

Racecar Evangelism Revs Up

Ministries to the unique NASCAR culture of hot cars, cold beer and public prayer are on the rise



When you think about motorsports, what comes to mind are probably images of beer-drinking Bubbas, tattooed fanatics and the occasional death-defying crash. But more and more, Jesus is in the mix.

Unless you've been to the race track, you may not know NASCAR is the only professional sport that still launches with a prayer, usually in the name of Jesus, over the public address system. Lately, more ministries are moving to preach the gospel and make disciples by sponsoring drivers as they race their souped up cars around famed NASCAR and IndyCar tracks.

Indeed, from pre-race prayer meetings to behind-the-scenes testimonies to live television exposure, evangelicals are reaching men (and women) who are watching drivers speed around circles at up to 200 miles per hour.

"Our outreach team is reaching people at race tracks across America who might not otherwise hear the transformational message of Jesus Christ, like we do here at Daystar every day through television," said Marcus Lamb, founder and CEO of Daystar Television Network. Daystar is sponsoring second-year hopeful Blake Koch and the MacDonald Motorsports Racing No. 81 team in the NASCAR Nationwide Series for 2011.

"For me, the most exciting thing about being a NASCAR driver is the opportunity to share my faith with the fans and to be a Christian witness everywhere I go," said Koch, who participates in a weekly Bible study with fellow drivers at the track. "There are a lot of people in the grandstands who may believe in God but have never gone deeper in their faith."

Living Waters, a nondenominational Christian ministry, is also

seizing on the motorsports evangelism opportunities. Living Waters sponsored Kevin Lepage and the No. 24 Ford Mustang for the Royal Purple 300 at Auto Club speedway in Fontana, Calif. Alan Pearson, director of donor relations, says the ministry is focused on making disciples by driving awareness of its equipping resources among a national TV audience.

“Sponsoring Kevin gives us an opportunity to get access to areas we otherwise wouldn’t have,” Pearson said. “In other words, behind the wall in the garage area. We brought our film crew in and did interviews with drivers and fans. We want to equip Christians with the tools, training and encouragement they need to share their faith in a biblical and authentic way, as well as reach the lost.”

Kingdom Racing took a different approach. Rather than merely sponsoring a driver, George Del Canto had a vision from God to launch an IndyCar race team with a mission to deliver God’s Word through motorsports. Kingdom Racing entered the scene in May 2008, making history as the first faith-vision team to compete in the 100-year history of the Indianapolis Motor Speedway.

Kingdom Racing has one driver, Davey Hamilton—and he has quite a testimony of God’s saving grace. Hamilton’s racing career almost ended on June 9, 2001, after a devastating crash at the Texas Motor Speedway. After 21 operations and two years of rehabilitation, he returned to Indy Car racing in May 2007 and finished ninth. Hamilton’s testimony is a tool in the hands of Del Canto as he seeks to fulfill his God-given mission.

“The racecar is just a billboard that gets people’s attention,” Del Canto said. “We have a booth where people can come by and get an autograph from Davey or sit in a show car and have their picture taken. We use Davey’s testimony to start the conversation and share the gospel. Now we’re working with local churches that can follow up with them and get them plugged into a local congregation, because evangelism without

discipleship is cruel.”

