

Dave's Daytona NASCAR Driving Experience

by Dave Boesche

It was a thrill to once again be inside the Daytona International Speedway.



I had been there years ago, like 50 years ago, as a participant in the endurance races. Not as a driver but as a car owner, mechanic, organizer. That was when we raced a BMW, with some factory assistance. I only looked at the track, for three days, and our race car, usually under the hood or under the chassis. Sleep = hardly any, Meals = same answer, Learning Curve = raised more than the 'high banks' of the track, Fun Activity = absolutely, Famous People = oh yes, even had a 'cold one' with Paul Newman (that is when he was also a racer, his budget was bigger than ours).

But this time around Mrs. Clause gave me a Christmas Present, of a NASCAR Driving Experience. This included a training in the classroom, video of the track – up close and at speed, and the assignment of a 'spotter' which is a person, way up in the stands, that was in 100% communication with me and the safety crews. The spotter can see the entire, 2 1/2 mile track, all other cars, and track hazards.

So, after passing these hurdles, it was 'time'. The only 'racing' was against the clock, not each other. The cars were genuine, NASCAR Cup Cars. (Cup Cars = the fastest, most powerful, most refined, highly regulated/inspected, stock looking vehicles on planet earth. Note: about the only 'stock' item of these cars is the roof, sheet metal. That is even reworked with safety flaps that deploy if you should spin the car above 100 MPH, they open and 'try' to keep the car ON THE GROUND! I was very surprised to find they were actual, last season, real race cars. No extra seats for instructors. They also had real safety racing seats custom tailored to last season's driver. NOTE: most of the real drivers, are not 75, 30+ pounds overweight, with 6 total joint replacements. So getting in/out of the car was a real close fit! Once in the seat hurt like crazy, but my spotter informed me it would 'FIT' once I got up to speed. NOTE: He was painfully right.



So buckled, strapped, fastened in, off I go to seek a self defined goal of a fastest lap average of 150 MPH.

Ride with me here. Out of the pits, into 4th gear, exhaust starting to crack/roar. Still on the pit road, throttle to the floor, driving below turn #1, holey moley, that high bank looks almost straight up, speed increasing, onto the back straight, car smoothes out, feels happy with more speed, OMG what is that big, black, monster thing ahead? Foot stays on the floor, the spotter calls, snap, pressure on my body, quiet about me, the monster was the high banked, turn #3! OMG as fast as it approached, it was gone. Down the front straight which is actually a dog leg bent affair. The car is still accelerating, the exhaust is very loud but the engine sounds happy. NOTE: the cars were 650 HP, but they de-tuned them to a mere 600 HP for us amateurs, thanks a lot! I'm already headed to turn #1, oops already thru, on to turn #2, gone, back stretch, take a breath, monster ahead, car squats, body hurts, something pulls at my head and arms, 'stay on the floor, slight turn to left' the spotter yells, all flat now, front straight, spotter announces 'fun, you just cranked off 2.2 Gs', keep digging – foot harder on the floor – who knows there may be a little more.

Without boring you and me, there were more laps traveled, I was getting more adjusted to the pain but not the speed. All my points of reference were way down there ... but bam, I was there. *Sureal!* The spotter says 'nice job,' your checkered flag is out, you did crack over 150 MPH on the front straight, let up on the gas SLOWLY. That is the first time today I heard that word!

Painfully they pulled me out of my seat, even my legs were sweaty, had to have a little help the first few steps, I'm half dazed when up walks Michael Waltrip, former NASCAR champion now TV personality/commutator, 'Dave, you did a great job out there, how did it feel?' Wonderful. Then for the next week I was so sore, black & blue, that I thought I would never say wonderful again. But life is again wonderful, I have a great family, friends and I get to play in the Fakahatchee almost anytime I want.

