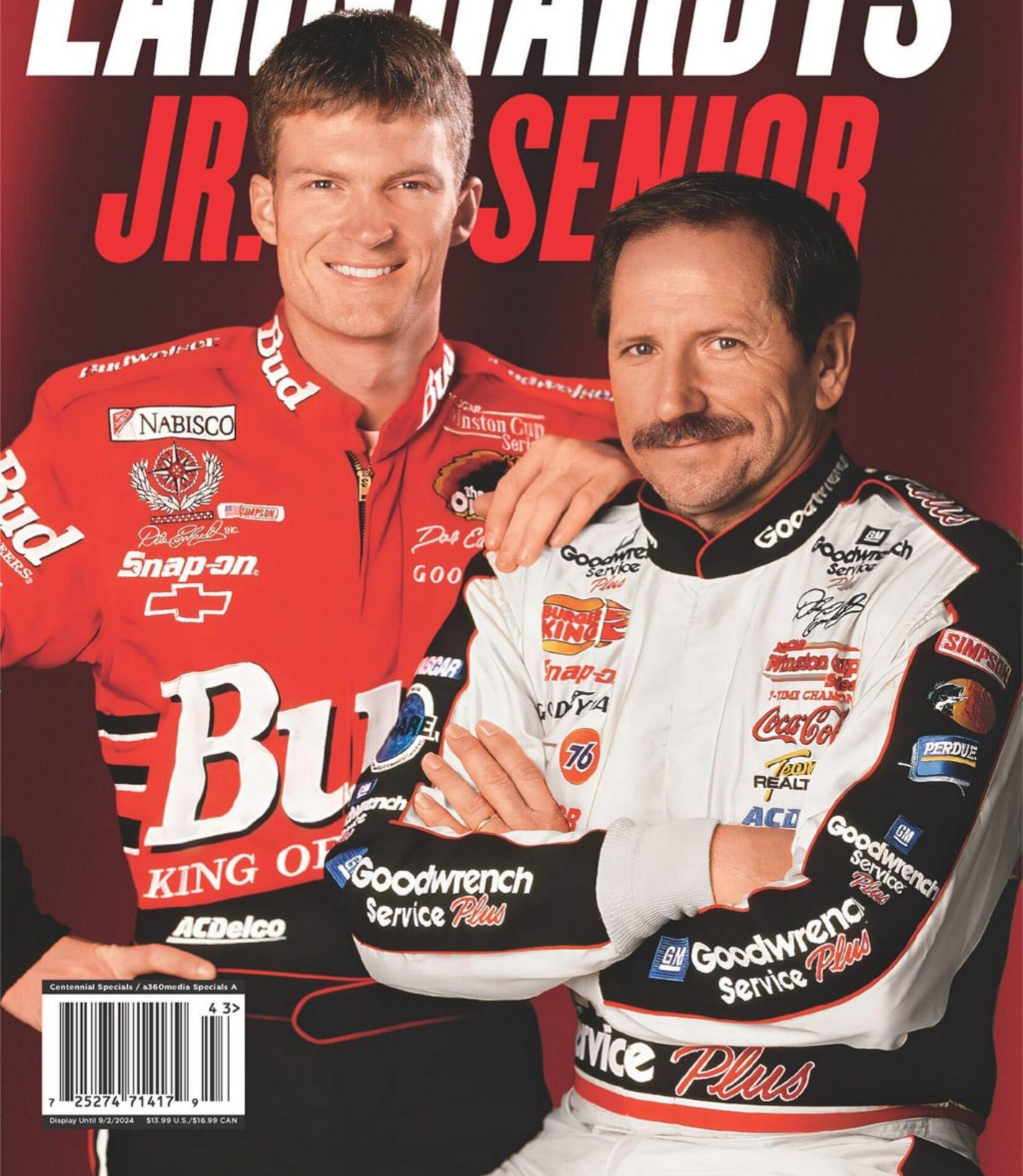


★ **NASCAR DYNASTIES** ★

EARNHARDT

THE

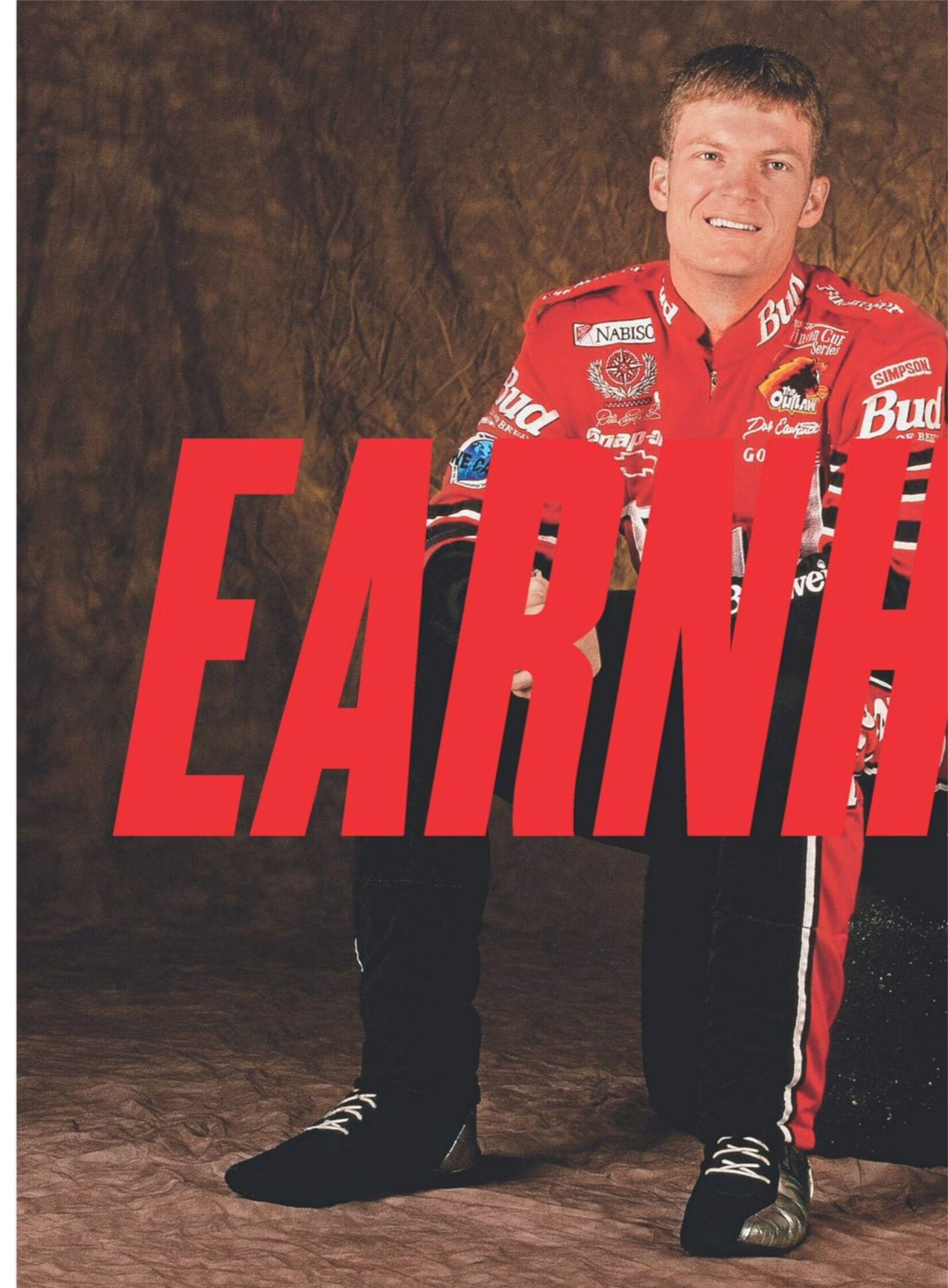
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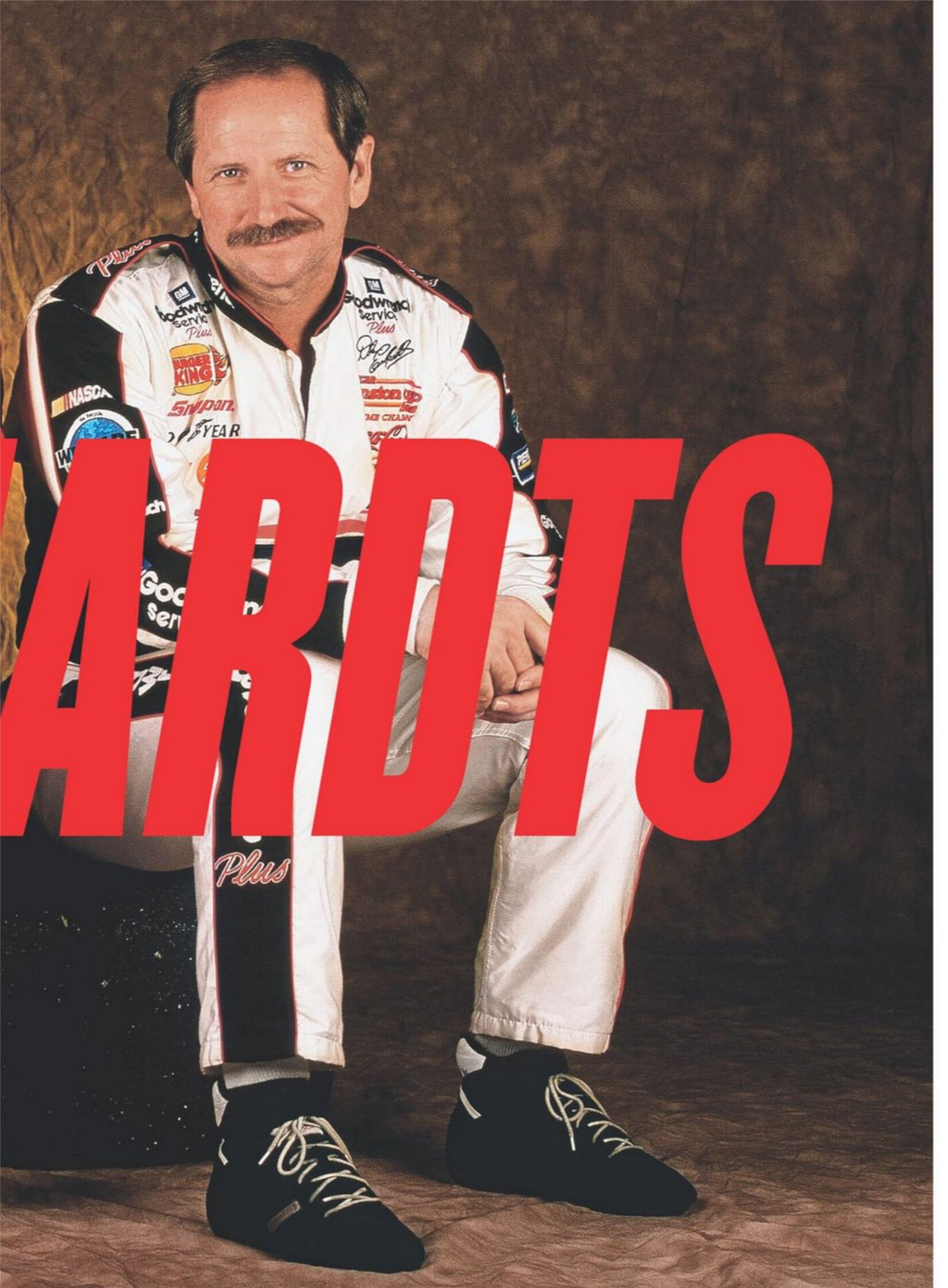
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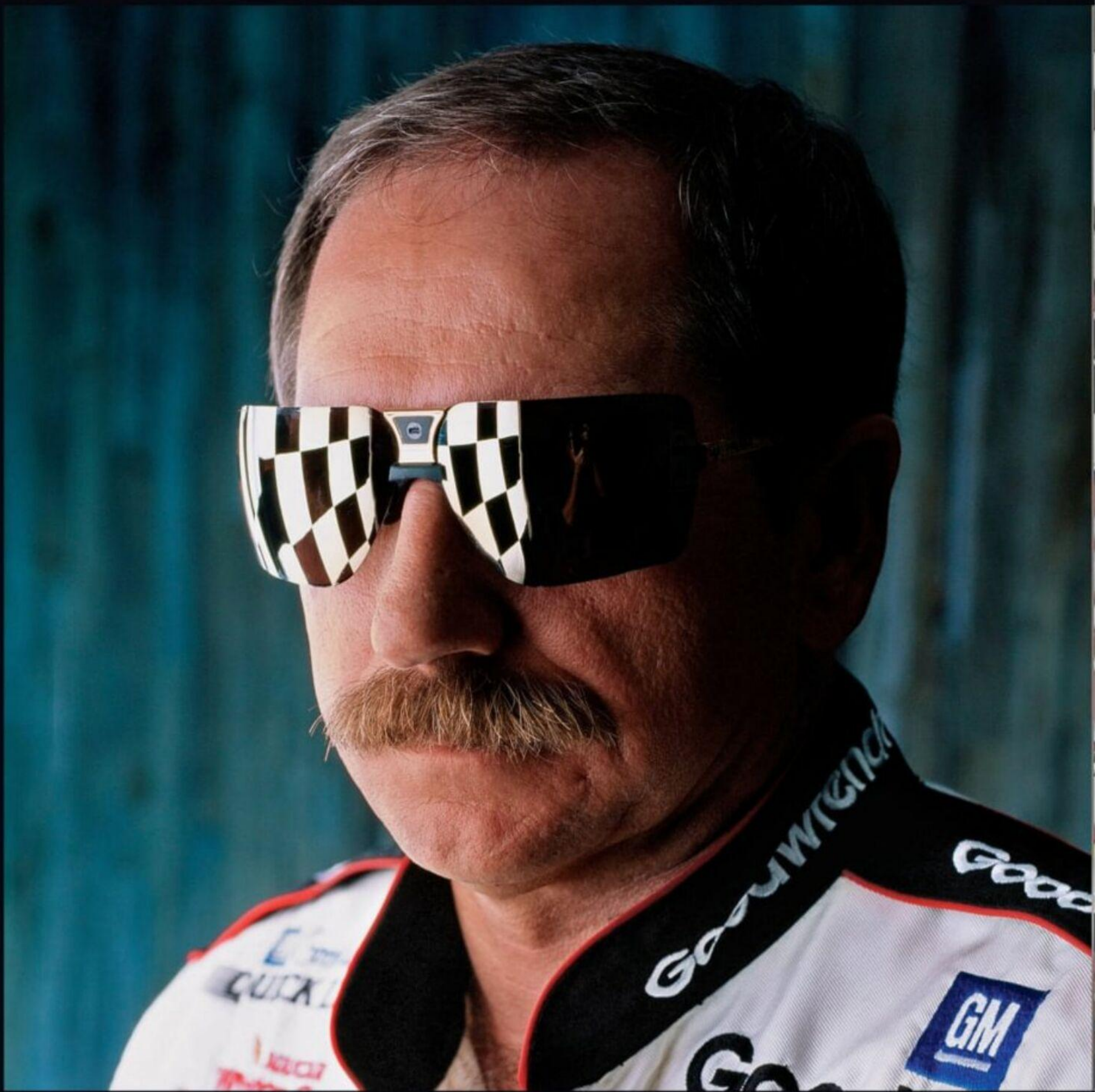


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EARNHART





CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION 6

PROLOGUE 18

EPILOGUE 88

PHOTO CREDITS 98

THE EARNHARDTS



CHAPTER 1

THE INTIMIDATOR!

Dale Earnhardt Sr., NASCAR's Man in Black, rose from racing roots to become the best driver of his era

20

CHAPTER 2

JUNIOR

Despite the long shadow cast by his father, Dale Earnhardt Jr. made a name of his own in NASCAR

44

CHAPTER 3

THE ROAD AHEAD

The sport of racing is in a constant state of change, but the Earnhardt family endures

68

CHAPTER 4

DYNASTY BY THE NUMBERS

Ten amazing statistics about the Earnhardt family

78



Dale and Teresa Earnhardt pose at their wedding with Dale's children, Kelley (left) and Dale Jr., on Nov. 14, 1982, in Mooresville, North Carolina.

INTRODUCTION

THE FIRST FAMILY OF RACING

THE EARNHARDT NAME REMAINS THE
GOLD STANDARD



NASCAR knows family. Heck, the sport's origins trace to the days of moonshine running, when in many cases throughout the South the only thing that kept a not-quite-legal family business going was a fast car and a fearless driver. Many of those 'shine runners would go on to take their souped-up vehicles and their passion for speed to the countless dirt tracks that soon sprung up throughout the region. And those daddies would pass that passion—along with the tools and tricks of the racing life—on to their offspring.

In the decades since, generations of NASCAR fans have been thrilled and moved by the exploits of such renowned racing families as the Bakers, the Waltrips, the Jarretts, the Allison's, and of course the Pettys. But one family name evokes a passion among the racing faithful that revs higher than all the others: Earnhardt.

It was back in Kannapolis, North Carolina, in 1949, that Ralph Earnhardt, looking for a way

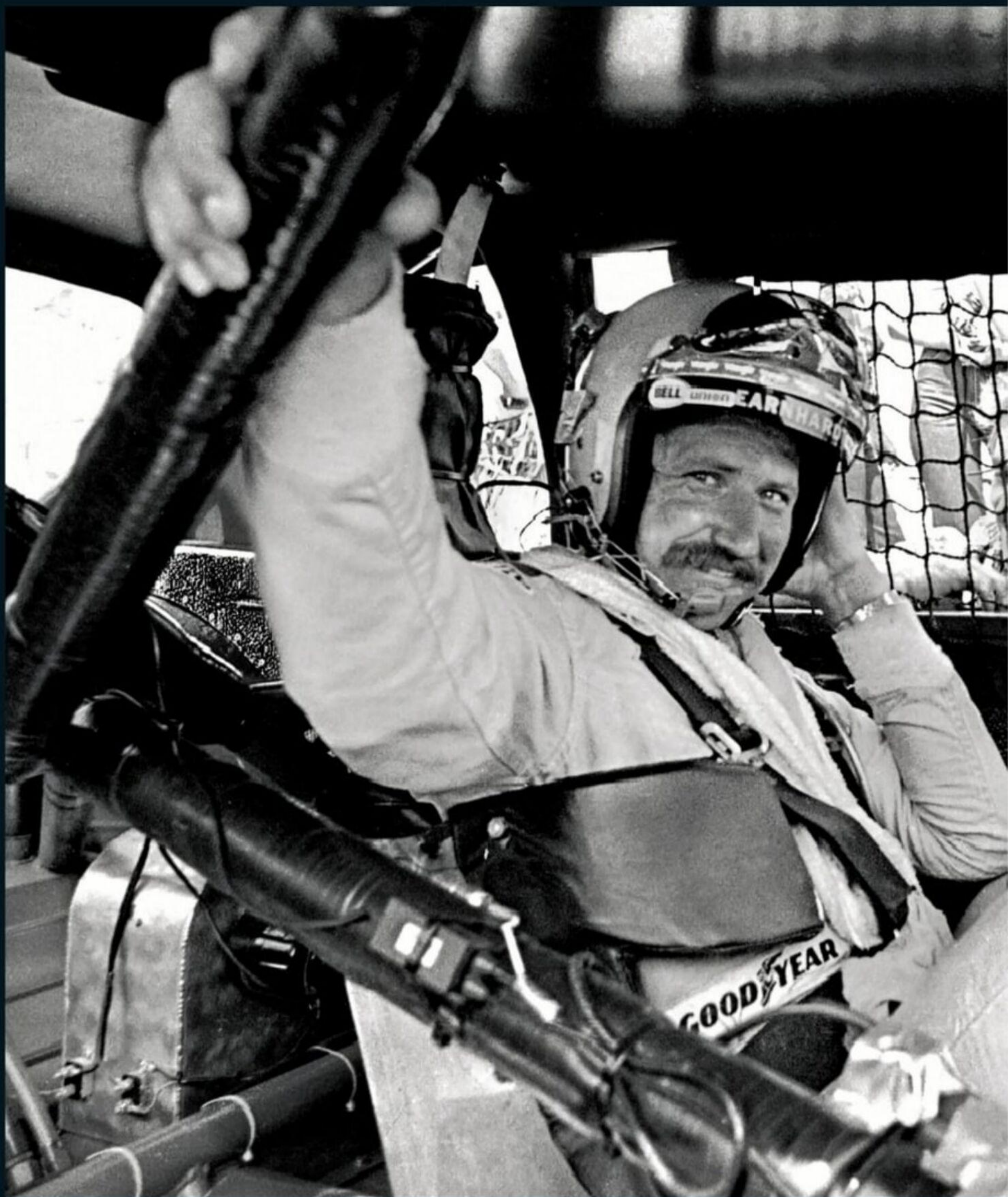
out of the cotton mills, began his racing career on local tracks. Ralph's pedal-to-the-metal ambition would take him to countless dirt-track wins, a national Sportsman Championship, and important technical innovations. It would also inspire the Earnhardt generations that followed—children, grandchildren and great-grandchildren—but most significantly his son Dale and his son, Dale Jr.

Dale. Junior. Among the greatest father-son duos in all of sports. Though vastly different in temperament and driving style, both were bound together, in a kind of slipstreaming closeness, throughout their lives. They remain so revered that to this day—though Dale died in 2001 and Junior retired in 2017—a stroll around any NASCAR track on race day will produce evidence of their fans' enduring love reflected in merchandise, signs, and memorabilia galore. The heart of the greatest family in racing history still beats loud and fast. This is their story.

Ralph Earnhardt waves from the window of the 1962 Pontiac that he drove for owner Acey Taylor at the Daytona 500 on Feb. 18, 1963. Earnhardt had completed only 15 laps before his day was ended by a broken fuel pump. He finished in 47th place.









Dale Earnhardt relaxes in his race car while it is being repaired after an accident during the Firecracker 400 at Daytona International Speedway on July 4, 1981. The damage from the wreck forced him to retire from the race after 71 laps. He finished in 35th place.





The Earnhardts (from left to right: Kelley, Dale Sr., Dale Jr., and Teresa) pose together at Martinsville Speedway on April 26, 1987, in Martinsville, Virginia, before the Sovran Bank 500. Dale Sr. won the race—one of his 11 victories that year—en route to his third Cup championship.





Dale Earnhardt Sr. and Dale Earnhardt Jr. (in red) on pit road before the start of the GoRacing.com 500 at Bristol Motor Speedway on Aug. 26, 2000, in Bristol, Tennessee. Dale Sr. finished in fourth place, while Junior, then a 24-year-old Cup rookie, ended the day in 21st.





Dale Earnhardt Jr. poses with a push broom after his victory in the GoBowling.com 400 at Pocono Raceway in Long Pond, Pennsylvania, on Aug. 3, 2014. It was the 22nd win of his career, which ended after the 2017 season, when the man known as Junior was 43 years old.

Ralph Earnhardt sitting in the driver's seat sometime in the 1950s, the same decade he quit his job in a cotton mill to race full-time.

PROLOGUE

IN THE BEGINNING...

RALPH EARNHARDT: THE PATRIARCH

▼

RALPH Earnhardt was born in 1928 in Kannapolis, North Carolina, a cotton mill town just northeast of Charlotte. After dropping out of school in the sixth grade, Ralph—like just about every other young “lint head,” as the town’s residents were sometimes called—signed on at the mill as a teen. It was a steady income for a young man who would soon have a wife and a growing family, but Ralph dreamed of more. What he really wanted to do was drive race cars.

On Easter Sunday 1949, Ralph entered his first recorded race, finishing third in the late-model Sportsman feature on the dirt at a track in nearby Concord. He kept on at the mill, but raced whenever he could, four or five nights a week at tracks throughout the area, doing all his own car building and mechanical work. With his meticulous preparation and incisive driving, Ralph piloted his cars—

usually sporting his preferred number 8—to win after win, collecting a few hundred bucks for each victory. In 1953 he quit his job to race full-time, telling his wife, Martha, that he would return to the mill if he couldn’t earn enough to support the family.

He never looked back. In his 23-year career, Ralph won more than 350 races across NASCAR’s various series, and countless more state and track titles. He was the 1956 NASCAR Sportsman Champion and drove more than 50 Cup races. Two-time Cup champion Ned Jarrett called Ralph, “absolutely the toughest race driver I ever raced against.”

Ralph died of a heart attack at just 45, but not before passing that toughness on to his oldest son, Dale. Born in 1951, Dale grew up immersed in his father’s racing world, and he learned his lessons well. Asked once about what his father had taught him, Dale answered, “You don’t move over for anybody.”

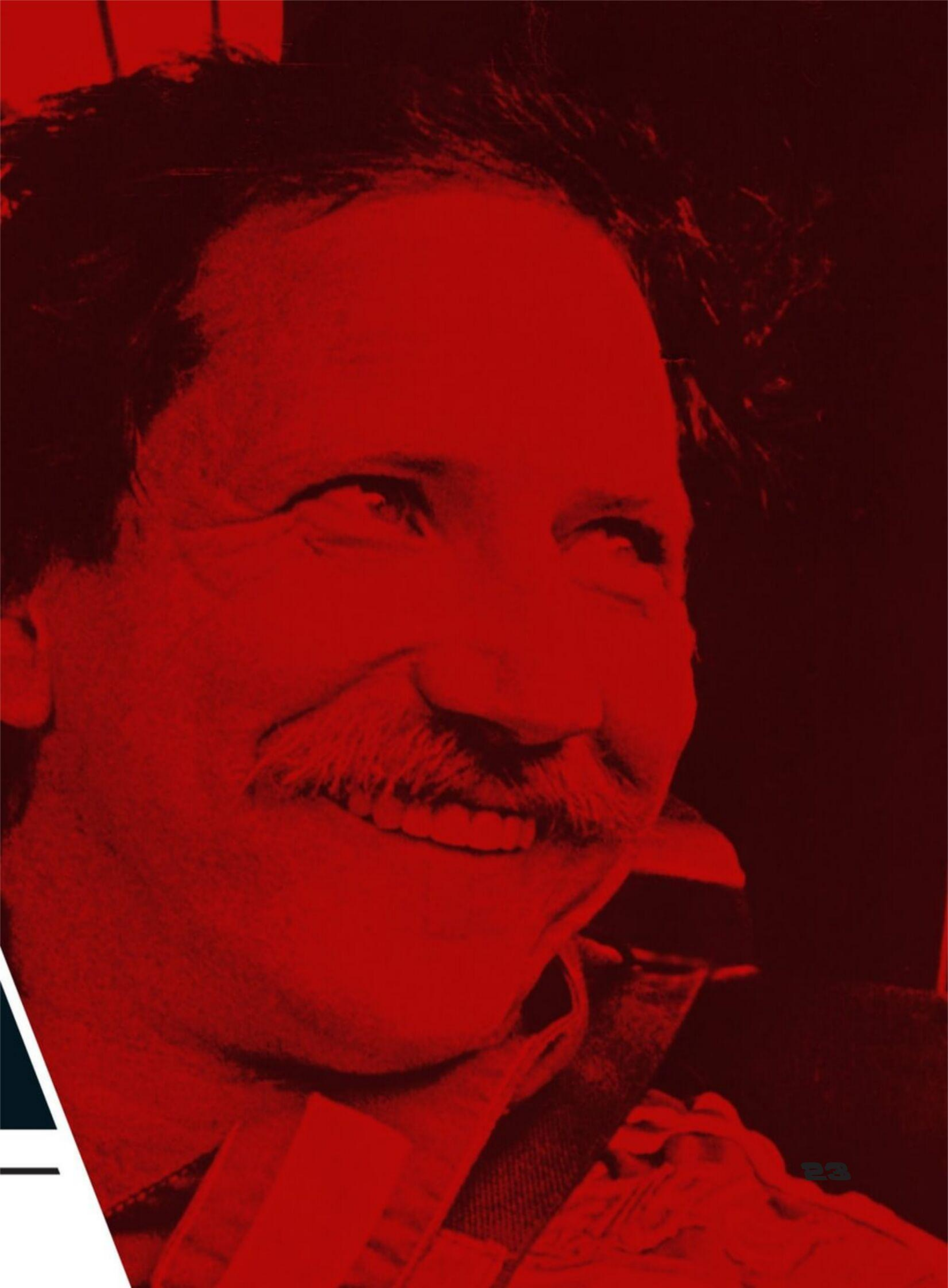




CHAPTER 1



**THE
INTIMIDATOR!**
DALE EARNHARDT SR.:
THE MAN IN BLACK



Earnhardt as a fourth-grader in 1961 at Royal Oaks Elementary School in Kannapolis, North Carolina (near right).

Earnhardt (far right) proved himself as a rookie by finishing eighth in the 1979 Daytona 500 in an unsponsored car (below).



so many sports, yesterday's heroes can seem diminished when viewed alongside the greats of today. LeBron James, Patrick Mahomes, Serena Williams—seen live in HD and with us 24/7 on social media—loom as the paradigms of their sports. But then there's NASCAR. The current Cup drivers, for all their skill and media savvy, tend to blend together and all pale in comparison to the larger-than-life figures who came before them. And of all those predecessors, none casts a bigger or more, well, intimidating shadow than Dale Earnhardt.





Earnhardt stands in Victory Lane after winning his first NASCAR Cup race, the Valleydale 500 at Bristol, on April 1, 1979 (left).

Earnhardt (below, in front) raises his arm in celebration at the finish line as he wins his first Daytona 500 on Feb. 15, 1998.

The stats alone are formidable: 76 Cup wins, 428 Top 10s, a record-tying seven Cup championships. But it was his singular style—the mustache, the boots, the quotes, that wicked smile—and his unrelenting approach to racing that made Earnhardt the giant that he was. It's what has kept fans honoring his signature number 3 car to this day.

He was his father's son. Born in Kannapolis, North Carolina, in 1951, Dale grew up shadowing

Ralph in the garage and at the track. And he wanted nothing more than to race. In his book *Earnhardt Nation*, author Jay Busbee quotes Dale's mother: "From the day he could ride a bicycle or a tricycle, he wanted to be out front." That stubborn, full-on way of doing things earned Dale the first of his memorable nicknames, "Ironhead." It would stick.

Ralph Earnhardt died suddenly at age 45, when Dale was just 22, a blow that would haunt him all





his life. “There isn’t a day I don’t think about Dad,” he would say years later. A desire to make his father proud drove Earnhardt throughout his racing career. He won his first Cup race at Bristol in 1979, and was named Rookie of the Year that same season. His final win would come at Talladega in 2000. In the years between Earnhardt would thrill—and more than occasionally outrage—fans with many of NASCAR’s most unforgettable moments, from “the Pass in the Grass” to his so-long-awaited Daytona 500 win in 1998. Earnhardt’s mastery at the slipstreaming duels of superspeedway racing gave rise to the legend that he could “see the air.” But he was just as fearsome on the short tracks. Just ask Terry Labonte. With a lap to go in a 1999 race at Bristol, a tap from the Intimidator sent Labonte into the wall and Earnhardt to his ninth win at the Tennessee bull ring. “I wasn’t gonna wreck him,” Earnhardt said afterward. “I didn’t mean to turn him around. I meant to rattle his cage, though.”

Off the track, Earnhardt could show a softer side. He was generous with fans and deeply loyal to his friends, if a notorious prankster at times. And, though he was a ninth-grade dropout, ol’ Ironhead had a head for business. His lifelong friend and hunting buddy Hank Parker told Dale Jr. on a podcast that his daddy was “the smartest man I ever knew.” Earnhardt recognized early on how to package and sell his name and likeness, generating millions that allowed him to bankroll his own racing team, and laying the foundation for NASCAR’s enormous merchandise industry.

He was also a father. Tough, remote at times, but present when it counted. Earnhardt never pushed Dale Jr. into racing, but he backed him as the young man who bore his name climbed through the ranks. And those closest to Earnhardt recognized just how much Junior’s success meant to him.

NASCAR lost one of its icons when the Man in Black was killed at Daytona in 2001. But more than 23 years later, it’s clear that Dale Earnhardt remains utterly undiminished.

With other drivers, Earnhardt (above, second from right) could be a tough competitor, earning him the nickname “the Intimidator”.

Earnhardt (left, signing autographs before the 1981 Daytona 500) was generous with fans, which helped make him immensely popular.



Earnhardt with (above, from left) his wife, Teresa, son Dale Jr. and daughter Taylor at Atlanta Motor Speedway on Nov. 18, 1990.

Earnhardt crosses the finish line less than two seconds ahead of Mark Martin to win the 1989 Southern 500 at Darlington Raceway.

SENIOR'S GREATEST

THE INTIMIDATOR'S
CAREER
HIGHLIGHTS

Dale Earnhardt famously said, "You win some, you lose some, you wreck some." In his 676 Cup races, Earnhardt won way more than most. When he lost, it was only while trying to win to the very last second—this is, after all, the guy who also said, "Second place is just the first loser." And the wrecks? Let's just say the Intimidator earned his nickname. Buckle up for racing's top 10 Senior Moments.

10

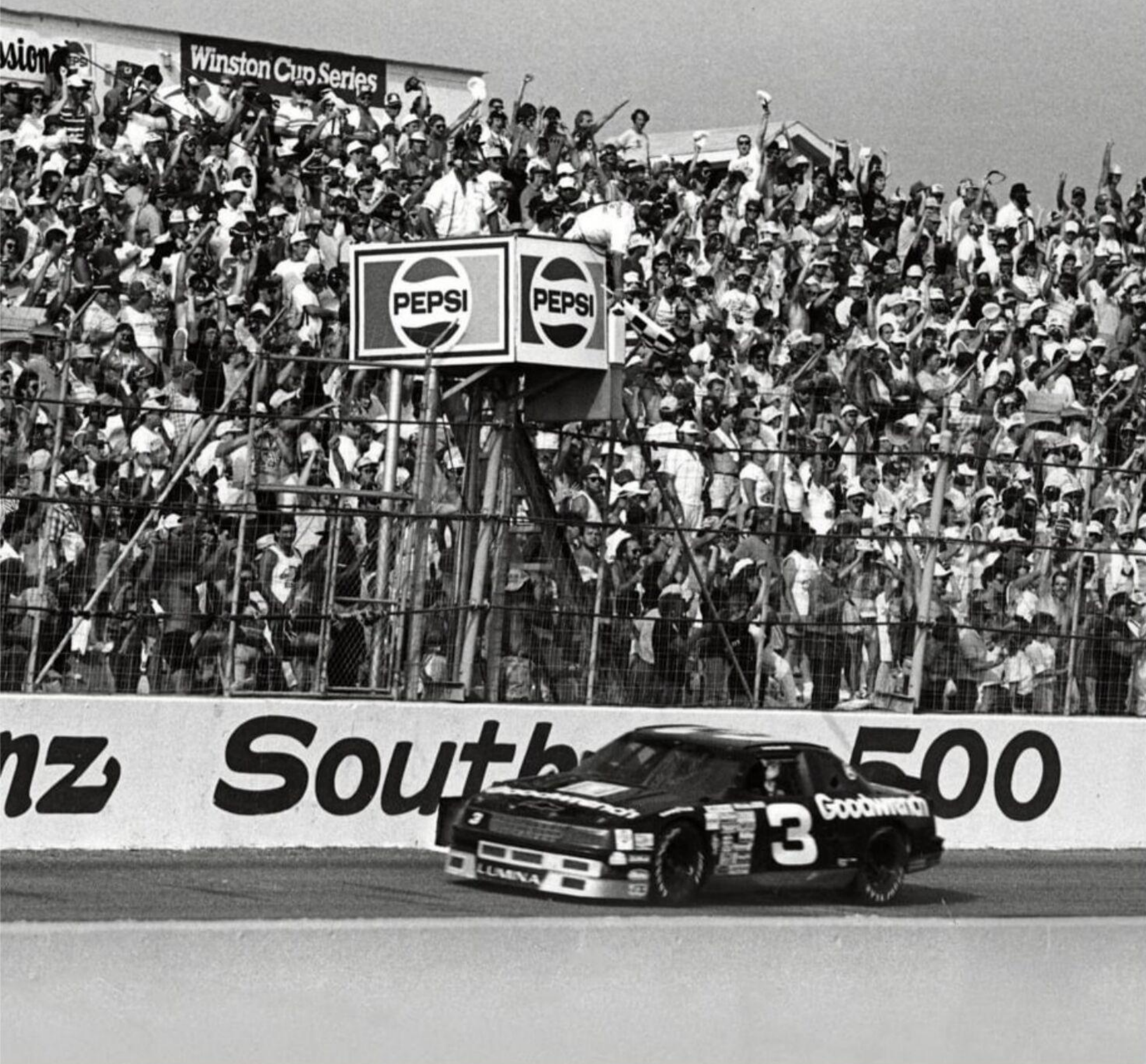
1979
SOUTHEASTERN 500

As a 27-year-old rookie, Earnhardt led 163 laps on Bristol Motor Speedway's notorious half-mile oval and beat veteran Bobby Allison by three seconds for his first career Cup win—becoming the first driver in NASCAR's modern era to make it to Victory Lane as a rookie. Earnhardt's thrilled crew chief, Jake Elder, told his young driver after the race, "Stick with me, kid, and we'll have diamonds as big as horse turds!"

9

1989
SOUTHERN 500

Driving the iconic black number 3 Goodwrench Chevrolet at Darlington, Earnhardt claimed his second Southern 500 title. This win, though, was testimony to Earnhardt's finesse more than his trademark hard-charging style. Facing the threat of running out of fuel before the finish, Earnhardt nursed his car through the final 80 laps to take the checkered flag 1.45 seconds ahead of Mark Martin. Earnhardt's average speed of 135.462 mph still broke the race record.





8

1997

DAYTONA
500

In his 19th 500—and still searching for his first win in the race—Earnhardt was battling for the lead when, with 12 laps to go, a multicar crash flipped his ride. It came to rest in the grass, upright but crumpled on all sides. Earnhardt said later, “I got in the ambulance and I looked back at the car and said, ‘Man, the wheels are still on that thing.’” His crew taped it together and he brought it home in 31st place. Ironhead.

7

2000

CRACKER BARREL OLD COUNTRY
STORE 500

Earnhardt was about to turn 49 and was in his 25th Cup season, but he was clearly far from ready to settle into one of the race sponsor’s iconic white rocking chairs just yet. After a ferocious battle over the final laps at Atlanta Motor Speedway, he held off Bobby Labonte to win by 0.10 seconds, at the time the third-closest finish in Cup history. “We went at it about as hard as we could,” said the happy winner.



Earnhardt (left, in front) takes the checkered flag in a Daytona 500 qualifying race at Daytona International Speedway in the late 1990s.

On March 12, 2000, Earnhardt celebrated in Victory Lane at Atlanta Motor Speedway after beating Bobby Labonte by 0.10 seconds (above).

Earnhardt and his wife, Teresa, celebrate at Charlotte after his comeback victory in the 1993 Coca-Cola 600 (below).

Earnhardt clinched his seventh Cup title after his victory at Rockingham in the AC Delco 500 on Oct. 23, 1994 (right).



6

1993 COCA-COLA 600

Going for his third win in NASCAR's longest race, Earnhardt looked to have the strongest car at Charlotte Motor Speedway, but midway through he was hit with a pit-road penalty and went a lap down. He drove his way back to the leaders before he was penalized another lap for tapping Greg Sacks. His blood really up, he charged back again to take the lead for good with 39 laps left. Said runner-up Jeff Gordon, "You never, ever counted out Dale Earnhardt."

5

1994

AC DELCO 500



With three races remaining in the season, Earnhardt rolled into Rockingham with a 321-point lead in the championship standings. Rusty Wallace, who'd entered the race in second-place, was forced to retire with a blown engine, and Earnhardt went on to not only win the race, but also clinch his seventh Cup title, tying Richard Petty's career record. "You have to finish these races to win the championship," Earnhardt said.





4 1987 THE WINSTON

Earnhardt was leading the field at Charlotte with eight laps left in the '87 All-Star race, holding off a hard-charging Bill Elliott, when a tap from Awesome Bill sent Earnhardt's 3 car sluing down onto the infield grass. Never lifting, Earnhardt swept the car back up onto the track still ahead and went on to win. That bit of four-wheeled wizardry remains one of NASCAR's most heralded moments, forever known as "the Pass in the Grass."

Dale and Teresa Earnhardt (left, center) celebrate with his crew in Victory Lane after his win in The Winston on May 17, 1987.

Earnhardt salutes his team after his breathtaking come-from-behind victory in the Winston 500 at Talladega on Oct. 15, 2000 (above).



3

2000 WINSTON 500

Though he had run strong all day in his 44th Cup start at Talladega, Earnhardt was seemingly finished with just four laps remaining on the 2.66-mile superspeedway, trapped in 18th place in a 190-mph traffic jam. Instead, he was just getting started. Slicing his way through the field to take the lead with one to go, Earnhardt held on for his 10th Talladega victory, in one of the most astounding finishes in NASCAR history.

2

1999 GOODY'S HEADACHE POWDER 500

Coming into Bristol, Earnhardt had not won on a short track since 1995. So maybe he had something to prove. Late in the race, Earnhardt and Terry Labonte swapped the lead back and forth. On the final lap Labonte led, but in Turn 2 Earnhardt bumped Labonte, sending him into the wall, and swept by for the win. "I wasn't gonna wreck him," Earnhardt said later. "I didn't mean to turn him around. I meant to rattle his cage, though."



Earnhardt (above) hadn't won at Bristol since 1995 when he bullied his way to victory on the short track on Aug. 28, 1999.

After he won his first Daytona 500 on Feb. 15, 1998, Earnhardt was congratulated on pit road by every crew member of every team (right).

1

1998 DAYTONA 500



Earnhardt had come so close so many times before, but was an aching 0-19 in the Great American Race. That all ended with his '98 victory. In a fittingly dominant performance, Earnhardt led 107 of the race's 200 laps, including the final 61. As he drove slowly down pit road to Daytona's Victory Lane, in one of the sport's most touching moments, crew members from every team lined up to congratulate an unmatched competitor.





Earnhardt (left) was killed when his number 3 car hit the wall on the final turn of the final lap of the Daytona 500 on Feb. 18, 2001 (right).



RACING'S DARKEST DAY

THE INTIMIDATOR'S DEATH AT DAYTONA IN 2001
CHANGED THE SPORT FOREVER

ON the final turn of the final lap of the 2001 Daytona 500, Dale Earnhardt was running third—blocking for his son Dale Jr. and leader Michael Waltrip, both drivers for Dale's own DEI race team seemingly on the way to a storybook 1–2 finish—when slight contact with two other cars sent Senior's black number 3 Chevy into the wall.

As crashes go, it didn't look that bad. But the seven-time champion who had survived so many wrecks in his 27-year career died instantly from a basilar skull fracture. With NASCAR president Mike Helton's announcement to the media, "We've lost Dale Earnhardt," the sport was shaken to its core.

For fans, the grief was immediate and profound. Whether they had cheered or booed the Intimidator, he had been a presence like no other for an entire generation and they knew that they would never see another driver quite like him.

What became known as Black Sunday eventually led to extensive safety improvements in NASCAR. Later that same season, the HANS (head-and-neck support) device became mandatory, "soft walls" now line every track, and cars have been repeatedly redesigned with driver protection foremost in mind. There have been no fatalities in NASCAR's top three series since that tragic day in 2001.

THE LEGACY

DALE EARNHARDT SR.
WILL ALWAYS
BE REMEMBERED



“ I’ve raced with three generations of drivers, and, on any given Sunday, Dale Earnhardt was as good as anyone who sat in a race car.”

—BUDDY BAKER
1980 DAYTONA 500
WINNER



“ What Earnhardt had connected the generations and the eras before him and was something you couldn’t see, couldn’t touch, you couldn’t feel, and you couldn’t describe. It’s just there. You can call it desire. You can call it hard-headedness, but there’s something you can’t see in some people and he had that by the bucketfuls.”

—KYLE PETTY
LONGTIME CUP DRIVER
TURNED RACING
COMMENTATOR

“ There were two Dales: The one who would come up, put his arm around your neck and talk to you like a buddy, like a brother; and then there was the one that, when he put that helmet on, and that little mustache got that turned up on the ends—you wanted to stay away from that Dale.”

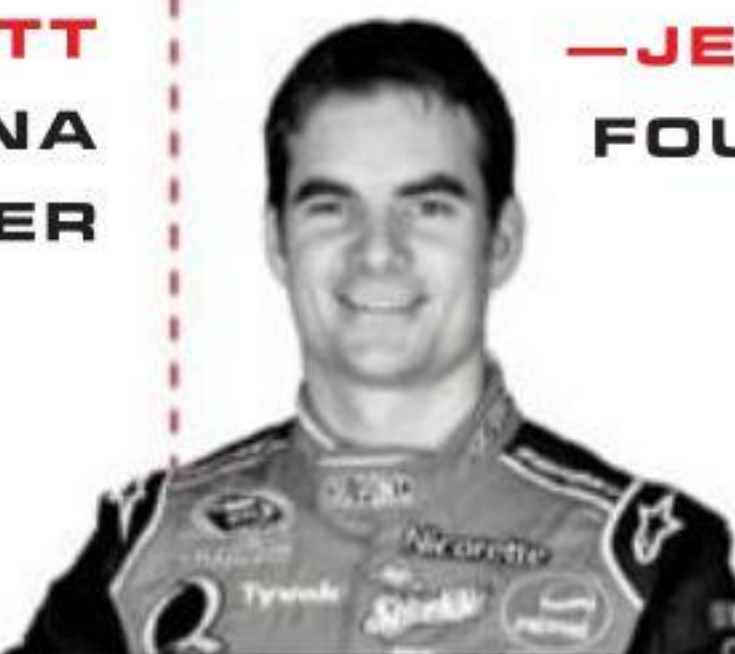
—DARRELL WALTRIP
THREE-TIME CUP
CHAMPION

“ He does things with a race car that you aren’t supposed to do. I think all of us have seen him do things that couldn’t be done, but he did them and kept on going like there was nothing to it.”

—DALE JARRETT
THREE-TIME DAYTONA
500 WINNER

“ When you looked in your mirror and you saw that black 3, it took your focus off.... He was testing you. He wanted to see what you were made of. ‘How tough can you be? Let’s see—right here, right now.’”

—JEFF GORDON,
FOUR-TIME CUP
CHAMPION



“ Someone will ask me, you know, explain to us Dale Earnhardt. Explaining Dale, that’s like trying to explain John Wayne or Neil Armstrong or other heroes from that era that you can no longer experience.... But you still try to explain it, because there was no one else like him. Never will be.”

—MIKE HELTON
FORMER NASCAR
PRESIDENT

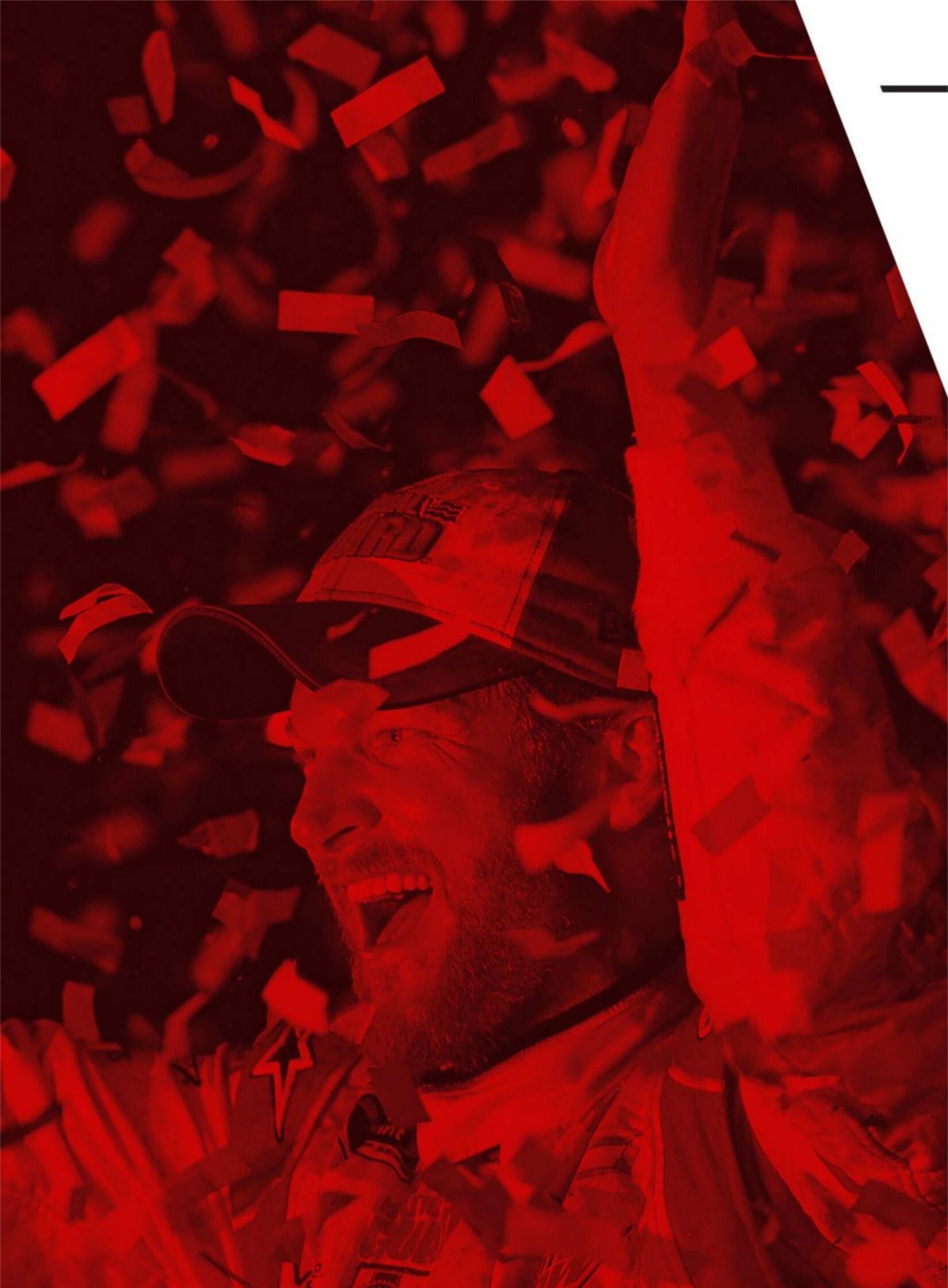
THE EARNHARDTS







CHAPTER 2



DESPITE HIS FATHER'S
LONG SHADOW, **DALE JR.**
MADE A NAME OF HIS OWN





YOU

Dale Earnhardt Jr. stands behind his father in the garage area at Atlanta International Raceway on Nov. 3, 1985 (left).

One of Junior's first forays on the track included this Legends Series race—he is piloting the car in the outside lane (above, far left).

might think that the son of a NASCAR champion driver and leading team owner would have the road smoothly paved for a racing career. But that wasn't quite the way for Dale Earnhardt Jr. Third-generation Kannapolis born, Dale Jr. had the sport in his blood for sure, but it took a while for his ambition to gain traction, buffeted by his father's hard edge and remoteness, both physical and emotional. Racing, the son in time found, was a way to connect. But even that wasn't easy.



Junior (far left, top) talking racing with his father while sitting on the back of a transporter at Charlotte Motor Speedway on May 21, 1998.

The Earnhardts (bottom, from left: Dale Sr., Teresa, Kelley and Dale Jr.) pose with Junior's Busch Series trophy in December 1998.

Earnhardt Jr. with crew chief Tony Eury Jr. (below, center) and Rick Hendrick (right) in 2007, the year Junior jumped to Hendrick Motorsports.

Early on it was running late-model stock cars with his sister Kelley (*she*, many folks say, was the most talented of the third-generation Earnhardts), but after Kelley turned to business, Junior kept his foot to the floor. "I didn't have a vision," he once said. "I just wanted to drive race cars."

He worked his way up to the Busch Series, racing part-time in 1996 and '97 for Dale Earnhardt Inc. (while also working as a mechanic at the old man's dealership), before earning a full-time seat in '98. Proving he had talent and discipline as well as a name, Junior raced his way to two straight Busch Series championships, then made the final step to Cup level piloting the number 8 Budweiser Chevy for DEI.

It was a hell of a run. Though he would never win a Cup championship, he competed at the very

top of the sport for 19 seasons, winning 26 races, including two Daytona 500s and six victories at Talladega. (Like his father, some said, Junior could see the air.) There were struggles along the way. He carried a heavy and very public emotional weight in the wake of his father's death at Daytona in 2001. And in 2007 he made the difficult, painful—and, again, publicly analyzed—decision to leave DEI, then run by his stepmother, Teresa, to go to Hendrick Motorsports. Through it all, Junior remained the sport's most popular driver (voted so by fans 15 years in a row). He was also, championships or not, the face of NASCAR to all of America.

Dale Earnhardt Jr.—or just Junior, as he was better known—was NASCAR's transcendent star. His endorsement deals soared beyond the familiar STP and Goodyear to the likes of Budweiser, Wrangler,





Nationwide, and Drakkar Noir cologne, making him a perennial on Forbes' Highest-Paid Athletes list. And never mind the car mags and ESPN, he was profiled in *Rolling Stone*, interviewed in *Playboy*, featured in *People* magazine's "Sexiest Man" issue, and showcased on MTV's *Cribs*. This wasn't your father's idea of a stock-car driver—and Lord knows it wasn't *his* father's. But it worked for Junior and it breathed a whole new life into the sport.

In the course of his career, all played out under a white-hot spotlight, Earnhardt evolved. He may have started out as a kid who just wanted to run races and, in between, kick back and maybe drink a few beers, but he became a committed husband, business man, team owner, and thoughtful voice

of authority. His own full-time driving career ended after the 2017 season. He had been forced to miss the second half of the previous season due to a concussion. (He had previously sustained two concussions in 2012.) "Once I realized how delicate things are, it's something I had to start thinking about quite seriously," he said when announcing his decision to retire. He then added, "I've accomplished way more than I ever dreamed, way more than I ever thought I would accomplish. So I'm good on that front."

And so is NASCAR, as the sport's favorite son carries on the Earnhardt legacy through broadcasting, podcasting, and, hell yeah, the occasional Xfinity drive.

Junior with his wife, Amy, and daughters (above, from left), Nicole and Isla, before a NASCAR Xfinity Series race at Richmond Raceway in 2021.

Junior prepares for the start of the NASCAR Xfinity Series Food City 300 at Bristol Motor Speedway on Sept. 15, 2023 (right).



Dale Earnhardt Jr. and his father (far right) celebrate winning the 1998 Busch Series title at Homestead-Miami Speedway.

JUNIOR'S GREATEST

LITTLE E'S CAREER HIGHLIGHTS

Dale Earnhardt Jr. never won a championship at NASCAR's highest level, but it's safe to say that on pretty much every one of the 179,429 laps he ran in his 631 Cup races over 19 years, no other driver had as many fans watching his every move and cheering him on. Junior felt that connection and it drove him to some of the sport's most memorable moments. Consider these achievements.



10

1998

JIFFY LUBE MIAMI 300

Earnhardt, 24, came into the final race of the season in the Busch Series (NASCAR's second-highest division) with a 166-point lead over Matt Kenseth. To clinch the title, all Junior had to do was start the race at Homestead Speedway. And that's about all he did, blowing an engine on Lap 89. It was enough, and even as the race roared on, the new champ saluted the fans while standing atop his smoking car.

9

1998

COCA-COLA 500

A week after winning his first Busch Series championship, Junior made his first start in a Cup race. It was only an exhibition—and he had to go all the way to Montegi, Japan—but it must have felt very close to home, for it was also the first time that Earnhardt Jr. competed against his father in a NASCAR race. The kid did all right, taking ninth place to the old man's 15th.





8

2001

MBNA CAL RIPKEN Jr. 400



Just 12 days after the 9/11 terrorist attacks, NASCAR returned to racing. Dover International Speedway was a sea of red, white and blue, with 170,000 flag-waving fans determined to show their resilience and patriotism. Junior passed Dale Jarrett with 37 laps left on the Monster Mile to take the win. Handed a large American flag by a crew member, Earnhardt waved it from his window on an unforgettable victory lap.

7

2004 SHARPIE 500

Riding a 12-race winless streak and recovering from burns sustained in a sports car race a month before, Junior came to Bristol looking to turn his luck around. He did so in style, winning the Busch event on Friday and dominating the Cup race on Saturday for his first victory at the track where his father had won nine times. Junior's exultant shout in Victory Lane—"It's Bristol, baby!"—would become the track's celebrated slogan.



Junior proudly waves Old Glory during his victory lap after his win at Dover International Speedway on Sept. 23, 2001 (left).

Earnhardt Jr. broke a 12-race winless streak with a dominant victory in the Cup race at Bristol on Aug. 28, 2004 (above).

Junior (below, behind trophy) and his crew celebrate his first Cup victory, in the DirecTV 500 at Texas Motor Speedway on April 2, 2000.

Junior exults amidst a shower of confetti at Daytona International Speedway after winning his second Daytona 500, on Feb. 23, 2014 (right).



6

2000 DIRECTV 500

Call it a Texas two-step: At Texas Motor Speedway, the site two years before of his first Busch Series victory, Dale Jr. delivered a polished and dominant performance to win his first race at NASCAR's highest level. It was just his 12th Cup start. The victory earned Junior a proud embrace from the race's seventh-place finisher—a certain seven-time champ, who said of his son, "The kid's something else!"

5 2014 DAYTONA 500



In his 2018 memoir, *Racing to the Finish*, Junior wrote that there are "only one or two times in your career when you take the checkered flag and go, Man that day was dang near perfect. The 2014 Daytona 500 was one of those days." Ten years after his first victory in the Great American Race, Earnhardt, 39, got his second, radioing to his crew after crossing the line, "This is better than the first one!"





4 2003 AARON'S 499



As a driver, Dale Jr. was most like his father on NASCAR's restrictor-plate tracks, both of them masters of the 190-mph slicing and dicing required to win. Junior's victory at Talladega in the spring of 2003 was his fourth-straight victory at that most daunting of challenges, a feat unlikely to be matched. He took the win despite sustaining damage in an early 27-car Talladega "Big One." Said Junior afterward, "That took everything I had."

Holding the trophy aloft, Junior is all smiles in Victory Lane after winning the Aaron's 499 at Talladega on April 6, 2003 (left).

On May 20, 2000, Junior (above) became the first rookie to win NASCAR's All-Star race, besting a field that included his father.



3

2000 THE WINSTON

Junior would recall that, as a Cup rookie, he was just glad to be in the field for NASCAR's All-Star race, adding, "Winning never crossed my mind!" Yet he ran with the established stars all night and, with a bold call to take four tires on a final pit stop, drove away to become the first rookie winner in the event's history. The victory brought Little E \$500,000—and a touching father-son celebration.

2

2004 DAYTONA 500

Making just his sixth start in the 500—on the sixth anniversary of his father’s only victory in the Great American Race—Earnhardt Jr. produced a timeless win. Earnhardt slipped past Tony Stewart for the lead with 20 laps to go, and then hung on to the flag. “It takes a little less than a minute to get around that track,” he would recall. “It seemed like every lap took ten minutes to run.”



Jeff Gordon (above, 24) running side by side with Junior in the Daytona 500 on Feb. 18, 2004—three years to the day after Dale Sr. died.

Earnhardt Jr. (right) scored an emotional victory at Daytona less than five months after his father’s death at the superspeedway.

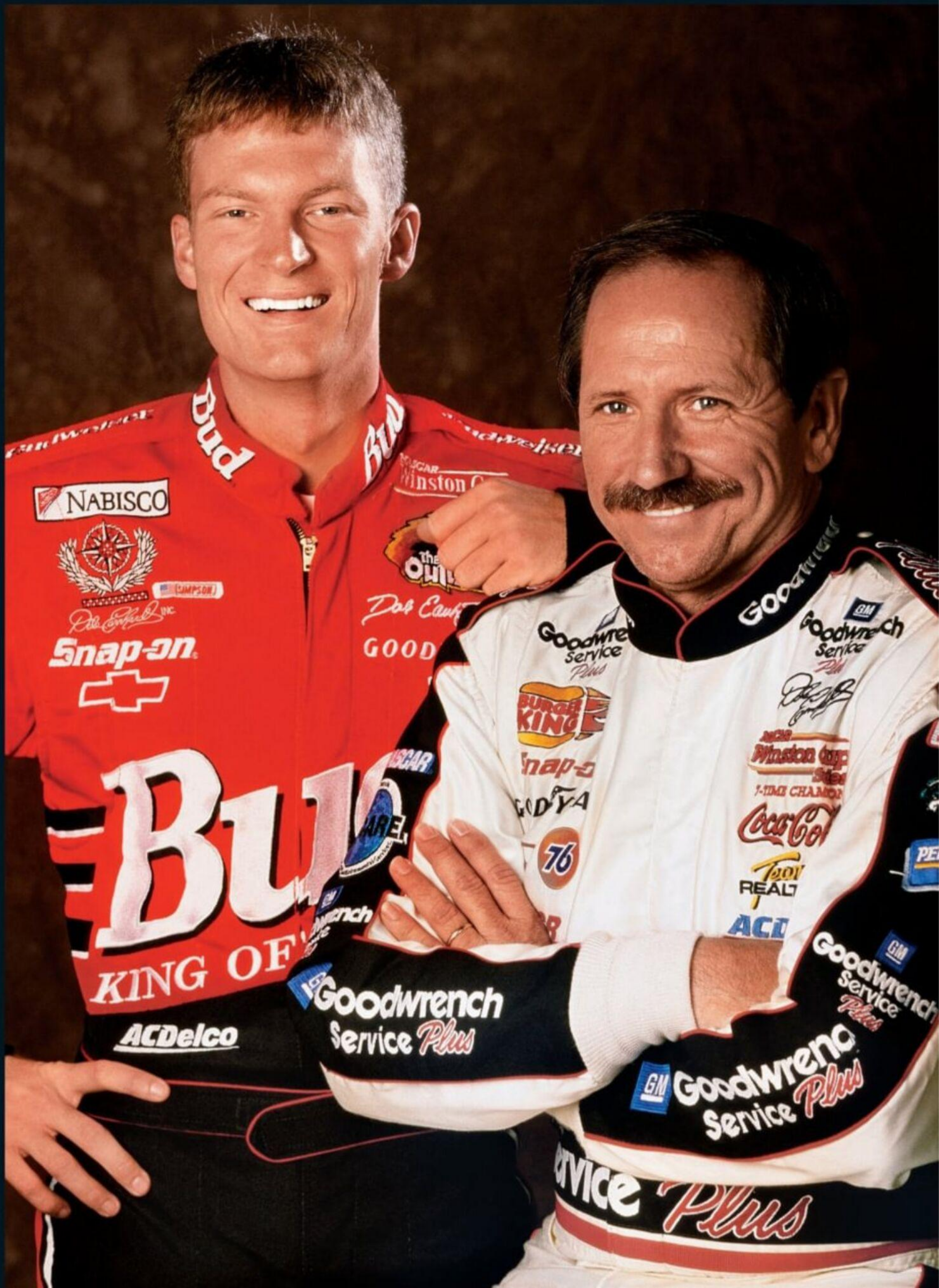
1

2001 PEPSI 400



NASCAR returned to Daytona less than five months after Dale Earnhardt Sr.’s fatal accident in the season-opening 500, and for everyone involved in the sport—fans, drivers and crews alike—the sense of loss was palpable. Driving the number 8 car owned by his father’s DEI Racing team, Junior dominated from the start and, with a final push from teammate Darrell Waltrip, scored an emotional and healing victory that he dedicated to Senior.





The Earnhardts—Dale Sr. (3) and Dale Jr. (8)—running two-wide during a Cup race. Junior had become a driver to get closer to his father.



FATHER & SON

THEIR RELATIONSHIP WAS
COMPLICATED, BUT AT THE HEART WAS
MUTUAL LOVE AND RESPECT

IT wasn't easy growing up the son of a man known as the Intimidator. In a 2023 interview on *In Depth with Graham Bensinger*, Dale Earnhardt Jr. made a revealing statement. "The only reason I raced," he said, "was to get closer to my dad." That dad, like his own dad before him, was fully and fiercely immersed in his racing career. To young Dale, it seemed that the path to connection lay on the racetrack. And, indeed, as his own passion for the sport emerged, so too did a new relationship with his father. "Finally," Junior would recall, "when I started racing and I won a couple of races, we would talk."

That connection would deepen as the years and miles went by. Their first race together was in a Cup exhibition in Japan in 1998. For Junior, coming off his second straight Busch Series title, it was an unforgettable moment. "The feeling I got being on the racetrack with my dad was far better than winning the championship," he said. Their time together would be cut tragically short with Dale Sr.'s death in 2001, but for Junior the bond remains. In 2020, retired and happily married with his own family, Junior said in an interview, "Maybe he can see all this. Maybe he is looking down and proud."

THE LEGACY

JUNIOR'S CLASS AND OPENNESS EARNED
HIM ETERNALLY
LOYAL FANS OF HIS OWN



“

He is so popular, he's got that single-name-fame thing going. You know, you got Bono and you got Sting and you got Cher—and you got Junior. That's it.”

—KYLE PETTY
LONGTIME CUP DRIVER
TURNED RACING
COMMENTATOR

“

What has surprised me about Dale in getting to know him is how much he wants to succeed. He's a simple, humble, honest guy, and man, he's working his ass off.”

—JIMMIE JOHNSON
SEVEN-TIME NASCAR
CUP CHAMPION

“

He's as talented as any driver out there.”

—MATT KENSETH
TWO-TIME DAYTONA
500 WINNER



“

Junior has the weight of the NASCAR World on his shoulders.”

—MARK MARTIN
WINNER OF 40 CUP
RACES



“

I think that most people know that Dale's got an unbelievable heart. We were going through a recession and [every team] was adjusting pay... and he came up to me and said, 'Listen, I don't want any of my team to suffer; I'm gonna take a million dollars out of my salary and I'm gonna give it to the company to pay my people.'”

—RICK HENDRICK
TEAM OWNER
OF HENDRICK
MOTORSPORTS

“

His humility really set him apart in a lot of ways. He has a massive fan base, a ton of sponsors, and made a ton of money. But he never bragged about what he had, or what he had accomplished.”

—BRAD KESELOWSKI
2012 NASCAR CUP
CHAMPION



CHAPTER 3



THE ROAD

**RACING CHANGES,
BUT THE EARNHARDT
FAMILY ENDURES**

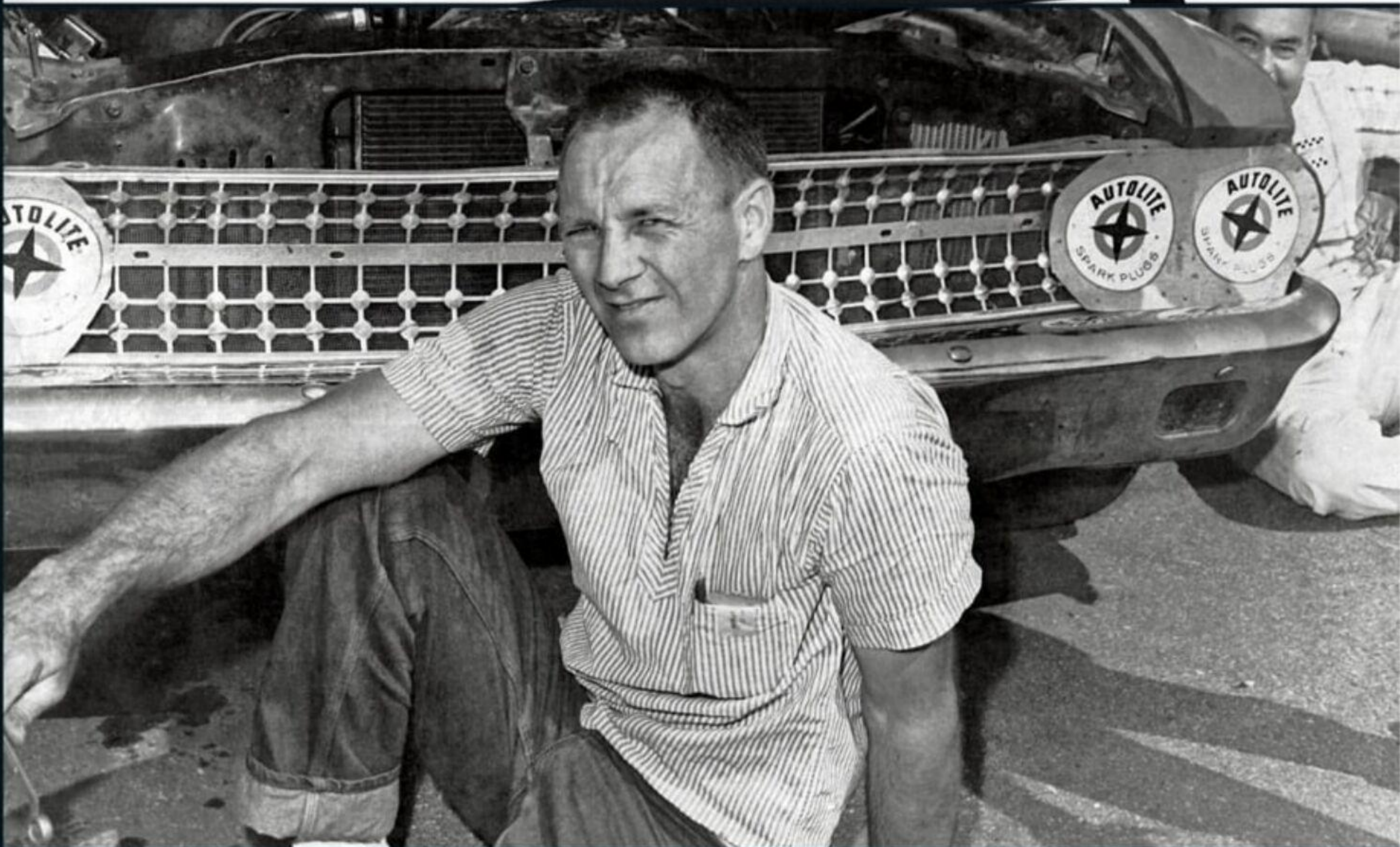
WALL



Rajah E. Caban



Ralph Earnhardt





Every

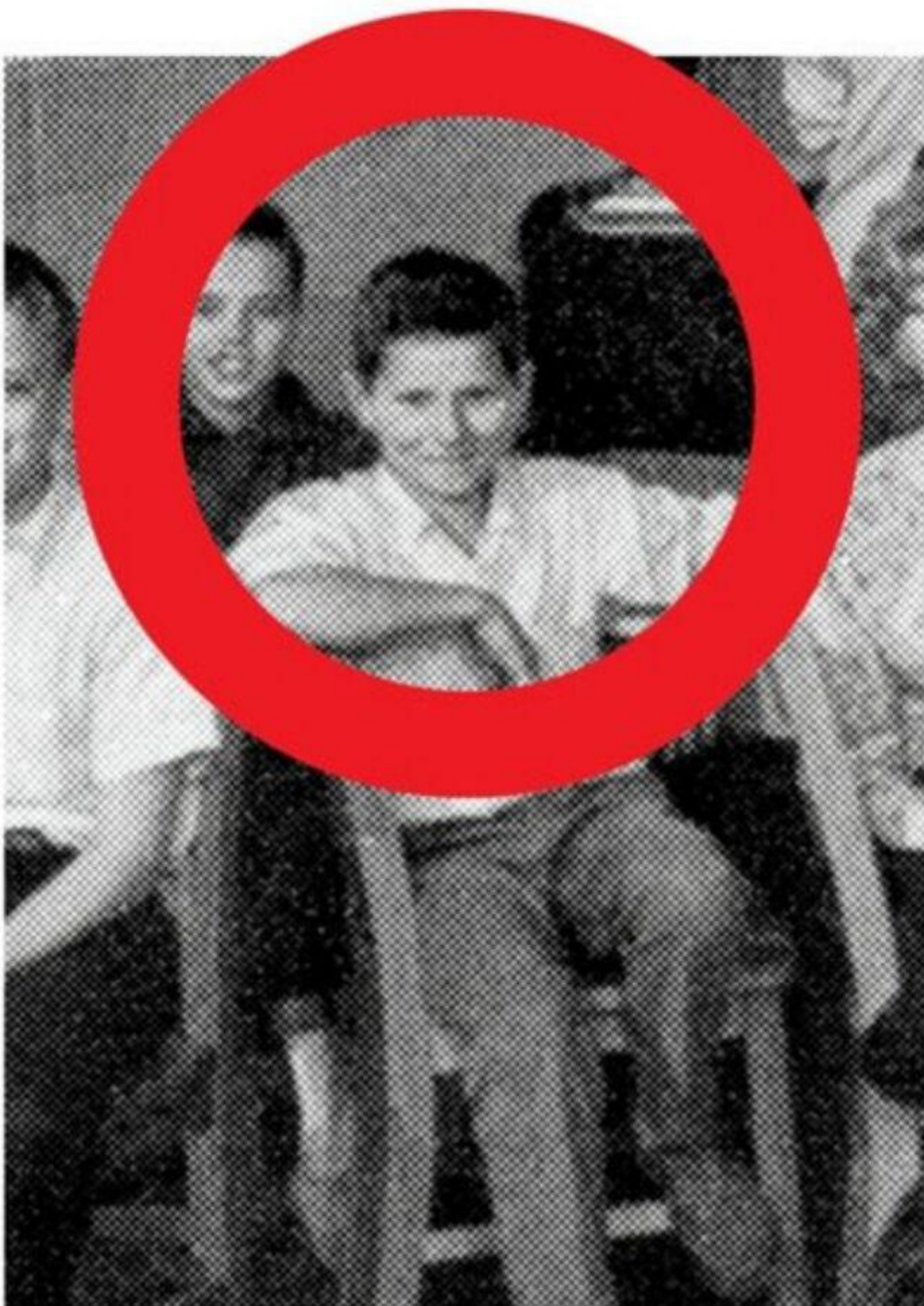
race driver straps into his, or her, car alone. But from the very first lap of that driver's first race, a whole family is riding along. That's been true for the Earnhardts since the start.

It was that way back in Kannapolis, North Carolina, in the late 1940s, when Ralph spent his precious hours away from the cotton mill building those first race cars in his garage and then bringing his dirt track winnings home to put food on the table for his wife and five kids. Martha Earnhardt not only supported her husband's career, keeping her fears hidden and giving him leave to go full-time, she once even drove in a race herself. That outing, in a "ladies" race at Hickory Speedway in North Carolina, ended when she rolled Ralph's car.

And then, of course, there was Ralph's first-born son, Dale, who idolized his dad and grew up in the garages and at the tracks, soaking up every drop of automotive knowledge Ralph had to give. Stubborn

Family patriarch Ralph Earnhardt posing with his race cars in the 1950s (left, top), and in 1965 (left, bottom).

Ralph Earnhardt's wife, Martha (above), once raced in a "ladies" event in Hickory, North Carolina—and rolled her husband's car.



and ambitious (and focused on his career through three marriages) Dale would take the Earnhardt name to the very pinnacle of the racing world. And, yes, his family would share—and continue—the drive.

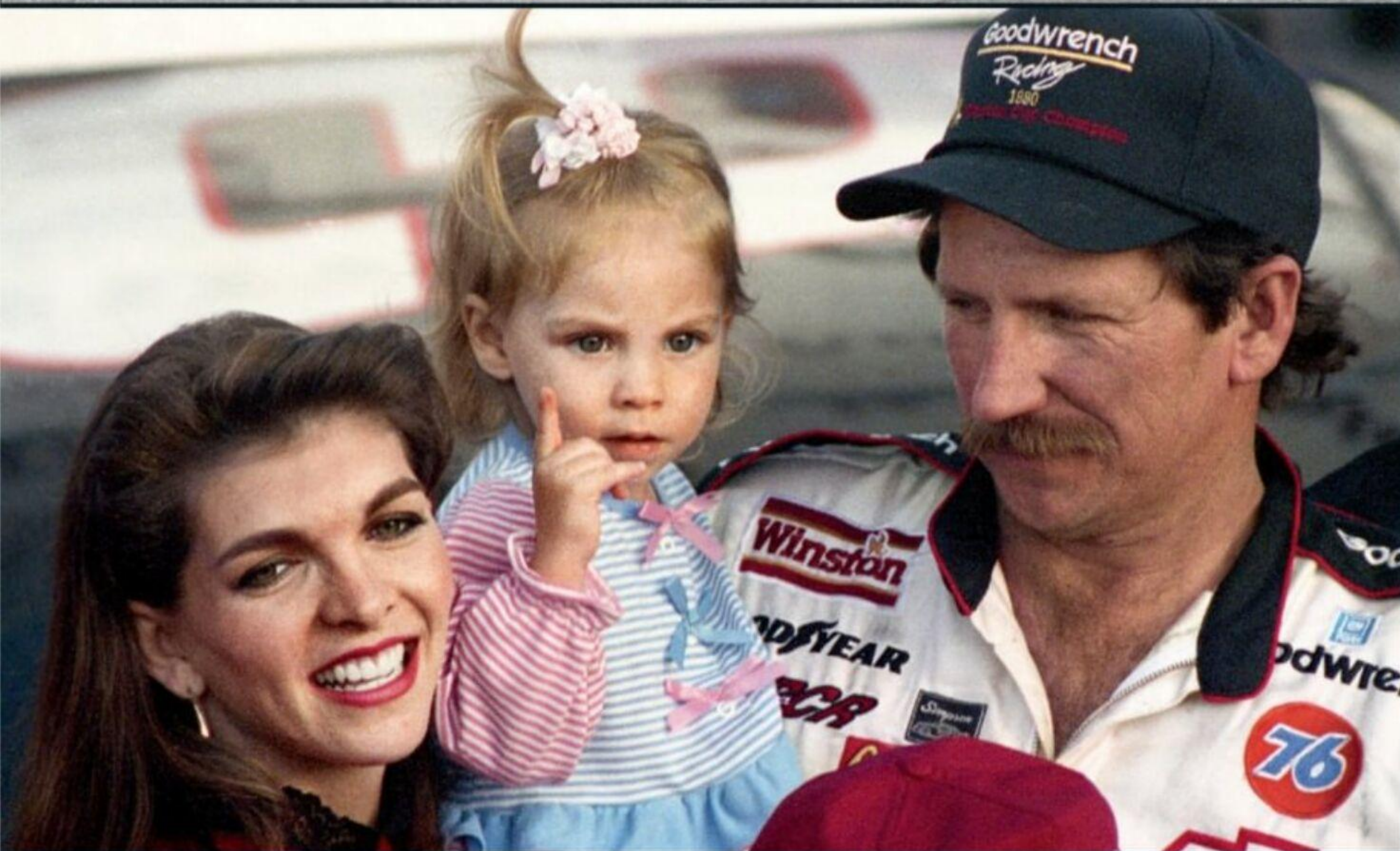
Dale's first child, son Kerry, was born when Dale was just 18 and married to his first wife, Latane Brown. Though Dale and Latane divorced before Kerry turned 2 and the boy grew up without really knowing his father, Kerry would still become a race driver. The Earnhardt who bears the closest physical resemblance to Dale Sr., Kerry drove for 10 years in NASCAR's Xfinity Series and made seven Cup starts.

Dale Sr.'s second marriage, to Brenda Gee, the daughter of noted NASCAR car builder Robert Gee, would also end in divorce, but not before producing a daughter, Kelley, and a son, Dale Jr., both of whom are still active in the racing world.

A third marriage, to Teresa Houston, would last until Dale Sr.'s death in 2001. Raised in a racing family herself (her uncle Tommy Houston was a longtime Busch Series driver), Teresa joined with her husband to form Dale Earnhardt, Inc. The organization made its Cup debut in 1996. Though

Dale Earnhardt when he was in the sixth (left, top) and seventh (left, bottom) grades in Kannapolis, North Carolina, in 1965 and '66.

Earnhardt with his third wife, Teresa, at Daytona in 1982 (right, top), and with their daughter, Taylor, in 1990 in Atlanta (right, bottom).





The car driven by Bobby Dale Earnhardt (66) spins during practice for an Xfinity Series race at Texas Motor Speedway on Nov. 2, 2018.

Jeffrey Earnhardt (left, bottom)—Bobby Dale's younger brother—has driven in 76 Cup races, including two Daytona 500s.

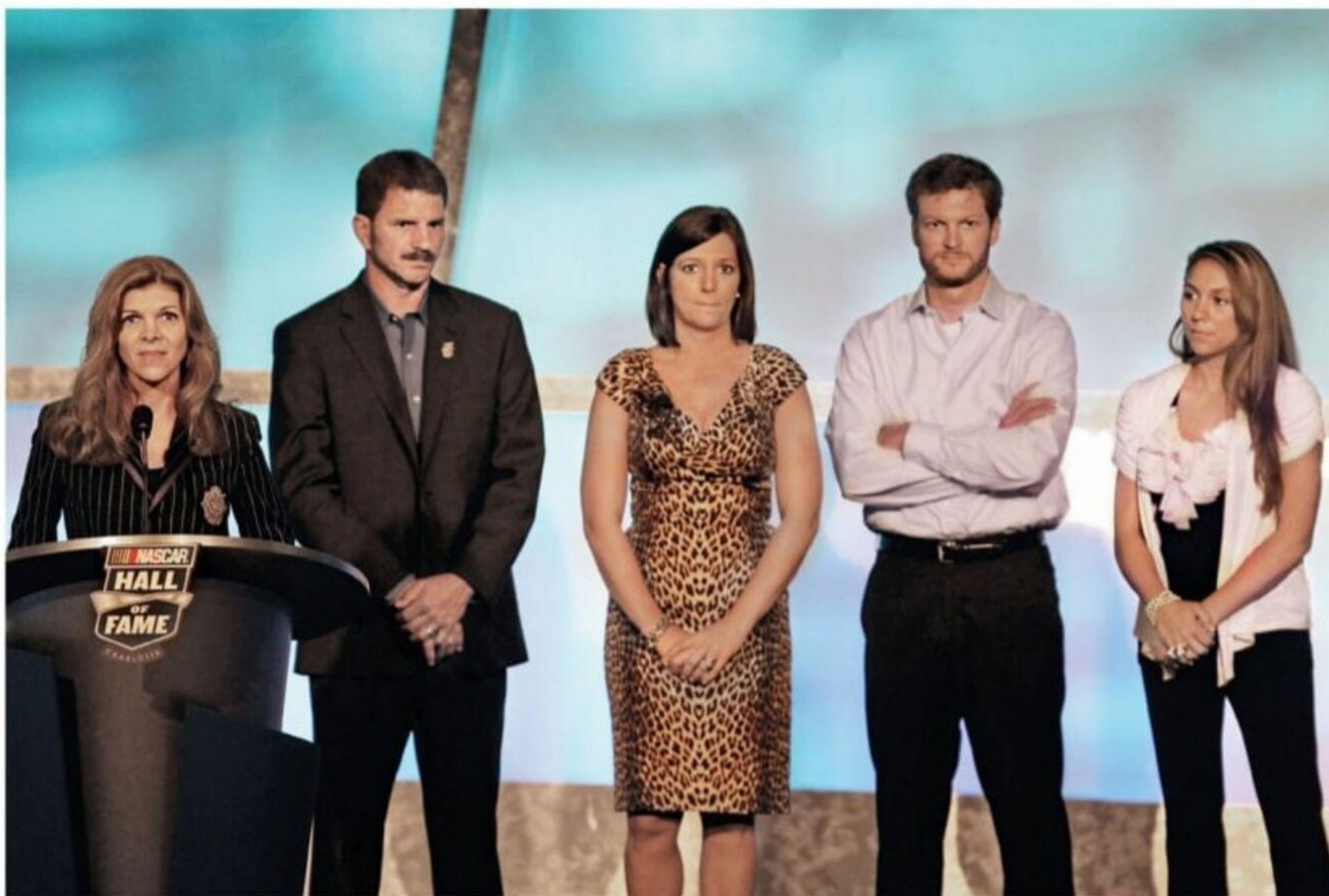
Teresa Earnhardt speaks at Dale Sr.'s 2010 NASCAR Hall of Fame induction (below) with his kids: (from left) Kerry, Kelley, Dale Jr. and Taylor.

he was co-owner, Dale Sr. never raced for DEI in the Cup Series, but Dale Jr. piloted the number 8 Budweiser Chevy for the team until a contentious split between Junior and his stepmother in 2007. Teresa continued to head the operation after her husband's death. In all DEI would win 107 races across NASCAR's national series, collecting four Xfinity Series championships and two titles in the Truck Series.

Two fourth-generation Earnhardts have carried on the famous name behind the wheel. Bobby Dale Earnhardt, Kerry's eldest son, competed in the Xfinity Series, and his brother Jeffrey has driven in 76 Cup races, including two Daytona 500s, and is still competing in the Xfinity Series.

Right now, though, the driving force in the Earnhardt racing family lies with Dale Jr. and his sister Kelley. A racer herself up through college ("hardheaded and tough and drove hard," as Junior described her to ESPN in 2010), Kelley eventually took her competitive passion to the business side of the sport. She is the CEO and co-owner—along with her brother, her husband L.W. Miller (another former race driver in the family), and NASCAR Hall of Famer Rick Hendrick—of JR Motorsports. Now in its 22nd year, the team has won three Xfinity championships (2014, 2017, and 2018), and brother and sister are talking of a possible move up to Cup level.

Ralph would no doubt approve.







CHAPTER 4

A member of Dale Earnhardt Sr.'s racing team (at Daytona in 1985) holds a pit board used to help drivers locate their stalls during pit stops.

DYNASTY BY THE NUMBERS

TEN AMAZING STATISTICS ABOUT THE EARNHARDT FAMILY

There's a hard-nosed attitude in racing that the only number that matters is 1—as in who's first across the finish line. But in a sport that records every lap run and times everything down to the thousandth of a second, there are any number of numbers that make a richer picture—especially when considering a family that over the course of seven decades has been at the heart of NASCAR. Here are 10 of the most significant.

3

Iconic car number for Dale Earnhardt Sr. Piloting the 3, Earnhardt won 67 races in 529 starts. He drove with eight other numbers during his career, for a total of 147 starts, but the only other numbers he reached Victory Lane with were 2 (six times) and 15 (three times). In tribute after his death, fans at Daytona began a tradition of standing with three fingers raised for the third lap of the race.

8

The other iconic Earnhardt number. Ralph Earnhardt used the number 8 on his Late Model car, and Dale Jr. took it as his number at the start of his Cup career. When he left DEI after the 2007 season, stepmother Teresa Earnhardt maintained the rights to the 8 so Junior doubled down, sporting number 88 at Hendrick Motorsports. Little E won 17 races in the number 8 and nine in the 88.





Earnhardt (left, 3) races with Jeff Gordon during the 1993 Daytona 500. Despite leading a race-high 107 laps, Earnhardt finished second.

686 & 1

The first number represents the laps led by Dale Earnhardt Sr. in his 23 Daytona 500s. That total puts him second only to the 780 laps that Richard Petty led on the way to his record seven victories in the Great American Race. The second figure is the number of times Earnhardt led at the finish of the final lap of the 500—in his iconic 1998 victory.

33

Races at Daytona *besides* the 1998 500 won by Dale Sr. He had two victories in the midsummer 400, won the February Busch Series 300 seven times and the SpeedWeeks Shootout race six times, captured 12 pre-500 qualifiers, and added six victories in the International Race of Champions, a series that pitted drivers from different disciplines in identically prepared cars in races at Daytona from 1975 to 2006.

16

Combined number of Cup races won at Talladega by Dale Earnhardt Sr. (10) and Dale Jr. (6). Though the racing styles of father and son were very different, both were masters on NASCAR's superspeedways. At 'Dega, the 2.66-mile Alabama monster where cars run in vast slipstreaming packs inches apart at 190 mph, and the Big One lurks on every lap, Senior and Junior always seemed to lead the way.

Dale Earnhardt Jr. (below) won NASCAR's most popular driver award every year from 2003 to 2017. His father won it just once.

In 2001, Dale Sr. and Dale Jr. competed in the 24 Hours of Daytona endurance race with (from near right) Kelly Collins and Andy Pilgrim.



1615

NASCAR Cup Most Popular Driver Awards won, respectively, by Dale Earnhardt and Dale Earnhardt Jr. During their careers. The Intimidator removed his name from contention, but he won posthumously in 2001 following his death at Daytona. Junior won for the first time in 2003 and every year after that until his retirement in 2017. His total ranks him second only to Bill Elliott, who won 16 times between 1984 and 2002.

24

Hours of racing in the 2001 Rolex 24 Hours of Daytona. For the sports car endurance race held on Daytona's road course, Dale Sr. and Junior competed as part of a four-driver team, along with sports car stars Andy Pilgrim and Kelly Collins. Driving the number 3 C5R Corvette, they finished second in class and fourth overall—a very respectable finish, despite Senior's post-race comment to Pilgrim: "Second sucks, doesn't it, son?"





Driver Marshall Teague posing in the Fabulous Hudson Hornet he piloted to victory on the beach in Daytona, Florida, in 1951.

3.1 MILLION

Viewers for the TV premiere of the September 2007 documentary *Dale*, a record at the time for the CMT network. The film, narrated by Paul Newman, covered Dale Earnhardt Sr.'s life and career up through his death and had opened in theaters in select cities in February that year, in conjunction with the Daytona 500. The film's tagline: "Behind the wheel he was a legend... Behind the legend he was one of us."

75+

Automotive carcasses in Dale Earnhardt Jr.'s own private Racecar Graveyard. Among the acreage of wrecked cars Junior has assembled in a wooded area of a North Carolina property he calls Dirty Mo Acres are the number 42 Chevy that Juan Pablo Montoya infamously drove into the jet dryer at Daytona in 2012, the number 48 that Jimmie Johnson wrecked in qualifying at Phoenix in '16, and about a dozen of Little E's own former rides.

18

Cars chosen by Dale Earnhardt Jr. when he personally curated the 2020 edition of the NASCAR Hall of Fame's Glory Road exhibit. The models showcased ranged from Herb Thomas' 1951 Hudson Hornet (the model a half century later for the cartoon character Doc Hudson in Disney's *Cars*) to the Lowe's Chevy Jimmie Johnson drove to his seventh Cup title in 2016. Junior also included two of his dad's rides as well.

A diecast model of Dale Earnhardt Sr.'s iconic black number 3 car (below) is still a popular piece of NASCAR merchandise.

Dale Earnhardt Jr. (near right) poses with his father on pit road before a Cup race at Michigan Speedway on Aug. 20, 2000.



EPILOGUE

WHY WE LOVE THE EARNHARDTS

THE FAMILY IS STILL
THE HEART AND SOUL OF NASCAR



When Lionel Racing, NASCAR's official maker of diecast models, revealed its top 10 bestsellers for 2023, all were cars piloted by current drivers—save two. In fifth place was Dale Earnhardt Sr.'s 1998 Daytona 500-winning Chevy, and in ninth was Dale Earnhardt Jr.'s Bass Pro Shops late-model.

NASCAR fans don't root for teams, they root for drivers. And the merchandise they buy by the truckload—T-shirts, caps, flags, and those meticulously detailed diecasts, each a 1/24-scale reproduction of a particular car from a specific race—is a direct reflection of their passion for that pilot. That the Earnhardts, father and son, are right there, mid-pack, dicing with the cream of today's stars, is testimony to the enduring love felt for both. It's also a reflection of the fact that what they brought to the sport—intensity, excitement, style, and a rich legacy—remains essential to the NASCAR experience.

When it comes to personal merchandising, of course, Earnhardt Sr. pretty much created, as they







Earnhardt Jr. signing autographs during qualifying for the Michigan 400 at Michigan International Speedway on Aug. 14, 2009.





say in NASCAR, that whole deal. Through copy-righting his name and marketing products with his signature, his nicknames, and his image, he made a fortune and showed the way for every driver that followed. He's still going strong. In 2022, NASCAR's promotional arm partnered with Senior's estate to create a new line of merchandise around him.

Junior, who in 2022 joined his father in the NASCAR Hall of Fame, remains a significant presence in the sport. He is co-owner, along with

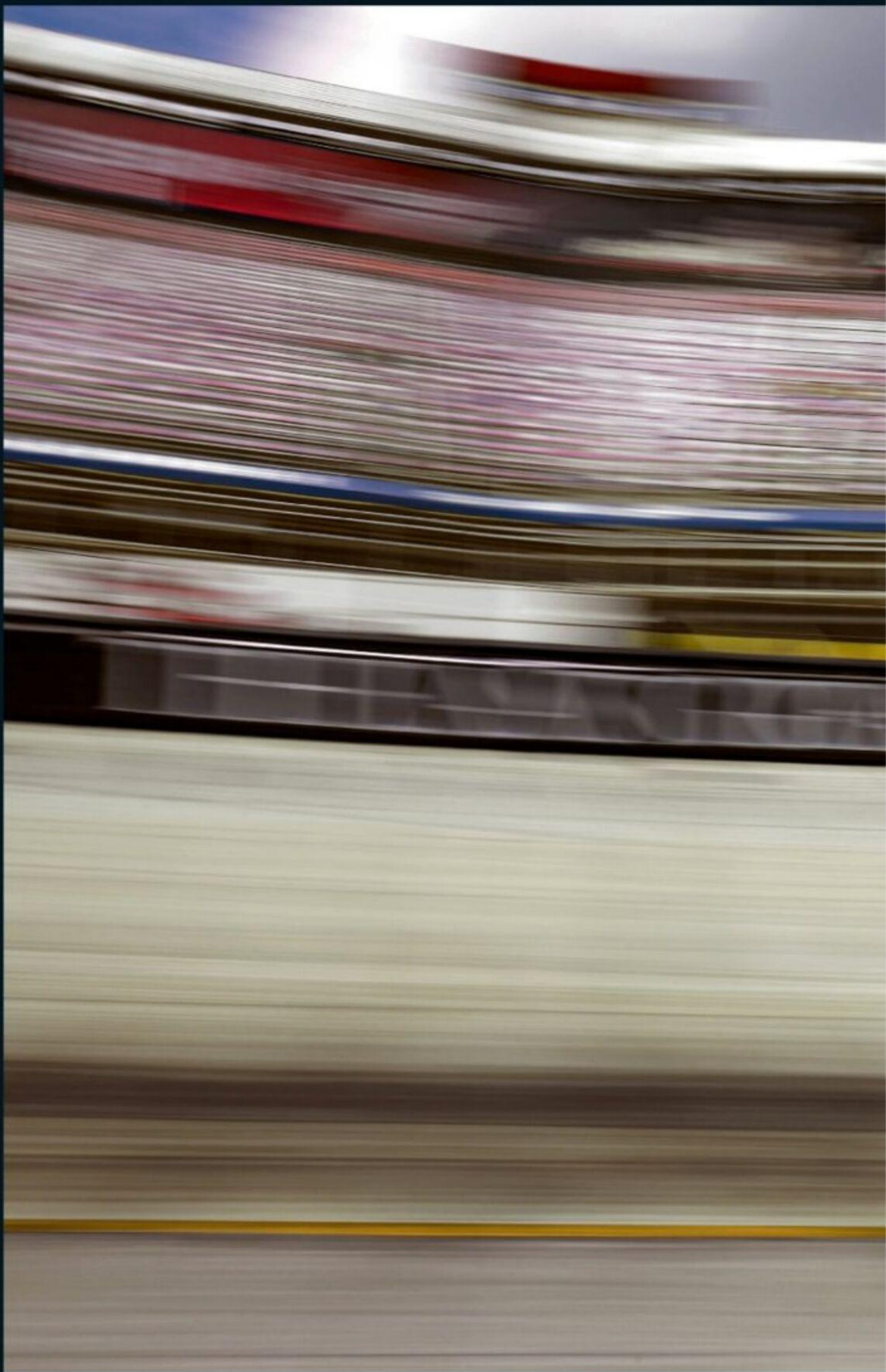
his sister Kelley, of JR Motorsports, running teams in NASCAR's Craftsman Truck and Infinity Series and—the buzz has it—eyeing the Cup Series. He even still takes the wheel in select Late Model races. He also serves as an analyst for NBC's NASCAR coverage, bringing both insight and signature high-pitched excitement to the telecasts.

More than anyone else, Dale Earnhardt Jr. is doing something profoundly important in NASCAR: putting the sport's current and increasingly diverse

The Chevy Impala that Junior drove to victory in a 2010 Nationwide Series race on display at the NASCAR Hall of Fame (left).

Junior (above) is a member of the class of 2021 at the NASCAR Hall of Fame, but wasn't inducted until 2022 due to the Covid-19 pandemic.

Earnhardt Jr. drives the number 88 Hellmann's Chevrolet during qualifying for a NASCAR Xfinity Series race at Bristol in 2023.







fan base in touch with the stars, the history, and the passion of its past. On his enormously popular *Dale Jr. Download* podcast, Earnhardt discusses the latest racing news and shares memories and stories—and even goes deeply personal into family matters and his own issues—with guests that include current top drivers and owners, as well as such past giants as Darrell Waltrip and Richard Petty.

As one NASCAR fan—not a Junior fan back in the day, he made clear—posted on Reddit, “Then along comes the *Dale Jr Download*.... This is where things changed for me completely on Junior. I love the fact that he talks about the past in NASCAR. I can’t wait for the episodes to come out.”

Another poster who had discovered the podcast responded: “I don’t have a favorite driver in the sport today, but I do have a favorite personality, and it’s Dale Jr.”

Junior doesn’t just talk about the past, he’s helping to give it new life. He is one of the owners of the CARS Tour racing series, which hosts events at historic tracks throughout the Southeast. One of those tracks, the 5/8-mile North Wilkesboro Speedway in North Carolina, long a fixture on the Cup circuit, had been dropped from the calendar in 1996 and fallen into disrepair. Junior led a move to rebuild and relaunch the track, and in 2023 it hosted NASCAR’s All-Star race.

There may just be more history to come as far as what we love and need about the Earnhardts in NASCAR. Keep an eye out for *The Thriller*, Wyatt Miller. The 12-year-old son of Kelley Earnhardt Miller and husband L.W. is already winning championships in Micro Class dirt racing. That’s Earnhardt Gen IV, a legacy that keeps on giving to fans of yesterday, today and beyond.

Earnhardt Sr. drives his black number 3 to the front during the First Union 400 at North Wilkesboro Speedway on April 12, 1992 (above).

Junior (right, top, 3) raced at the renovated North Wilkesboro in 2022. A year later, the track hosted the NASCAR All-Star race (right).



EARNHARDTS

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