

Vroom! Racing for Educational Excellence

by Suzanne Wise

Stock car racing, born in the Southern Appalachians, has taken the nation by storm. "If baseball is indeed the national pastime, then NASCAR (for the uninitiated, the acronym stands for the National Association for Stock Car Auto Racing) may be the national obsession," noted Dermot McEvoy in a 1999 article in *Publishers Weekly*.¹ Attendance at NASCAR's three top racing series (Winston Cup, Busch Grand National, and Craftsman Truck) annually approaches ten million people, and television broadcasts of NASCAR events garnered the highest ratings for the last four weekends as this is being written in spring 2001, beating out the NCAA Basketball tournament selection show. Stock car racing is hot, embraced by men and women (40% of fans are female), young and old, of all financial means. It is the perfect vehicle (couldn't resist it) to use as an educational tool, as illustrated by the educational initiatives below.

Racing Across the Curriculum

Students and teachers in Georgia, Alabama, and Mississippi are "Racing Across the Curriculum" thanks to a very successful summer program at the International Motorsports Hall of Fame (IMHOF) in Talladega, Alabama. Mark Rice, a four-time state teacher of the year and recipient of a National Science Foundation award for the best mathematics and science program in the United States, thought learning should be fun and wanted to develop a theme for teaching that would interest kids.

Stock car racing was a natural fit with his own interests (his stepfather, the late Bruce Jacobi, was a race car driver and Rice was a member of his race crew as a teenager), so he worked with a group of eighth grade girls in his classes to generate curriculum ideas based on motorsports. The students produced a CD-ROM that was so exciting it quickly got the attention of possible sponsors (copies of the CD are available for educational purposes from Stringer Horizons Program, P.O. Box 68, Old Highway 15N, Stringer, MS 39481). NASCAR Winston Cup's Robert Yates Racing team and CART's (Championship Auto Racing Teams) Newman-Haas Racing team and their major sponsor, Texaco, came on board. In 1999 the IMHOF and the adjacent Talladega International Speedway agreed to host a teacher workshop using stock car racing to teach a wide variety of subjects, including mathematics, science, economics, and language arts skills. The program also emphasized character education, and several young NASCAR drivers, including Lyndon Amick and the late Kenny Irwin, who were concerned about the poor image projected by many star athletes, volunteered to participate and serve as positive role models. The original week-long session was attended by 40 teachers from three states. Working in teams, the teachers participated in a variety of creative activities. They devised a marketing plan for Crayola as a race car sponsor, designing race team uniforms and the car paint scheme, and developing an adver-

tising campaign. They learned how to teach physics and math in the context of setting up cars to perform on the speedway, and actually got to circle the track as passengers at speeds approaching 200 mph. On the last day of the workshop the teachers teamed with students to try out their new ideas in a competition. In 2000 the program doubled, offering two sessions; 80 teachers were selected from more than 2,000 applications. 2001 promises to be even larger, and Rice hopes eventually to establish a permanent summer program similar to Huntsville, Alabama's internationally recognized Space Camp. He envisions state competitions for students, with the winners coming to Talladega each year to compete in a variety of academic events, all based on stock car racing. The program has received widespread media attention, including a segment on Nickelodeon's *Nick News*. It was also featured on the Japanese version of *60 Minutes*.

Rice conducts shorter teacher education workshops in cooperation with other race tracks and has used the NASCAR model in corporate teamwork and leadership training programs. He has accomplished this through partnerships with computer and software companies, race teams, racing magazines, and companies marketing kid-targeted products. He is joining with others, including chairman and racing legend Bobby Allison, to form the National Racing Education Association. For more information, contact Rice at: Mark Rice, Director of Technology, Aerospace Sci-

ence Technology Education Center, Inc., 2633 N. Villa Avenue, Oklahoma City, Oklahoma 73107.

Reading and Racing

Morgan-McClure Motorsports in Abingdon, Virginia, wanted to thank their community for its long support of their NASCAR Winston Cup race team. Ginny McClure, wife of co-owner Larry McClure, had witnessed firsthand the reading and writing difficulties of many adults when she was a placement test administrator at Virginia Highlands Community College. She designed "Racing 4 Literacy" (4 being the number of Morgan-McClure's Winston Cup car) as a way to support the acquisition of reading and writing skills at an early age. Working with First Lady of Virginia Roxane Gilmore and the Virginia Department of Education, she began a pilot project with ten schools in 1998. Students in the third through sixth grades were given the opportunity to sign a contract to read a specified number of books, the number and titles to be determined by the students, and to write a book report on each. The program has since been modified to concentrate on fourth and fifth grade classes, and has expanded into east Tennessee. McClure and her sister Willma Blevins, also a Morgan-McClure employee, read every report, correcting grammar and making positive notes and personal comments. For instance, when a report mentioned that a boy had a pet dog, McClure wrote, "I have poodles!" These personal notes are much prized by the students, who ask each other, "What did she write on your report?" At the end of the year McClure visits each class. She tells the students about the importance of reading and writing and also talks about stock car racing and what it takes to field a team. She then presents the students who have completed their contracts with autographed photographs of Morgan-McClure driver Kevin Lepage, a tee shirt, and a certificate of completion on which she has personally written the student's name in calligraphy.

McClure says the most difficult aspect of the program has been the children who chose not to participate or who did not complete their contracts. While it is hard on those students to see others receiving prizes, she says that it sends a very important message about keeping one's word and being rewarded for honest effort, and it motivates non-

participating fourth graders to join the program in the fifth grade.

The funds to underwrite Racing 4 Literacy come primarily from an annual benefit golf tournament (the August 2000 event netted about \$17,000) and from corporation support. Dana Corporation, which supplies car parts to vehicle manufacturers, often sends staff with McClure when she visits classes in schools near their plants. They reinforce the idea that working in a factory or garage usually requires at least a high school education and good reading and writing skills. Morgan-McClure sponsors a table at local career day activities to let aspiring mechanics and automotive technicians know that a good education is necessary to get a job.

At present the program is used in 78 classes in 31 schools in Virginia and Tennessee, totaling about 1,600 students; in 2000 McClure and Blevins read 3,100 book reports! McClure is willing to extend this program to interested schools, and has even worked with home-schooled children. For more information, contact Ginny McClure, Director, Racing 4 Literacy Program, The Morgan-McClure Foundation, 26502 Newbanks Road, Abingdon, VA 24210.

Racing for Character Education

In South Carolina, Team Amick, featuring Saluda, South Carolina's racing driver Lyndon Amick, spearheaded RACE with Lyndon. Recognizing that race car drivers are role models for many kids, Team Amick contacted the South Carolina Department of Education and asked what it could do to support education in the state. The team decided to focus on character education, and Reinforcing Academic and



NASCAR driver Lyndon Amick explores the Internet with a young fan. Photo used with permission <http://www.lyndonamick.com/LA_outreach.html>

Character Education (RACE) with Lyndon was born. Four school districts participated in the pilot project in 1999-2000, which was underwritten by Team Amick's primary sponsor, SCANA. Fourth- and fifth-grade teachers in these districts received the "Rev It Up: Racing Across the Curriculum" curriculum enhancement program materials developed by *Racing for Kids* magazine, which focus on activities in reading, mathematics, science, history, and geography. In addition, Lyndon Amick met with students in each of the four districts and talked about his racing experiences. The twenty-two-year-old's willingness to speak candidly about handling both success and disappointment in racing has made the program a big success. Students participating in the school districts may be identified as Top Performers, "all-round students who demonstrate through everyday words, deeds and actions a commitment to living responsibly, dependably, and with integrity." Top Performers are listed on the Team Amick Motorsports transporters and a brief biography is displayed on the team Web site <<http://www.lyndonamick.com>>. Teachers may request copies of the curriculum materials from Zeta Smith, NASCAR *Racing for Kids*, P.O. Box 588, Concord, NC 28026-0588.

North Carolina Racing Education Programs

Robeson County is offering a new program tied to stock car racing. Under the leadership of Dr. Wilbur Smith, the school system is establishing a Motor Sports Academy, which will offer automotive and related classes to students who may wish to work in the motorsports industry. The senior faculty will be joined by several former drivers and race team pit crew members, and the two-semester program will culminate in the students actually building a race car. Dr. Smith and system superintendent Dr. Barry Harding hope the Motor Sports Academy will be the first program in an eventual new technology high school.

Several colleges and universities offer degrees tailored to students who want to work in racing. Catawba Valley Community College has established the Bobby Isaac Motorsports Technology Program, named for the late driver and 1970 NASCAR champion. The curriculum, which has attracted students from more than 30 states and

Canada, provides a hands-on educational laboratory simulating a race shop environment. Rowan-Cabarrus Community College offers a two-year program in motorsports technology management. The Lee College of Engineering at UNC-Charlotte offers a motorsports engineering concentration. NASCAR plans to open a state-of-the-art Technical Institute in the Charlotte area in 2001 to train automotive technicians.

A number of institutions offer occasional courses on motorsports. Each semester Appalachian State University's Department of Health, Leisure, and Exercise Science offers "The Evolution of Southern Motorsports," a course on the history of stock car racing. UNC-Asheville has offered "Stock Cars and Southern Culture." Wake Technical Community College features a continuing education class, "Race Car Vehicle Dynamics," which provides an in-depth look at race car set-up. Central Piedmont Community College sponsored "A Rookie's Guide to Racing," taught by Celia Kelin, owner of a motorsports marketing firm, and featuring television racing analyst and former NASCAR driver Benny Parsons and current Busch

Grand National series driver Tony Raines. North Carolina State University sponsors a six-week seminar on the business of stock car racing.

Several schools have partnered with race teams to provide both educational opportunities and institutional publicity. Texaco and Robert Yates Racing provided a fully equipped version of the team's No. 28 car to be used as a laboratory by students at North Carolina A & T, and they have established the Texaco/Havoline Racing Team Scholarship and Internship Program, available to students associated with the University's Intercollegiate Auto Racing Association (ICAR) racing team. Other schools competing in the ICAR racing program are Duke University, North Carolina State University, the University of North Carolina-Charlotte, the University of South Carolina, and the University of Virginia. UNC-Charlotte awards the Alan Kulwicki Memorial Scholarship, named for the late NASCAR champion, to a student who demonstrates excellence in academics and has a racing background. In October 2000 Richard Petty presented STP Maximum Performance Scholarships to two students in Rowan-Cabarrus Com-

munity College's motorsports management program.

Several schools, including Virginia Tech, the University of Tennessee, and the University of Nebraska, have been featured in NASCAR races via one-race paint schemes on cars. The exposure to millions of race fans at the track and on television generates a huge amount of positive publicity for the institution.

Appalachian State University's stock car racing collection was featured in the November 2000 issue of *Stock Car Racing* magazine, which has a readership of more than 400,000. The article has generated several donations to the collection as well as requests for research assistance.

For more information on these and other educational programs in racing, log on to the premier stock car racing Web site *Jayski.Com* <<http://jayski.thatsracin.com>>. Scroll down the list of links on the left side of the screen and select "Racing Schools."

References

¹ Dermot McEvoy, "A New Player Roars onto the Sports Scene," *Publishers Weekly* 246 (March 22, 1999): 54.

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