular sport, feels like a pretty golden opportunity."

— Matt Tolmach, Columbia Pictures president of production





CHECK OUT THE PAINT JOB

Mark Martin shows off "Batman Begins" cars big and small at Michigan, and the Looney Tunes characters fuss over their plush Chevy before a race in Phoenix.

a reality series executive produced by Tony Krantz that takes a look at drivers behind the scenes — their families, home life and other interests. With NASCAR races moving from FX and NBC to ABC and ESPN, the show is moving from FX to ESPN next season.

"Drivers: 360" is a 50/50 partnership between NASCAR and Krantz's company Flame Ventures, but NASCAR also gets an undisclosed per-episode fee from the show's budget for the services it performs and its assistance in producing the show, says Krantz, who has also executive produced "24" and "Felicity."

Nettinga declined comment on NASCAR's production fees but says they vary based on the level of NASCAR's involvement. She says NASCAR's entertainment partners get much more than production consultancy when they team with her organization. "If you're working with us, we're working with you across the board," she says. "You not only get a strong brand with a strong fan base but you also get a huge support system from marketing and publicity and even from the licensing side."

As part of its television efforts, NASCAR has also partnered with branded entertainment firm Madison Road Entertainment to develop integration opportunities for NASCAR and its partners in new and existing shows.

Of all of the extensive NASCAR-Hollywood activity going on, Nettinga says the development of original movie and TV content has had the most impact in achieving NASCAR's goal of going mainstream. "You are basically putting your message out in the form of entertainment and educating people who may not be fans of the sport in an entertaining way," she

notes. "Before 2001, that didn't exist."

As far as the near-term future, Nettinga thinks NASCAR will have at least three TV series and one movie of the week on a major network and possibly another motion picture during the next year.

France, grandson of NASCAR founder Bill France Sr., says NASCAR is focused on the different platforms that are going to be distributing content in the future, especially with Sprint Nextel as one of its main partners and sponsor of the NASCAR Nextel Cup series. "As entertainment assets find different ways to be distributed, I think we're going to want to be as impactful in that space as we possibly can," he says.

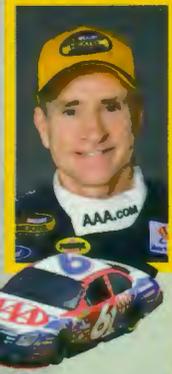
France hopes NASCAR can do two NASCAR-themed movies a year. And with NASCAR's entertainment strategy at least partly responsible for the sport's soaring success in recent years, NASCAR plans to continue co-producing content and orchestrating large-scale entertainment tie-ins.

"There are lots of factors that explain why NASCAR has had significant growth over the past five years while other sports are flat or decreasing," Glover says. "One of them has been the ability to continuously expose the product to a greater audience. We will continue to try and maintain that formula. We believe we have a plan that is working. We're going to stick to it." ■

MARK MARTIN

PROJECT:
"Guiding Light"

What I remember the most is probably how nice all of the people were to work with. The actors were just great to work with and very patient. They didn't act like it was a pain or anything to have to fool with us, although I'm sure it took more time than normal. All in all it was a lot of fun and a cool experience. You know, there wasn't really anything that surprised me. I've been at this type of stuff for a long time, maybe not with something like "Guiding Light," but we've done a lot of TV, a lot of commercials, and I've worked with a lot of directors, so I pretty much know how it works. It's like anything else; you have to put a great deal of work in it to get to that point. Just like we have to as drivers, they have to as actors. But as with anything, it takes hard work and preparation to do a good job in either field. It is fun when you get a chance to see (another world) like that, and it does give you an appreciation for what those guys do as well.



RUSTY WALLACE

PROJECT:
"Days of Thunder"

The one I did all my talking to was producer Jerry Bruckheimer. I remember talking to him at a little restaurant across the street from the Charlotte Motor Speedway. I said I'd never seen anyone make a good NASCAR movie. And he said, "You've seen 'Top Gun?' What'd you think of that?" I said, "I thought it was great." He said, "I'm going to make a NASCAR movie that good." When I met Tom Cruise, he acted like he was very, very focused. He was really on a mission to try to understand everything he could. What I remember most about it was how big it was. Oh my gosh, they tore up more cars. It was just an amazing production. They bought tons of race cars from (NASCAR team owner) Rick Hendrick. Rick was basically a sole supplier of all the pieces and parts to get that movie made. I still get a check every now and then for six dollars. The movie was pretty good, (but) it turned out a little hokey, you know.

