

Dale Jr: Race Car Driver

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Dale Jr Timeline

Since his first NASCAR Busch race in Myrtle Beach, South Carolina in 1996 Dale Earnhardt Jr has set NASCAR on fire. But, if you ask, he'll likely tell you there is much left to be done.

With 18 Victories on the premiere Sprint Cup circuit Junior ranks 39th on the all-time win list for NASCAR's modern era. He's earned 8poles along the way, and earned a total of \$57 million in career winnings. That's just in the Cup series.

Dale Jr has won at Daytona with a victory in the 2004 Daytona 500, and the 2001 Pepsi 400.

He's won at Talladega -- 5 times -- including 4 consecutive victories.

Now Earnhardt has his sights set on a Sprint Cup Championship. He's been a contender in the past, finishing 3rd in the final standings to Matt Kenseth in 2003. He qualified for the Chase For The Sprint Cup in 2004, and again in 2006 and 2008.

At 17 years old Dale Jr began his racing career with a little help from his brother, Kerry. The 2 got their hands on an old 1979 Chevrolet Monte Carlo race car and entered it in the Street Stock division at Concord Motorsports Park near Charlotte with Dale Jr at the wheel.

They didn't exactly have the best equipment. Junior purchased that 1st car for \$200, with him and Kerry, and a few friends, serving as mechanics and crew. Corporate sponsors and help from Dad's race team were still a long way off.

Still, Junior managed to earn 3 victories racing late models around North Carolina. But more importantly, he got an education on building a race car and dialing in a chassis set-up. This information would prove invaluable in communicating with his crew chief when he moved first to Busch, and then to the Cup series.

When he turned 18 Dale Jr moved out of his Father's comfortable home in search of independence. He and older brother Kerry shared a double-wide trailer in Mooresville.

"They tried to put me in an adult situation. Kerry and I started splitting the bills and trying to get everything taken care of," Junior said. "I was working changing oil in my dad's dealership."

"They never gave us money for racing. If we were behind on the bills, they let us be behind until we caught up and learned what that feels like to go through struggling with credit and things like that," he said.

Dale Earnhardt had been the long-time driver of the No. 3 Chevrolet owned by Richard Childress Racing when he started his own Busch team, Dale Earnhardt, Inc. His shop had fielded Busch entries for Neil Bonnett, Steve Park, Michael Waltrip, and occasionally The Intimidator himself.

That's when Earnhardt had asked his crew chief and long-time friend Tony Eury if he thought Dale Jr could make it in the Busch series.

"I remember Dale coming up to me and asking if I could make a driver out of Dale Jr.," Eury said. "My remark to him was I don't know why we can't. Why would you want to spend money on someone else's kid when you can spend money on your own kid?"

Earnhardt Jr competed in his 1st Busch race, without a sponsor, at Myrtle Beach Speedway on June 22, 1996. He finished 14th that 1st race, his only Busch start of the season. 2 years later he would be the Busch Champion.

In 1997 he competed in 8 Busch races, but only finished in 4 of them. He was sidelined by a crash at Gateway in July. Engine problems put him out in Nashville and at the road course in Watkins Glen, and he was forced to park his car at Fontana, California due to handling problems.

In 1998 business started to pick up. Earnhardt was now a Busch regular, competing in all 31 events that year, thanks to a sponsorship from ACDelco.

He got off to a rough start at Daytona, crashing after just 81 laps. But by April he would have his 1st win at Texas Motor Speedway.

Junior scored a total of 7 wins and 3 poles in the 1998 season, along with 16 top 5's, and 22 top 10's on the way to his 1st championship.

In 1999 he successfully defended his championship with 6 wins, 3 poles, 18 top 5's, and 22 top 10's.

1999 would also mark Dale Earnhardt's Winston Cup debut. He competed in 5 races in preparation for a move to Cup full time in 2000.

The 2000 Cup season would bring Junior his first win in NASCAR's top division. On April 2, 2000 he won his 1st Cup race at the site of his 1st Busch victory, Texas Motor Speedway.

For 6 years straight, beginning in 2003, Dale Jr has won the Chex Most Popular Driver Award. This contest is the result of fans voting for their favorite driver, and Junior is clearly a fan favorite. He is currently in the lead for 2009.

2003 would bring 3 more victories including Daytona's July 4th weekend Pepsi 400. He had 13 top 5's, and 21 top 10's, finishing 3rd in the final championship standings.

Dale Jr started 2004 out with a bang winning the season opening Daytona 500 in February. He was also victorious the next day in the

Hershey's Kisses 300 Busch race that had been delayed due to rain on Saturday.

He made 6 visits to Victory Lane in 2004, along with 16 top 5's and 21 top 10's, but saw his championship chances slide near the end of the season. Junior wound up finishing 5th in the final standings.

With almost \$9 million in earnings from the previous year Earnhardt was able to purchase a private jet just prior to the start of the 2005 season. His Learjet 60 is a top of the line executive jet.

In a 2005 shake-up at Dale Earnhardt, Inc, Dale Earnhardt Jr was left without Tony Eury Sr. and Tony Eury Jr in his pits. Tony Eury Sr. had been his crew from 1996 until 2003, with Tony Jr being the car chief and right hand man. In 2004 Eury Jr was promoted to the top spot of crew chief.

Despite the fact that the team won 6 races in 2004 Eury Jr was replaced by DEI management with little-known Pete Rondeau.

Tony Eury Jr was now crew chief of the No.15 of Michael Waltrip, Dale Earnhardt Jr's teammate at DEI. To make matters worse Waltrip was given the cars that Dale Jr had been driving and Junior got Waltrip's old cars.

The Rondeau and Earnhardt pairing never gelled, and by May Pete Rondeau was out and Steve Hmiel was in as Junior's crew chief. Hmiel was able to get Dale Earnhardt Jr his only win of the 2005 season at Chicagoland Speedway. The No. 8 team failed to make the Chase in 2005.

2006 brought a fresh start with Tony Eury Jr back as Dale Jr's crew chief, but it may have been too little, too late. Earnhardt Jr made the Chase For The Sprint Cup, but finished 5th in the final standings. He won only 1 race in 2006, scoring that victory at Richmond in May.

In December 2006 during the off-season tension between Dale Earnhardt Jr and his step-mother Teresa Earnhardt, President of Dale Earnhardt, Inc. finally reached the boiling point.

Teresa Earnhardt seemed to question Dale Earnhardt Jr's commitment to racing and the race team when she was quoted in a Wall Street Journal interview saying "Right now the ball's in his court to decide on whether he wants to be a NASCAR driver or whether he wants to be a public personality."

Dale Jr declined to respond to the comments publicly, but during Daytona's Speedweeks in February 2007 the bomb dropped.

Dale Earnhardt Jr was demanding majority ownership in DEI, and without 51% ownership he would take his driving services elsewhere.

The negotiations went on for months, but appeared to be heading nowhere. Then on May 10, 2007 Dale Earnhardt Jr held a press

conference to announce that he was leaving DEI at the end of the 2007 season.

The move basically put Dale Jr on the open market for teams wanting his services.

After carefully considering all offers, and a firestorm of media and public speculation, Dale Jr announced on June 13, 2007 that he would drive for Rick Hendrick beginning in 2008.

In his first race with his new team Dale Earnhardt Jr scored a win in the 2008 Bud Shootout.

He had one more win in 2008 in the LifeLock 400 at Michigan International Speedway. Earnhardt earned 10 top five finishes and 16 top ten finishes in 2008. He finished the year 12th in the Sprint Cup championship point standings.

2000: Dale Jr's Rookie Year

With 34 races lying ahead of him Dale Earnhardt Jr rolled through the turn 4 tunnel at Daytona in February 2000 as a full-time Winston Cup driver.

Fresh off back to back championships in the Busch series in 1998 and 1999 Earnhardt turned his attention to cup, with a run for Rookie of The Year. While that title would elude him he would find success with 2 Cup wins, and 2 poles -- plus a win in The Winston -- NASCAR's all star race.

At the season-opening Speedweeks in Daytona Dale Jr would attempt to qualify for his 1st Daytona 500 -- 1 of 7 rookies trying to make the field.

Junior finished 4th in the 2nd of 2 Twin 125 qualifying races, earning him an 8th place starting position in the Daytona 500. The next day he drove in the IROC race at Daytona and posted a 5th place finish -- his father won the race.

In his 1st Daytona 500 Junior learned a lesson about drafting and working with other drivers -- the hard way. With 30 laps to go he was in 5th, trailing the No.3 Chevrolet of his father. The 2 battled for position with little give and take, and were quickly shuffled back in the pack.

"He didn't work at all with anybody," Earnhardt Sr said. "He wanted to pass. That's all he wanted to do, so that's why he finished where he did."

But Dale Jr had a different point of view:

"I thought he would be the first one to help me, but he was the last person who wanted to stay behind me," said Earnhardt Jr. "We did more racing than I wanted to. I wanted to stay with him and stay behind him.

"Then, everybody got to racing behind me and it was either pass or be passed."

Junior would wind up finishing 13th -- and Earnhardt Sr finished 21st.

After crashing out of races 2 weeks in a row, 1st at Darlington, then at Bristol, he captured his 1st career win on April 2 at Texas Motor Speedway -- the site of his 1st Busch win as well.

By May 6 Dale Earnhardt Jr had win No. 2 under his belt with a victory in the Pontiac Excitement 400 at Richmond International Raceway -- becoming the only 2 time winner so far in the 2000 season.

The win at Texas had guaranteed Earnhardt a starting spot in The Winston -- NASCAR's All Star race held in Charlotte. He became the 1st rookie to win the all star race with a strong charge to the front after a late race pit stop under caution with just 6 laps remaining.

While this may have been a non-points race there was a lot of pride on the line -- not to mention the \$515,000 he earned for winning the race.

Up next was the Coca Cola 600 -- NASCAR's longest race of the season. This would mark Junior's 2nd appearance in the 600. In 1999 it was his 1st Cup race ever.

This year he would win the pole -- the first ever of his career -- with a speed of 186.034 MPH. He would go on to dominate the early part of the race leading 175 laps before being overtaken by Matt Kenseth on the final pit stop and finishing 4th.

Earnhardt Jr would capture another pole that year, at Michigan on August 20. He would finish the season with 2 wins, 2 top 5's, 5 top 10's, and 2 poles. His effort would earn him a 16th place finish in the championship standings.

His total earnings for that first year were \$2.8 million.

2001: Restrictor Plate Dominator

In 2001 Dale Earnhardt Jr would begin to show his dominance of restrictor plate racetracks, capturing wins at both Daytona and Talladega. He would also win at The Monster Mile; the high banked concrete Dover International Speedway.

He also won 2 poles, one at Atlanta, and one at Texas.

Junior had a strong run in the 43rd Daytona 500 in 2001, leading 13 laps and finishing 2nd to DEI stable-mate Michael Waltrip by just 0.124 seconds. A race had qualified 6th for.

However, the next 6 races would be austere. A crash at Rockingham on lap 1 the week following Daytona would relegate Dale Jr to a last place finish.

At Darlington he finished 34th, 8 laps off the pace. Bristol was only marginally better. He managed only a 31st place showing in the finishing order, 44 laps down.

It wasn't until the Texas race in April that the No.8 Chevrolet began to show signs of life again. Dale Jr must have had the track figured out. After all he won his 1st Busch race there in 1998, and his 1st cup race in 2000.

This time he would claim the Texas pole with a qualifying speed of 190.678 MPH.

This would mark the start of a 7 race streak where he would finish outside the top 10 only twice -- although his first win of the year wouldn't come until he returned to the high banks of Daytona.

In Texas he would lead 107 laps before a lengthy pit stop under caution just 23 laps from the finish put him back in the pack.

With a set of tires that Junior reported as making the car extremely tight, and not wanting to turn in the corners, he still managed to drive back up to an 8th place finish.

When NASCAR headed back to Daytona for the July 4th weekend Pepsi 400 Dale Jr was ready.

He headed to Daytona a few days early to relax with a group of friends in a rented condo on the beach before heading to the track for Thursday qualifying.

Although his qualifying effort would put him 13th fastest, the red No. 8 quickly moved to the front when the green flag fell. Junior won the Pepsi 400 after leading a race-high 116 laps.

At Dover in September he would win once again after battling most of the day with Ricky Rudd. Junior led 193 laps to Rudd's 169, but it was Earnhardt at the finish winning by 1.576 seconds.

October would bring his 1st win at Talladega, where he led 67 laps on the way to his 1st win at the Superspeedway.

Dale Jr would capture 1 more pole this year, in Atlanta for the NAPA 500. His qualifying speed was 192.047 MPH.

In all Junior would earn over \$4.3 million for the 2001 season for his 3 wins, 9 top 5's and 15 top 10's over the 36 race schedule.

He finished 8th in the final championship point standings.

2002: A Contract With DEI

Dale Earnhardt Jr would own Talladega in 2002. He won both races on Alabama's high-banked Superspeedway, making it 3 wins there in a row. He had also won the previous race in 2001.

The 3 win streak at Talladega would tie a long standing record set by Buddy Baker in 1976.

Most Cup drivers have contracts to drive for race teams, but in 2002 Dale Jr reported that he had been driving for DEI simply on his word up to that point. He later signed his first contract, a 2 year agreement to race for Dale Earnhardt Inc.

In the 1st 3 races of 2002 Junior failed to finish in the top 10, but then in the next 3 races, Atlanta -- Darlington -- Bristol -- he posted 3 solid top 5's in a row.

Then at Texas in April -- a track Earnhardt has ran well at, and the site of his 1st win -- he crashed into the wall after contact with Shawna Robinson on lap 184 and finished 42nd.

When the Aaron's 499 at Talladega finally rolled around Earnhardt was ready. He qualified 4th, led 133 of 188 laps, and won his 2nd race in a row there.

But after Talladega Junior would experience another run of bad luck, crashing hard at California Speedway.

On lap 229 Kevin Harvick had a left rear tire in turn 3 and was diving for pit road when he was hit by Earnhardt's No.8 Chevy.

The contact sent Junior head-on into the wall. He climbed from the car, obviously in pain, and was taken by ambulance to the infield care center, where he later emerged on crutches with a bruised right foot near his ankle.

"That was about as hard of a hit as I've ever taken," Earnhardt said. "It just took every bit of air out of me. I could hear the guys on the radio, but I couldn't answer."

Dale Jr's secret was that he had also suffered a concussion in the hard crash as doctors would later discover after he returned home to North Carolina.

Earnhardt did not reveal his condition to NASCAR, and continued to race. He finally confessed the truth -- but only after he was completely healed -- later that year in September.

Junior admitted he had mishandled the situation.

"I probably would have told. I definitely, definitely, not probably, would have told Mike Helton and a few of the officials so they could be aware of it," Earnhardt said. "They would have probably helped me with a better way of handling it. I kind of hurt the trust between me and Mike a little bit. I think I told the wrong people at the wrong time."

Junior was back at work at the DEI shop the following Monday, and he was ready to race the following week in Richmond.

Engine problems plagued the No.8 team at Charlotte in the May Coca Cola Racing Family 600, where Junior would finish 35th -- his 3rd race in a row with a finish of 35th or worse.

It would be July before Dale Jr would get another top 10. He finished 6th at Daytona in the Pepsi 400, then the next week at Chicagoland Speedway he finished 10th.

In August he won his first pole of the year at Michigan, where he would finish 10th.

In September he earned another pole -- this time at Kansas -- where he finished 6th.

Then it was back to Talladega for the October EA Sports 500. Dale Jr had won the last 2 Talladega races, and was a favorite to three-peat. That's just what he did winning a caution-free race after leading 56 laps.

He would score 4 more top 10's in the final 6 races of 2002.

Earnhardt finished the season with 2 wins, 11 top 5's and 16 top 10's. He earned 2 poles.

In the final championship standings Junior finished 11th.

His winnings for the year were \$4.9 million.

2003: 3rd in Championship Standings

Dale Earnhardt Jr captured 2 Cup victories in the 2003 Cup season, one on the high banked -- restrictor plate controlled -- Talladega

Superspeedway, and another on the 1 mile flat track of Phoenix -- plus a win in NASCAR's preseason all-star race, the Shootout at Daytona.

This was Dale Jr's 1st Shootout win -- a race he started dead last. By lap 16 Junior had the lead. He stayed near the front from there on out and passed Jeff Gordon for the final time with just 5 laps left to take the lead.

Junior would also capture 3 Busch wins this year -- sweeping both Daytona races, and winning at Talladega in April. He only made 3 Busch series starts this year, giving him a 100% win rate.

It was All Dale Earnhardt Jr All the Time in the Daytona Busch race. Dale Jr led 100 laps in the years 1st Busch race -- the race was only 100 laps long.

"We stayed out front all night," said Junior. "I didn't think that was possible. It was possible. It's a lot easier to be out front than run second."

In the season opening Daytona 500 Junior qualified 2nd, and led 22 laps during the race -- but when the race was halted due to rain after just 109 of the scheduled 200 laps the No. 8 Chevrolet was caught a lap down. When NASCAR called the race early he finished 36th.

Junior clearly had a fast car early in the race. He was leading as late as lap 87, but a faulty alternator forced him to pit road for a battery change. That put his car back up to speed, but he wasn't able to make up the lost ground before the rain came.

After 10 races Dale Jr would have 5 top 5 finishes, including the Talladega win.

In April Earnhardt qualified 13th at Talladega, led 34 laps, and beat Kevin Harvick to the finish line by about 1 car length to take his 1st win of the season.

This was Dale Jr's 4th win at Talladega -- in a row -- he certainly seemed to have the Alabama track figured out. He's the only person ever to win 4 straight races there.

"There ain't too many ever won four races here, period," Earnhardt said. "I'm steppin' into some awful big shoes."

The following race he would dominate at Martinsville, leading 195 laps, before fading at the end to finish 3rd.

There were 4 races this year in which Earnhardt did not finish. In May at Charlotte Junior dropped out due to brake problems.

Crashes took him out of 3 other races at Chicago, Michigan and Dover.

A hard crash at Dover in September left Earnhardt Jr momentarily unconscious, sent him to the hospital, and left him on crutches for a few days.

NASCAR required him to submit to a medical evaluation, but eventually cleared him to return to the track the following week at Talladega.

It would be November before Dale Jr would win again, in the Checker Auto Parts 500 at Phoenix. There Earnhardt Jr started 11th, led 84 laps, and won the race by .735 seconds over 2nd place Jimmie Johnson.

In August Junior set off a wave of media speculation when he announced that he didn't have a contract to drive for the following year. Eventually he came to an agreement with DEI and signed a 5 year contract.

This would be his final contract with DEI -- agreeing to drive for his stepmother Teresa Earnhardt's DEI through the 2007 season. That would be his last year to race for DEI.

Despite only 2 wins Dale Jr finished 2nd in the final championship standings by scoring 13 top 5's and 21 top 10's -- he had an average finish of 12.7 for the year.

Junior led a total of 1,046 laps, and completed 10505 of the 10668 laps raced during the season.

His total winnings for the year were \$4.6 million.

2004: 6 Cup Wins

Dale Earnhardt Jr kicked off the 2004 NASCAR season in February at Daytona's Speedweeks with a bang, easily cruising to victory in the 1st Twin 125 qualifying race for the upcoming Daytona 500. He would go on to win the 500, and a total of 6 Cup races by the time Ford Championship Week rolled around at Homestead in November.

The win in the 1st Twin 125 would earn Junior a 3rd place starting spot for the Daytona 500, but when pole winner Greg Biffle lost an engine

and had to start from the rear of the field the entire inside row moved up 1 position. This gave Dale Jr a pole position starting spot for the race.

Dale Jr would battle with Tony Stewart for most of the 2004 Daytona 500, leading 59 laps to Stewart's 97 -- but by the end of the race crew chief Tony Eury Sr would have Junior's car dialed in. He would beat Stewart's No. 20 Chevrolet to the finish line by .273 seconds.

On Monday after his Daytona victory Earnhardt was back on the race track. Saturday's Busch race had been halted due to rain and was set to resume on Monday morning. He quickly found himself in victory lane for the 2nd time in as many days.

Following Monday's victory Earnhardt hopped on his jet and headed to New York for a round of Media appearances as Daytona 500 champ. TV appearances included CBS' Late Show with David Letterman, and NBC's Today Show.

In March Junior's dominance showed once again at Atlanta. He easily cruised to victory by over 4 seconds ahead of 2nd place Jeremy Mayfield in the Golden Corral 500.

The win was a 180 degree turn from the previous race in Las Vegas where Junior finished 35th, dropping out of the race after just 196 laps due to handling problems.

Going in to Richmond after only 10 races Dale Jr had already racked up 7 top 10's, 6 top 5's and 2 wins -- he would soon add another Richmond win to his record.

In May Dale Jr led 115 laps on his way to a win in the Chevy American Revolution 400 at Richmond International Raceway -- a 3/4 mile high-banked short track.

When NASCAR returned to the short tracks at Bristol in August he would win again. After a mediocre qualifying run Junior started the race on

30th position -- extremely deep in the field on the 1/2 mile track where driver's near the back can quickly lose a lap.

Earnhardt dominated the Saturday night race under the lights -- quickly moving to the front and leading 295 of 500 laps.

The following week in Fontana, California Earnhardt would not be so fortunate. A crash would take him out of the race -- and handing him a 34th place finish. Even with the poor finish Junior would leave California already qualified for 1 of the final 10 spots in the Chase for the championship.

In the 10 races of the Chase Dale Jr would score 6 top 10's including wins at Talladega and Phoenix.

Following the win at Talladega Dale Jr emerged from his winning car -- and on live television responded to a question from an NBC broadcaster about what the win meant to him.

"It don't mean s--- right now. Daddy's won here 10 times." Earnhardt responded on live TV.

A slip that would cost him the points lead. NASCAR docked Earnhardt 25 championship points and fined him \$10,000 -- a move that would cost him the championship lead.

Dale Jr appeared before NASCAR to appeal the penalty was appealed by DEI, but the appeal was denied by NASCAR.

"I wouldn't have went down there all the way to Daytona if I didn't feel like it was worth the trip," Earnhardt said. "They made you feel like they were listening to you while you were there, but I think the decision was already made before the wheels hit the ground, you know."

Now instead of leading the point standings by 13 points he was trailing leader Kurt Busch by 12 -- Busch would go on to become the 2004 champion.

Earnhardt's championship chances were not helped by back to back crashes in October. He finished 33rd at Martinsville after a late race crash, then matched that with another 33rd place finish the following week at Atlanta after crashing near the end of the 500 mile race.

He bounced back in November with a win in the Checker Auto Parts 500 at Phoenix, but that wasn't enough to gain the championship.

Dale Jr finished the season 5th in the final points standings -- with 6 wins, 16 top 5's and 21 top 10's.

He failed to win a single pole position this year, and had 4 races in which he did not finish.

His total winnings for the year totaled over \$6.8 million.

2005: Crew Chief Swapping

Dale Earnhardt Jr would begin the 2005 NASCAR season without Tony Eury in his pit stall. Eury had been calling the shots for junior since he made his 1st Busch series start at Myrtle Beach in 1996.

Tensions had been running high between Earnhardt, Eury, and car chief Tony Eury Jr for some time when DEI management decided to make changes on the No. 8 team -- in the hopes of making a run for the championship.

Tony Eury Sr was promoted to Director of Competition for DEI, overseeing the organization's 3 race teams.

Tony Eury Jr was promoted from car chief of the No. 8 to crew chief of the No. 15 driven by Michael Waltrip.

Waltrip's crew chief, Pete Rondeau, was moved to the No. 8 team as Earnhardt's new crew chief.

In the swap Junior also lost several key crew members who had taken him to 6 wins the previous season. To make matters worse the decision was made at DEI to allow Tony Eury Jr to take the cars he had built for Dale Jr to Waltrip's team, and Junior was given Waltrip's cars.

Earnhardt and Rondeau got off to a promising start, finishing 3rd in the Daytona 500. But the 2 never gelled, and by race No. 12 in May Rondeau was out as Dale Earnhardt Jr's crew chief.

Dale Jr explained that a comfortable level of communication was never there between Rondeau and himself.

"We found ourselves, I guess a lot of times, just kinda out of touch in the middle part of the race. There was a lot of things," Earnhardt said of Rondeau. "I didn't feel like personally I was getting a lot of information about what changes were being done on the car and I'm sure that I

wasn't giving him enough information about what those changes were doing."

Steve Hmiel, DEI's technical director, was named as interim crew chief beginning with the Memorial Day Weekend Coca Cola 600 at Charlotte. It would be Hmiel who would get Dale Jr his only win of the season in July.

With 30 wins as a crew chief for Mark Martin and Richard Petty, Hmiel certainly had the credentials to serve as Earnhardt's pit captain. What's more, the 2 also had a great line of communication. On race days Steve Hmiel had been Junior's spotter.

But Hmiel wasn't interested in another full-time gig as a crew chief, and speculation centered around Tony Eury Jr coming back to the No. 8 team.

In the meantime the duo of Steve Hmiel and Dale Earnhardt Jr endured a string of bad races, not finishing higher than 17th in their 1st 5 attempts together.

Then in July at Daytona they managed a 3rd place finish. The following week at Chicago Earnhardt claimed his only win of the season thanks to a fuel mileage call from Hmiel.

The last race to qualify for the Chase to the Championship was set for Richmond in September, and Earnhardt failed to qualify for 1 of the 10 spots in the Chase.

The following week he would have his 3rd crew chief of the season. Tony Eury Jr was once again paired with Earnhardt, this time as crew chief.

Although the 2 are cousins, bad blood between them had forced the initial separation.

"We didn't change the teams because of a performance issue, we changed it because of an attitude issue between me and Tony Junior" Earnhardt said. "We changed it, maybe not for the right reasons, but the change did what it was supposed to it. It fixed his attitude and it fixed my attitude."

"It's not always greener on the other side for either one of us. We both look at each other and talk to each other today totally different. I think that gives us that opportunity to work together in the future that we wouldn't of had if we would have run ourselves totally apart."

For the final 10 races Earnhardt scored 3 top 10's, but he also had 4 finishes of 34th or worse. 3 of those were due to crashes.

At Talladega in October Dale Jr was involved in a huge wreck on lap 20 that took him out of the race. The crash was caused when Jimmie Johnson bump-drafted

Elliott Sadler in turn 1, sending Sadler spinning. Johnson then hit Sadler in the left quarter panel, leaving Dale Jr nowhere to go. Junior hit the No.48 car of Johnson, heavily damaging both cars.

Dale Earnhardt Jr was out of the race early at his best track; he had won at Talladega 5 times previously.

In the October race at Charlotte NASCAR considered calling the race early due to widespread tire problems. About every 20 laps or so someone was losing a right-front tire. Goodyear blamed the problem on low air pressure, while race teams blamed the problem on a tire compound that was too hard.

On lap 62 Dale Jr blew his right front tire, sending the No. 8 Chevy hard into the outside wall -- leaving him next-to-last with a 42nd place finish.

At Phoenix in November Earnhardt again crashed with tire problems. The 113 lap incident left him in 40th place at the finish.

Earlier in the year Junior crashed at Las Vegas on lap 12 after hitting Brian Vickers and triggering a 5 car wreck.

Junior quickly acknowledged the crash was his fault.

"He just got in there a little easier than I expected him to and I got all over him. It's a big mistake on my part and I apologized to him," said an embarrassed Dale Jr as he emerged from the infield care center.

At the Brickyard in August Dale Jr was nailed from behind by Mike Wallace sending the No. 8 Chevrolet crashing nose-first into the inside retaining wall. The incident occurred on lap 63, and Dale Jr was the first driver out of the race -- leaving him with a last place finish.

By the end of the season Dale Earnhardt Jr would have 1 win, 7 top 5's and 13 top 10's. His average finish was 20.5. There were 6 races in which he did not finish. He only led 169 laps for the entire season.

Total winnings for the year were \$5.5 million.

2006: A New Start

2006 promised to be a fresh start for Dale Earnhardt Jr following a tumultuous 2005 season where Junior ran through a string of 3 different crew chiefs. Now he had Tony Eury Jr back on his team full time.

Eury had been Earnhardt's car chief up until the end of the 2004 season - - when a feud between the 2 had left them barely speaking to each other.

In 2005 Earnhardt had finished 19th in points, the worst in his career and only won 1 race.

For 2006 Eury and Earnhardt settled their differences and concentrated on racing.

"He kind of saw what my job was, and I saw what his job was," Eury said. "We were together for six years, so we had kind of taken each other for granted."

Earnhardt and Eury are cousins who have a long history together. Eury's father, Tony Eury Sr, was Dale Jr's crew chief from 1998 to 2004, starting in the Busch series.

Eury went to work putting together the fastest and best over the wall pit crew members for the No.8 team.

"I'll be able to share with NASCAR fans things they won't be able to hear anywhere else," Junior said.

When NASCAR held its annual media day at Daytona on the 1st day of Speedweeks Junior lacked anything but confidence about the upcoming race season.

"We're going to come into the Chase in the top three in points, and we'll have six or seven wins this season if not more," Earnhardt boldly predicted.

"If we lose the championship, it won't be by much."

When asked about his chances of winning a 2nd Daytona 500 he said simply, "I've got the car to beat over there in the garage."

In the Daytona 500 Dale Jr led on 5 occasions for a total of 32 laps -- more than any other driver -- but handling problems late in the race dropped him to an 8th place finish. Earnhardt considered this a good start -- especially considering the cool weather and strong winds which made passing to the outside difficult.

A late caution forced a green-white-checkered restart on lap 202 -- with Dale Jr in 5th. He moved high to the outside but the lack of a drafting

partner and an engine running low on power quickly moved him back to 8th.

Junior described the engine's horsepower in a classic Earnhardt quote after the race.

"The motor's like an old man -- it'll get up, run for a while and then fall back asleep," he said.

In February Dale Earnhardt Jr began hosting a weekly show on XM Satellite radio called "Dale Jr's Unrestricted." The loosely formatted show features Junior, and his longtime friends Josh snider and Steve Crisp discussing racing, music, and just about everything else.

At about the same time Junior announced that his new media company, Hammerhead Entertainment, would produce a new show for Speed Channel. The show, "Back In the Day," would be hosted by Earnhardt and highlight classic NASCAR races from the past.

In March at Atlanta Earnhardt scored a 3rd place finish, then 2 weeks later at Martinsville he finished 4th -- but heading into Talladega in May he had yet to win.

Not long after the green flag fell at Martinsville's DirecTV 500 in April Earnhardt was heading down pit road with crash damage.

The entire left side of the No. 8 Chevrolet was beat up front to rear, and the right rear was not much better.

Crew chief Tony Eury nearly called for Junior to take the car to the garage -- instead he ordered team members to start cutting away the damaged sheet metal -- not knowing if the suspension was damaged, or if the radiator was intact.

When Junior made it back to the track he was missing a brake cooling duct -- an important component at Martinsville -- but he was also missing a right front fender, which allowed plenty of air to the brakes.

Eury just wanted to finish the race -- but Dale Jr had other plans.

The car drove great despite the heavy damage, and Earnhardt drove it to a 4th place finish.

Dale Earnhardt Jr knew how to win at Talladega -- he had done so 5 times. 4 times in a row!

When the No.8 Chevrolet rolled off the hauler at Talladega the familiar red paint scheme was gone.

In a tribute to his father the car sported a familiar black scheme with silver and red trim like the one Earnhardt Sr sported on the No. 3 Chevrolet.

The special paint was to mark the occasion of Dale Earnhardt Sr's induction into the International Motorsports Hall of Fame which sits just off turn 4 at Talladega Superspeedway where Earnhardt Sr has 10 wins.

"I think the car looks good, and I think it's a cool way to honor my dad," Earnhardt Jr. said. "It's going to be a lot of fun to be behind the wheel of that car, and sort of see the reaction that it gets.

Unfortunately, the black paint scheme didn't bring Junior good luck. With just 37 laps remaining Dale Jr's engine erupted in a puff of smoke - giving him the 1st DNF of the season.

Earlier in the race Junior spun the No.8 Chevrolet after making contact with Carl Edwards. In that spin his car turned around causing the rear wheels to spin backwards.

"It was four wide and I got loose and got into Carl and spun myself out," Junior said. "I might have spun the motor backwards. That's probably why I blew up. We don't normally have engine failures. But right there, it just blew up and quit running."

Dale Jr scored his 17th Cup victory in May at Richmond, ending a 28 race winless run.

He spent most of the race chasing Kevin Harvick, who led 272 laps. Then in the final 100 laps Junior's crew made an air pressure adjustment to the car that sent him charging to the front. He took the lead with 44 laps remaining and never relinquished it.

Dale Jr made a June appearance at Seattle's Paramount Theatre for the "One Night Stand," a meet and greet with his fans where he answered questions for his fans, told stories and signed autographs. The appearance was accompanied by an appearance from Seattle band Fiasco.

When the Busch series returned to Daytona in July Junior claimed another win -- but he was unable to back it up in the Saturday night Nextel Cup race, where he finished 13th.

Earnhardt Booed!

In August Dale Jr was the target of Carl Edwards following the Carfax 250 Busch race at Michigan.

Earnhardt had applied the chrome horn to Edward's bumper in a pass for the lead just 2 laps from the finish -- a move that sent Edward's spinning.

As some of the fans were booing Dale Jr on the cool down lap after the race Carl Edwards came out of the pits in a scene reminiscent of Days of Thunder and rammed Earnhardt's car in the driver's side.

Junior had his hand out the window at the time and Edwards nearly took it off.

Later when Junior had made it to Victory Lane Edwards showed up with a few angry words for Earnhardt.

"I didn't mean to spin him out, I don't go around wrecking people on purpose," said Earnhardt.

"I could understand him being upset, but running in the side of my car after the race was over with, with my hand out the window and coming into a man's victory lane, no matter what the circumstance, was just rude."

Edwards was fine \$20,000 and placed on probation by NASCAR for the incident.

In September Dale Earnhardt Jr, along with sister Kelley and brother Kerry, announced plans to build Alabama Motorsports Park, a 75,000 seat, D shaped oval asphalt speedway with a drag strip, road course and dirt track. this is the trio's first joint business venture. The venue is slated to be completed in the Fall of 2009.

When Dale Jr returned to Talladega in October he was looking for win No. 6 on the 2.66 mile Superspeedway. He was leading when the white flag flew -- but on the backstretch Jimmie Johnson nailed him sending both cars spinning into the infield grass just a half lap from the finish.

The wreck wasn't Johnson's fault however; he had been rammed from behind by his own teammate Brian Vickers. It looked like Johnson move low in an attempt to pass the No. 8 Chevy, fully expecting Vickers to follow. However, Vickers seemed to hesitate for a moment -- perhaps considering staying with Earnhardt -- before deciding he had better stay with his teammate. The slight hesitation broke Johnson's momentum, and when Vickers moved into Johnson's draft the 2 cars made contact sending Johnson into Earnhardt.

Brian Vickers went on to win the race, while Junior finished 23rd.

"That s---," Earnhardt told Johnson. "I was going to finish third. I would have been fine with that."

Dale Earnhardt Jr finished the 2006 season with 1 win, 10 top 5's and 17 top 10's. There were 3 races in which he did not finish. His average finishing position was 13.5.

Total winnings for the year were \$5.2 million -- and that is not including endorsement deals or bonuses -- just what he was paid in prize money.

It was in December after the racing season was over that things started to get heated.

Teresa Earnhardt, Junior's stepmother and car owner, fired a shot over the bow during a rare interview published in The Wall Street Journal.

"Right now the ball's in his court to decide on whether he wants to be a NASCAR driver or whether he wants to be a public personality," Teresa Earnhardt told the Journal reporter.

Dale Jr had no public comment at the time, but 2 months later at Daytona he told the media he was seeking controlling interest, 51% ownership, in Dale Earnhardt Inc. If he didn't get it he was leaving DEI.

He would eventually announce his plans to drive for Hendrick Motorsports beginning in 2008

2007: Problems In the Family Business

When Dale Earnhardt Junior arrived in Daytona for winter testing in January there were more questions than answers for the head of Junior nation.

Just what exactly did team owner and step mom Teresa Earnhardt mean when she was quoted in The Wall street Journal Saying "Right now the

ball's in his court to decide on whether he wants to be a NASCAR driver or whether he wants to be a public personality?"

Would Earnhardt renew his contract that was set to expire at the end of the season, and would he be back with DEI for the 2008 season?

Could Earnhardt and crew chief Tony Eury Jr cement their relationship and make a run for the title -- or even win more than once, as they had done the year before?

How will the new Car of Tomorrow affect the No. 8 team's performance?

For much of the testing session Dale Jr ducked the media's questions, but the following month when he returned to Daytona for Speedweeks, the 2 weeks leading up to the Daytona 500, he was ready to be heard.

On Media Day, the kickoff to Speedweeks, Dale Earnhardt Jr casually commented to a throng of reporters that he was seeking controlling interest in the family business that was Dale Earnhardt Inc.

"I want majority ownership, basically," Junior flatly told the crowd of journalists and media types.

At least 51%?

"Absolutely," came the simple reply from the driver of the No. 8 Chevy.

The negotiations would continue between Dale Jr and Teresa -- both in the media, and behind closed doors, until May. That's when Junior announced he was leaving the company his Dad had founded.

The season on the track would be less than stellar. A crash would take him out of contention in the Daytona 500.

After 20 races a 4th place finish at New Hampshire would be his best finish.

Some people would say that Dale Earnhardt Jr wasn't getting the best equipment DEI had to offer because he was leaving at the end of the season.

In May Dale Jr called a press conference on short notice at his JR Motorsports shop in Mooresville, NC.

There, on live television, he announced to his fans and the world that he was leaving DEI at the end of the 2007 NASCAR season.

"At 32 years of age, the same age as my father was when he made his final and most important career decision, it is the time for me to compete on a consistent basis and contend for championships."

Junior denied rumors that he was leaving to start his own Cup team at JR Motorsports -- and that DEI teammate Martin Truex Jr was going with him.

"After a year of intense negotiations and intense efforts on behalf of Dale Earnhardt Inc. and JR Motorsports, we decided that it's time for us to move on and seek other opportunities for me to drive for a new team in 2008," Earnhardt Jr said.

Junior made it clear that he was willing to talk to any NASCAR team that was interested in talking -- and that starting his own team would be a last resort.

During the press conference his sister, Kelley Earnhardt Elledge, sat alongside him and answered some of the questions. Kelley would be instrumental in negotiating Dale Jr's new deal with Hendrick Motorsports.

Then in June another news conference was called at JR Motorsports. Dale Jr was ready to tell the world who his new boss would be. After introductions by the head of NASCAR's Hall of Fame, Winston Kelley, Junior was ready.

"We talked with many teams, but one stood out above the rest. It became apparent to me the man that I wanted to drive for. I've known him since childhood. He competes with integrity, and more importantly he wins races."

Just then Rick Hendrick appeared from behind the curtain. It was official -- Dale Earnhardt Jr had signed a 5 year deal to drive for Hendrick Motorsports.

Earnhardt Jr now had a new home, but there were many questions remaining.

Who would be his new crew chief?

Who would be his sponsor?

Would he be able to keep the No. 8?

Shortly thereafter Tony Eury Sr, Dale Jr's long-time crew chief and the director of competition at DEI, resigned his position. Eury Sr was going to work for Junior at JR Motorsports.

At Pocono in August Junior would take the pole -- he would run competitively all day but finish 2nd to Kurt Busch.

Later in August the disappointing news would come: Dale Earnhardt Jr would not be behind the wheel of the No. 8 in 2008 -- Teresa Earnhardt refused to give him the number.

However, Earnhardt would not give up on hopes of a championship. As the cut-off for the Chase drew closer, Earnhardt and his team worked hard to secure a spot.

His position in the championship standings had been moving from 12th to 13th. 12th was the cutoff.

2 blown engines at Indianapolis weren't helping matters, but Junior wasn't giving up.

2008: A New Start

The 2008 season started out with extremely high expectations for Dale Earnhardt Jr and his new No. 88 team at Hendrick Motorsports.

Everyone expected Dale Jr to win early, win often, and win big. Darrell Waltrip predicted Earnhardt would score 6 wins in 2008 – and almost no one challenged that prediction.

Dale Jr didn't wait very long to put the No. 88 into Victory Lane. His first race behind the wheel of a Hendrick car was the Bud Shootout.

Earnhardt started the Shootout 7th and won the race beating Tony Stewart to the line.

Earnhardt led 47 laps of the 70 lap Bud Shootout – a new race record.

Earnhardt backed up that win with a win in the Gatorade Duel qualifying race at Daytona on Valentine's Day.

For a while everything was right in Junior Nation. But the wins didn't start to flow in like Waltrip predicted.

Junior's next win came at Michigan on Father's Day. The No. 88 was fast that day, but it was a fuel strategy that paid off and eventually put Earnhardt in Victory Lane that day.

The Michigan win would be Earnhardt's only points paying win in 2008.

Not that the team didn't run strong. Earnhardt scored 10 top 5s and 16 top 10s in 2008. He even sat on the pole at Texas.

In March he finished 2nd at Las Vegas, 3rd at Atlanta, and 6th at Bristol and 7th at Martinsville. Earnhardt had momentum on his side and looked to be on a Championship run.

But as the season went on the team's performance began to suffer. The 2nd half of the season saw too many finishes of 20th or worse.

Earnhardt led 896 laps in 2008. Only Carl Edwards, Kyle Busch and Jimmie Johnson led more. His average finish was 14.1, and he finished on the lead lap in 26 of 36 races.

Junior made the Sprint Cup Chase – but wound up finishing 12th in the points standings.

Before the first year at Hendrick was even over there was already rumblings among fans that Dale Jr needed a new crew chief – that his cousin Tony Eury Jr was not getting the job done.

In a few months Eury would be gone.

2009: Trouble Brewing

It didn't take long for trouble to begin brewing for Dale Earnhardt J in 2009. In the season opening Daytona 500 he missed his pit stall on one stop – a mistake that he would be destined to repeat several times in the early part of the season.

Then on lap 124 of the Daytona 500 Earnhardt was involved in a controversial wreck with Brian Vickers that involved 10 cars running at the front of the pack.

“We were racing, he had a run and I tried to block,” said Brian Vickers.” I think I was doing what I had to do.”

Junior took some heat in the media following the incident. “There are no excuses for Dale Earnhardt Jr.” said David Poole with the Charlotte Observer.

Larry McReynolds said what Earnhardt did was “Totally uncalled for,” while his Fox TV partner Darrell Waltrip said “I don’t care who you are that’s totally wrong.”

Earnhardt didn’t see it the same way. “I got a run — Vickers drove me below the line. He ran into me and sent me below the line,” said Junior. “I just tried not to drive into the grass and tried to get my car under control, and get above the line so I don’t get penalized. I ran into his quarter panel and spun him out. He shouldn’t have started that and that would have never happened. At that point in the race that was pretty reckless.”

Earnhardt came very close to falling out of the top 35 in points early in the season. Had he dropped out of 35th he would have had to qualify for races with no guaranteed starting spot. He was in danger of becoming a go or go home qualifier.

Fans began calling for Earnhardt's crew chief to be fired. Some suggested that he be replaced by Chad Knaus, the Championship winning crew chief of the previous 3 years.

By May Rick Hendrick had had enough. On May 28 Tony Eury Jr was fired as crew chief and Lance McGrew was named as interim crew chief.

Hendrick Motorsports announced that Lance McGrew would become interim Crew Chief for the No. 88 car starting with the June 7 Pocono race.

Brian Whitesell will fill in as crew chief for one race this weekend at Dover.

Whitesell and Rex Stump – two of the best engineers in all on NASCAR – provided support to new crew chief Lance McGrew to get the No. 88 car back on track.

Brian Whitesell was Ray Evernham's right-hand man when the No. 24 team of Jeff Gordon was winning all those races and championships.

Rex Stump is the man behind the famous T-Rex car that Jeff Gordon won the All Star race with in 1997. That car was banned by NASCAR – not because it was illegal, but because it was so advanced. NASCAR had no rules against the car, but they had never seen anything like it, and told the No. 24 team not to bring the car back.

Stump is the lead chassis engineer at Hendrick Motorsports.

In August Dale Earnhardt Jr said what almost every other driver in the Sprint Cup Garage had been thinking for the past 2 years.

Junior has called NASCAR out saying that the COT is not producing very good racing.

“I feel like, especially right now, we need to really, really try to turn over every stone, and that includes where we are with this COT,” said Dale Jr.

“They don’t seem as willing to produce a better race car that will put on the type of races that we all wish to see,” Earnhardt said of NASCAR. “I feel like in a way we are holding ourselves back. We’re short-changing ourselves.”

Dale Jr's Pets

Killer the Boxer: There's Killer, a 70 pound Boxer that loves to ride in the car with Junior. Killer always demands the front seat and wants to go everywhere Dale Jr goes. This dog is the son of Foster, Greg Biffle's dog. Killer likes to chase cats when he's not sleeping.

Buddy the cat: Buddy found Dale Jr in a New Hampshire pet store back in 2000. It seems Junior stopped at the mall following the race and left with Buddy in tow. Buddy spent 3 years on the road crew traveling with Junior and the race team. These days Buddy stays home in North Carolina.

Stroker Ace the Great Dane: Stroker is a one year old Great Dane with Champion bloodlines. He's named after fictional race car driver "Stroker Ace," who was played by Burt Reynolds in the 1983 movie by the same name. Dale Jr once ran a Busch race at Daytona with Stroker Ace on the car where his name usually goes.

Tux the cat: Tux is a black and white Maine Coon cat that Dale Jr and Sister Kelley discovered in a Mooresville, NC pet shop during a shopping trip to buy tropical fish. Tux is a big cat – 15 pounds – and very playful.

Laverne and Shirley the buffalo: Junior received the pair of buffalo as a gift and named them after the girls on the 70's TV show Laverne and Shirley. They are somewhat highly strung and territorial, and demand to be fed before the Texas Longhorns they share the property with.

Lindy Lou, Dance 'til Dawn and Shadows Tiger Lily the Longhorns: Dale Jr acquired 3 Texas Longhorns last year. The 3 massive cows, which can tip the scales at 2,000 pounds each, roam the property at Junior's house alongside the buffalo. The horns on a Longhorn can grow 6 to 9 feet.

You can see photos of Earnhardt's pets on his website at DaleJr.com.

First Job

Dale Earnhardt Jr worked as an oil change tech in the shop at the [Chevy dealership](#) in Newton, North Carolina. He once claimed to be “the fastest oil change guy in the dealership”. Junior has said that if he wasn’t racing he would probably still be working there. Dale Jr worked on race cars at night, building his own race cars and hauling them to Carolina short tracks before convincing his father he was ready to move up to the Busch series in a DEI car.

Dale Jr’s Jet

Dale Jr’s Learjet looks fast, even while it's sitting still. Dale Earnhardt Jr's private jet has a cruising speed of 536 MPH.

That means he can leave his home in North Carolina and be at the speedway in Daytona in about an hour.

Dale Jr owns a Learjet 60 -- the largest and nicest aircraft in the Learjet fleet. See more photos at [JetJit.com](#)

Whisky River

Dale Jr has partnered with Chris Epstein, a longtime Charlotte bar and nightclub operator, to open [Whisky River](#) in Uptown Charlotte.

It's a place to go and hang out with your friends, have a beer, and maybe a burger or some hot wings.

Dale Jr and Epstein have landed a great location for the bar. It's right across the street from Charlotte's Bobcat Arena, and just a stone's throw from the site of NASCAR's new Hall of Fame.

A 2nd location of Whisky River is set to open in Jacksonville, Florida in 2010.

Fan Club

JR Nation Crew is Dale Jr's official fan club. You can learn more and join at [DaleJr.com](#)

Earnings

Total earnings for Dale Earnhardt Jr as of the end of the 2008 NASCAR Sprint Cup season are \$59,258,990.

That's his earnings from the Sprint Cup series only. Career earnings for the Nationwide series totaled \$4,593,241.

That comes to a grand total of \$63.8 million.

These figures represent Dale Jr's winnings for competition in NASCAR races only, and do not include bonuses, souvenir sales, endorsements, sponsorships or personal appearances.

Adidas Sponsor Profile

Adidas has a new line of Dale Earnhardt Jr footwear and apparel including fireproof, competition rated racing shoes, casual shoes a Dale Jr fire suit fans can buy that's just like the one he wears behind the wheel.

The new lineup comes with an Adidas sponsorship deal for Dale Jr -- he will officially endorse the Adidas brand, as well as appear in TV, magazine and internet ads for the brand.

"I've been wearing Adidas my whole life. It's who I am." Dale Jr said.
"Throughout my career I've been fortunate to partner with brands that fit my lifestyle, and Adidas fits."

Earnhardt will work closely with the Adidas Innovation Team in designing high performance driving shoes and a fire suit for competition use on the NASCAR circuit -- with 1 interesting twist -- Adidas plans to sell the exact same shoes and fire suits to NASCAR fans.

"We consider Dale Jr. to be the most influential driver in NASCAR and therefore the perfect driver for us to work with in creating the next generation of technical driving products for NASCAR," said Mark Clinard, Adidas' Business Director for Motor Sports.

Adidas plans to market the shoes and apparel in much the same way they would market a basketball shoe -- they intend to have a professional grade product to be worn by drivers and crew members -- and then offer that exact same product for sale to the public.

Other race teams are also a target market of Adidas -- from the Saturday night short track racer to road course drivers to other NASCAR competitors.

Both drivers and pit crew members can benefit from the advanced footwear and fire suits.

Adidas is also exploring ways to add their ClimaCool technology to racing products.

The ClimaCool fabric lowers body temperature allowing drivers more comfort under extreme hot conditions -- and perhaps giving them a mental and physical edge over the competition.

The company also plans a line of casual footwear carrying the Dale Jr name. Junior plans to work with Adidas designers in creating the line of shoes.

The Dale Earnhardt Jr line of Adidas footwear will be sold through official Adidas retailers including The Sports Authority and select online retailers.

This will be the 1st major entry into NASCAR by a shoe company. While rival shoemaker Puma sponsors Kasey Kahne, they have not gotten into product development the way Adidas has with Earnhardt.

One reason may be that the driver's shoes aren't highly visible in motorsports the way a basketball players might be. With Adidas' full line of apparel that may no longer be an issue -- especially with a high profile driver backing them like Dale Earnhardt Jr.

The sponsorship deal with Adidas came on the heels of a similar deal with Sony.

The 2 deals will give Earnhardt -- already a superstar in the United States -- more exposure in overseas markets.

Junior's Age

Dale Earnhardt Jr was born on October 10, 1974. Here is a list of his accomplishments at any given age.

Age 17 Dale Earnhardt Jr began his racing career competing in the Street Stock division at Concord Motorsports Park in Concord, NC

Age 21 Competes in 1st Busch Series race in the Carolina Pride / Red Dog 250 at Myrtle Beach Speedway, in South Carolina on June 22, 1996.
Finished 14th after qualifying 7th

Age 22 Led his 1st race in the Busch Series, for 22 laps. at Bristol driving for car owner Ed Whitaker

Age 22 Becomes best-selling author after writing his autobiography, Driver 8

Age 23 Begins 1st full season in the Busch Series

Age 23 1st Busch Series win in the Coca Cola 300 at Texas Motor Speedway on April 4, 1998, going on to win 7 times in the Busch Series this year

Age 24 Wins 1st Busch Series Championship by 48 points over Matt Kenseth

Age 24 Competes in 1st Winston Cup Series race in Coca Cola 600 in Charlotte. Finishes 16th after starting 8th. He would make 5 starts that first season.

Age 25 Wins 2nd Busch Series Championship by 280 points over Jeff Green

Age 25 1st Full season in Cup

Age 25 1st Cup win at Texas Motor Speedway on April 2, 2000

Age 26 1st restrictor plate win in the Pepsi 400 at Daytona on July 7, 2001

Age 27 Back to back wins at Talladega sweeping the 2002 season.

Age 28 Wins 3rd consecutive race at Talladega on April 6, 2003 tying a record set by Buddy Baker.

Age 29 Wins Daytona 500 on February 15, 2004 and goes on to capture 6 wins in the 2004 season

Age 30 Captures career win No. 16 at Chicagoland Speedway on July 10, 2005

Age 30 Buys his 1st private jet a 1996 Learjet 60

Age 31 Captures career win No. 17 at Richmond International Raceway on May 6, 2006

Age 32 Announces he is leaving Dale Earnhardt, Inc at the end of the 2007 season to join Hendrick Motorsports in 2008

Age 33 Begins driving for Rick Hendrick. Wins first race he competes in behind the wheel of the No. 88 – The Budweiser Shootout.

Age 34 Dale Jr perseveres through a tough race season. His Cousin and crew chief is replaced on his Sprint Cup team. However, the team Junior owns in the Nationwide Series scores multiple wins and Dale Jr's protégé Keselowski even scores a Sprint Cup win.

Age 35 Dale Jr begins the 2010 NASCAR season with a renewed focus on competition. Earnhardt begins to develop a better line of communication with new crew chief Lance McGrew. He runs competitively in the early part of the season and scores a pole at Atlanta.

Budweiser Apocalypse Commercial

In Budweiser's Apocalypse TV commercial Dale Earnhardt Jr is gunning the No. 8 Chevrolet across a desert highway at high speed. A bunch of thugs who look like they belong in a Mad Max movie are in hot pursuit on motorcycles and wild looking '70s muscle cars.

One rowdy looking mutant holds a high-powered chain saw.

It looks like they're ready to wage a battle with Earnhardt -- as if he had stolen their gasoline or ran off with their daughters -- who knew they just wanted a beer.

Driving through fireballs and explosions Dale Jr finally has had enough -- and slides the No. 8 car to a halt.

Climbing out of the car he explains to the goons, "Guys, I told you -- just because I've got Bud on the car doesn't mean I've got Bud in the car."

The disappointed mob then turns to leave without any beer.

The spot ends with Earnhardt muttering under his breath -- "Crazy mutant desert guys."

The spot was produced by DDB Chicago, Budweiser's award winning ad agency. This was at least the 12th Dale Jr commercial they've done for Budweiser.

The commercial was filmed on location on a barren stretch of highway near Lancaster, California.

Filming was done from multiple angles. A helicopter flew overhead capturing the action, while another film crew in a lead vehicle in front of Junior shot using a boom camera attached to the car.

The dramatic spot was nothing like any other commercial NASCAR fans had seen. "We wanted to have some fun and showcase Junior's amazing driving skills and personality," said Randall Blackford, Budweiser's Director of Marketing.

This ad achieved DDB's goal of making it more than an ad. The agency strives for Talk Value -- creating ads that get injected into pop culture,

and make the rounds on TV and radio talk shows. This Dale Earnhardt Jr ad certainly did that.

The commercial debuted during the 2007 Daytona 500 before being placed into a regular rotation of Bud commercials.

Here's a behind the scenes look at the making of Apocalypse starring Dale Earnhardt Jr.

Back In the Day

Dale Earnhardt Jr is not just the host of the Speed Channel's show Back In the Day -- his company, Hammerhead Productions, created and produced the show.

The show originally aired on SPEED – and is now available on DVD.

Dale Earnhardt Jr hosts the show, giving insights and commentary on old NASCAR races from the 1960's and 1970's.

The show features historical racing footage and clips originally aired on the vintage TV show Car and Track, hosted by Bud Linderman.

In season 1 there are 13 half-hour episodes highlighting various historical races.

1 episode actually covers the entire 1969 season.

Another covers the 1973 Daytona 500 where Buddy Baker and Richard Petty battled for the lead late in the race until Baker's engine failed.

Each episode focuses on the major developments as a race goes on, including crashes, pit stops and hard driving on the race track.

During the racing action Dale Jr will occasionally pop onto the screen for a brief commentary on the race.

The show has a laid back feel, mainly because Junior's parts were not shot in a studio, but at various locations around Earnhardt's Cleveland, North Carolina home.

But Back In the Day is not all about racing. Dale Jr also weaves in historical snippets of American culture, often giving viewers his personal take on things.

The entire 1st season is now available on DVD. This 2 disc set shows the early days of NASCAR, along with the sport's biggest stars of the day.

The DVD set features Richard Petty, David Pearson, Bobby Allison, Cale Yarborough, Fred Lorenzen, LeeRoy Yarbrough and many more gritty NASCAR stars of the era.

The show combines Dale Jr's modern insight and commentary along with vintage footage of the racing show Car and Track, with its host Bud Lindemann.

The original show aired in the 1960's and 1970's -- before NASCAR was regularly shown on TV. It was one of the few sources of racing information on TV.

Dale Earnhardt Jr introduces each episode with an intriguing look behind the scenes,

then turns things over to Bud Lindemann, the original host of Car and Track, with his now famous line "take it away Bud."

The show then cuts to old tape of Lindemann calling the races, and describing the action on and off the track.

The show closes with Lindemann's usual farewell, "So 'til next week, drive carefully, wont you? All the pros do. Bye-bye!"

Back In the Day has quickly become 1 of the highest rated shows on Speed.

Sales of the 1st episode on DVD, and commercial-free, have been hot.

A&E Home Video has released Back In The Day with Dale Earnhardt Jr: The Complete Season One as a 2 disc DVD set. It is priced at \$24.95, and includes a bonus interview with Dale Earnhardt Jr.

The bonus footage shows Junior racing go karts, and a 3 Doors Down music video with Tony Stewart and Dale Jr.

Whisky River

Dale Earnhardt Jr named the bar in his basement Whisky River – now he owns a real bar and nightclub by the same name.

Located in Uptown Charlotte in the EpiCentre complex, the bar is near the site of NASCAR's Hall of Fame.

Dale Jr has partnered with Chris Epstein, a longtime Charlotte bar and nightclub operator, in the business deal.

Dale Jr and Epstein have landed a great location for the bar. It's right across the street from Charlotte's Bobcat Arena, and just a stone's throw from the site of NASCAR's new Hall of Fame.

The EpiCentre complex is a new development in the heart of Charlotte that stands on the former site of the Charlotte Convention Center.

The \$275 million development includes retail and office space, a hotel, a park, and several restaurants ranging from fast food to fine dining. A 53 story condominium project is also in the works.

If you're in Charlotte be sure to visit the EpiCentre and check out Dale Earnhardt Jr's new bar.

Earnhardt's Birthday

Dale Earnhardt Jr's birthday is October 10.

His full name is Ralph Dale Earnhardt Jr. He was born on October 10, 1974 in Concord, NC to Brenda Lorraine Gee and Ralph Dale Earnhardt.

Mother Brenda Gee was Dale Earnhardt's 2nd wife and the mother of Dale Jr, and sister Kelley.

The racing roots run deep in the Earnhardt family. Both of Dale Earnhardt, Jr's grandfathers were involved in racing.

Grandfather Ralph Earnhardt raced in NASCAR's Late Model Sportsman, Modified and Grand National divisions winning more than 350 races in his 23 year career.

Robert Gee, father of Brenda, helped Rick Hendrick get his NASCAR start. Gee was a body fabricator, and many considered him the best in his day.

"I can look at Robert Gee Jr., or Jimmy Gee, or Dale Jr, and all I see is Robert Gee. They're the spitting image of him. I go back and look and pictures from when we did things together, and I have to say, I owe Robert a lot," Hendrick said.

One Superbowl Commercial

When a group of musicians appeared in a Chevrolet commercial it was Dale Earnhardt Jr who stole the show. Junior closed out the commercial singing "Ain't we got Love," -- which was also the title of the commercial.

The spot 1st aired during the 2007 Super Bowl and included performances by Big 'n Rich, Mary J Blige, and rapper T.I. along with several people singing the praises of their own Chevys.

Dale Jr sang a line from the song "The Jet Set," by George Jones and Tammy Wynette -- "No we're not the jet set. We're the old Chevrolet set, but ain't we got love," as he cruised down the highway in a red Corvette.

A side note: Dale Earnhardt Jr is part of the jet set, he owns a Learjet 60.

Following Earnhardt's part George and Tammy could be heard in the background singing the verse again.

The spot opens with Mary J Blige singing Foghat's Chevrolet.

Big 'n Rich sing "And I wouldn't trade ol' Leroy or my Chevrolet for your freak parade."

from their hit Save a Horse.

T.I. lays down the lyrics to his song Top Back by singing "I like my beat down low and my top let back. Can see me ridin' 24's on my Impala wet black."

He would later join Dale Jr in another Chevy commercial. T.I. is the artist who trades cars with Dale Jr, with Jr speeding along in a black Impala, and T.I. cruising slowly in the No. 8 Chevrolet.

Racer Johnny O'Connell also had a part in the commercial singing L.L. Cool J's Goin' Back to Cali.

The commercial was produced by Chevrolet by the ad agency Campbell-Ewald. Since originally airing on the Super Bowl the spot is regularly seen during NASCAR broadcasts and network programming.

Chevrolet and Dale Jr

With Dale Jr's move to Hendrick Motorsports the long-time Earnhardt affiliation with Chevrolet is set to continue. Hendrick is unofficially the

top Chevy team, and they signed a long term contract renewal with Chevrolet in 2007.

Dale Earnhardt Jr doesn't just drive a Chevrolet on the race track. He also has a sponsorship deal with Chevrolet to promote their vehicles.

By partnering with Dale Jr, Chevrolet is able to produce advertising and marketing campaigns revolving around the driver -- including broadcast and print ads, as well as internet promotions at Chevrolet Racing.

Junior also makes a number of personal appearances for Chevrolet such as meeting with Chevy dealers and business partners at the race track, and attending special events as a guest host or speaker.

Dale Jr has appeared in many Chevrolet TV commercials including the recent "Ain't We Got Love" spot where he's driving a red Corvette and singing "We're not the jet set, we're the old Chevrolet set, but ain't we got love."

Chevrolet designed a Monte Carlo with a Dale Earnhardt Jr theme in 2004. It was a limited production vehicle -- only 4,000 were built -- and occasionally 1 will turn up on eBay.

The red Monte Carlo features Dale Jr and No. 8 emblems on the exterior, along with DEI stripes like Junior drove on the track.

Inside a custom leather interior features Dale Jr's signature stitched into the leather upholstery.

Junior also regularly makes personal appearances for Chevrolet -- at the SEMA show in Las Vegas he introduced "Big Red," a customized Chevy Silverado truck that he worked with designers at GM to develop.

He doesn't just drive a Chevrolet on the race track, Dale Jr owns several Chevrolets including a Silverado truck customized with off-road racing gear that he drives when he's at home in Cleveland, North Carolina.

A 1973 Chevrolet Camaro Z28 is another of Dale Earnhardt Jr's Chevy vehicles. The red Camaro is equipped with a 364 cubic inch V8 Corvette engine producing 440 horsepower .

Chevrolet has no doubt invested millions of dollars in partnering with Dale Jr to promote its brand. The increased goodwill and increased sales they have enjoyed as a result are immeasurable.

Chevrolet's success in NASCAR includes 26 manufacturer's championships and 5 consecutive Daytona 500 victories.

Besides Dale Jr and Hendrick Chevy also sponsors a number of other NASCAR drivers and teams including Jeff Gordon, Jimmie Johnson and Richard Childress Racing.

Long before Dale Earnhardt Jr was a famous Chevrolet driver he worked as a technician at Dale Earnhardt Chevrolet in Newton, North Carolina -- so his Chevy roots run deep.

For Chevy dealers and Dale Earnhardt Jr the old adage of "Win on Sunday, sell on Monday" still rings true. Dale Jr has helped Chevy sell plenty of Impalas, Monte Carlos and Chevy trucks with his performance on the race track -- and the commercial tie-ins don't hurt either.

Driver 8: The Book by Dale Jr

It should come as no surprise to anyone that when Dale Earnhardt Jr writes a book it would be a bestseller.

In his autobiography, Driver #8, Earnhardt details the highs and lows of his 2000 rookie season in NASCAR's Winston Cup series.

The book is written by Earnhardt Jr from his perspective -- while Budweiser PR man Jade Gurss helped with the typing.

At 25 years of age Junior sets out on his 1st year in Winston Cup racing.

While he competed in the Busch series the previous 2 years -- and won 2 consecutive championships -- it would pale by comparison to his first year in Cup.

In the Busch series Dale Jr could come and go as he pleased -- without a throng of media and fans surrounding him.

Now he was being thrust into the white hot spotlight of fame that was NASCAR's Winston Cup series.

While media attention would grow more intense, so would competition on the track -- Junior was driving faster cars, and competing against faster drivers. He would have to take his performance up more than a notch.

Was he up to it -- find out in Driver #8!

You'll find out how Dale Jr developed a winning chemistry with his crew, and learn what it meant to him to get his 1st Cup win -- just 7 races into the season.

Tag along with Junior from the high banks of Daytona to his home in Mooresville, North Carolina.

Find out what it was like to hang around with Rolling Stones writer Toure' for his 1st interview with the rock 'n roll magazine.

Dale Earnhardt Jr's 1st person account of that 1st year takes you behind the scenes in the life of a NASCAR star.

He talks about how it feels to win a race -- and how it feels to lose one. What it's like to deal with the media -- and how he handles a rush of excited fans.

Earnhardt Jr shares a glimpse into his personal life too -- see what it's like to hang out with him in Club E -- the private nightclub he built in his basement where he once hosted a New Year's eve party for 600.

Driver #8 also contains 16 pages of photos showing the life and times of Dale Earnhardt Jr.

This book was originally published in hardback by Warner Books in December, 2002. It is also available in paperback.

Sales of Driver #8 have been phenomenal. The book spent 17 weeks on the New York Times Bestseller list.

Dale Jr had help with the book from Jade Gurss, the owner of Fingerprint, Inc.

Budweiser hired Fingerprint to handle media and public relations for Budweiser in NASCAR, as well as their driver Dale Earnhardt Jr.

Other books to his credit include “DW: A Lifetime Going Around in Circles,” the Darrel Waltrip story.

Gurss helped Dale Earnhardt capture all the gritty details of a year in NASCAR’s top season -- and a year in his life.

Product Details

ISBN: 0446612502

ISBN-13: 9780446612500 Format: Mass Market Paperback, 384pp

Publisher: Warner Books

Earnings

Total earnings for Dale Earnhardt Jr as of the beginning of the 2009 NASCAR Sprint Cup season are \$54.3 million.

That's his earnings from the Sprint Cup series only. Career earnings for the Busch series totaled \$4.3 million.

That comes to a grand total of \$58.6 million.

These figures represent Dale Jr's winnings for competition in NASCAR races only, and do not include bonuses, souvenir sales, endorsements, sponsorships or personal appearances.

Forbes magazine has estimated Dale Earnhardt Jr's total income from all sources at \$20.1 million per year -- more than any other NASCAR driver, and 18th among all athletes.

Earnhardt Jr is an astute business person who has invested his earnings from NASCAR into other business ventures.

Hammerhead Productions is Dale Jr's media production company, which produces the popular Speed TV show Back In the Day.

He also owns JR Motorsports which fields entries in the Nationwide series. Junior merged his Nationwide team with Hendrick Motorsports in 2008.

Elvis and Junior

Dale Earnhardt Jr enjoys a wide variety of music, and he has always been a fan of The King of Rock and Roll. So it was an honor for him to host "Elvis Music & Movies", on August 13, 2007 during the first ever Elvis Week celebration to be held at Graceland.

NHRA Top Fuel driver Brandon Bernstein joined Earnhardt on stage in a tribute to Elvis.

The 2 drivers were happy to discuss not only racing, but their favorite Elvis songs and movies before Dale Jr introduced a digitally re-mastered "Viva Las Vegas" before the classic Elvis Movie was shown on the lawn.

When Dale Jr was a young child he spent a lot of time with his grandmother, Martha Earnhardt, while his father was away racing. Martha was an Elvis fan, and she played Elvis' music for Junior.

"My grandmother used to watch me when I was little, and she always listened to Elvis, so I grew up an Elvis fan," Earnhardt said. "This will be my second visit to Graceland, and I'm looking forward to helping celebrate Elvis' legacy with thousands of his biggest fans."

Martha accompanied Dale Jr to Elvis Week in 2007.

A special paint scheme Elvis Car was developed for Dale Jr to drive beginning in September, 2007. The Elvis car is white with red trim and features a likeness of Elvis on the hood and rear quarter panels. "Elvis 30th" along with The King's image will appear on the trunk lid.

Bernstein will have a similar paint scheme on his NHRA dragster.

Junior drove the car in the 2007 Chevy Rock & Roll 400 at Richmond International Raceway.

Dale Jr has 3 wins at Richmond. It was nice to see him in on the track with The King.

Motorsports Authentics is produced a limited edition 1:24 scale diecast car featuring the Elvis paint scheme in a Car of Tomorrow Chevrolet Impala. The diecast car has an opening hood and trunk and tampon-printed graphics.

Hammerhead Entertainment

Add entertainment mogul to Dale Earnhardt Jr's resume.

On November 10, 2005 Dale Earnhardt Jr formed Hammerhead Entertainment LLC -- a production and entertainment company.

One of Hammerhead's 1st projects was to produce 13 episodes of Back In the Day for the Speed Channel.

Hammerhead Entertainment created the series based on an old racing show from the 1960's and 1970's called Car and Track which was hosted by Bud Linderman.

Dale Jr's production company also owns the rights to other TV and radio shows, DVD's, and even a nightclub.

In addition to Back In the Day, Hammerhead entertainment also produced Dale Jr's Unrestricted, a talk show Junior hosts on XM Radio.

The production company has also produced TV commercials for Sharpie, Sherwin Williams, Federal Mogul, Champion Spark Plugs and NASCAR.

It's also a force behind Infield Parking, Dale Jr's social networking web site.

While Dale Jr owns the company, his sister Kelley Earnhardt is listed President and runs the day to day operations of the non-racing side of the business.

The firm was ran by marketing whiz Thayer Lavielle before she departed the company in September 2009.

In addition to her duties at Hammerhead, Lavielle also headed up all marketing and branding for JR Motorsports.

Stock car racing is a long way from her previous position as a vice president for L'OREAL USA in New York.

There Lavielle successfully re-launched the men's cologne brand Drakkar Noir by tying it in with an endorsement and sponsorship with Dale Jr.

While at DEI Junior's No. 8 Chevrolet sported Drakkar decals, and he appeared in advertising for the product.

In the ads Dale Jr appeared in designer fashions, and not the usual t-shirt and jeans he wore around his friends.

That earned Junior a new nickname from his friends and crew guys -- Rico Suave'.

Lavielle also has television experience. She worked at ABC for 5 years as a producer for Good Morning America.

At L'Oreal Lavielle began her career in public relations, but her bosses saw she had a talent for marketing, where she found her niche.

The Dale Jr deal with Drakkar Noir was such a success that Lavielle scored a promotion -- L'Oreal tapped her to head up its Lancôme business.

All the while she stayed in touch with the Earnhardt's back in North Carolina.

Soon she had an offer to join JR Motorsports heading up marketing, branding and licensing for Dale Earnhardt Jr.

Hammerhead Productions was a natural extension of the Dale Jr brand given Lavielle's previous experience at ABC.

When she 1st moved to North Carolina her office was located on Dale Jr's remote 140 acre estate.

While the production firm now has an office in Mooresville, it's a long way from Manhattan's Madison Avenue.

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Rick Hendrick

In June 2007 NASCAR team owner Rick Hendrick scored 1 of the biggest victories of his career -- he signed Dale Earnhardt Jr to drive for Hendrick Motorsports.

Hendrick denied he was interested in signing Earnhardt Jr for weeks, saying there was “no room at the inn.” After all Hendrick had 4 excellent drivers under contract, and no room for Dale Jr.

But after much wrangling and intense speculation Kyle Busch was out at Hendrick Motorsports -- and Dale Jr was in.

Dale Jr agreed to a 5 year contract with Hendrick beginning in 2008.

Rick Hendrick made his fortune in the car business. He owns one of the largest automotive dealer groups in the country with 70 dealerships under the Hendrick banner.

Born Joseph Riddick Hendrick, III in 1949 in Warrenton, North Carolina, Hendrick grew up working on the family's tobacco farm just south of the Virginia state line.

He got his start in the car business in Raleigh while attending North Carolina State University and working as an intern at Westinghouse Electric. In his spare time he would buy used cars that were in need of repair, fix them, clean them up and sell them from an old gas station.

Hendrick later partnered with a Raleigh car dealer to open International Sports Car Center where he soon became general manager. His early success caught the attention of Chevrolet executives who tapped him to take over a struggling Chevrolet dealership in the small town of Bennettsville, South Carolina in 1976.

The dealership was unprofitable when Hendrick sold everything he had to buy it, but Chevrolet promised that if he would turn it around they would help him buy more dealerships.

With just 9 employees Hendrick took a dealership that had been selling just 20 cars a month to one that was selling 80 a month.

Chevrolet soon made good on their promise by arranging for Hendrick to purchase City Chevrolet in the busy city of Charlotte.

With the money he made in the car business Rick Hendrick founded All Star Racing -- which would later become Hendrick Motorsports -- in 1984.

Hendrick was an innovator in NASCAR. He was the 1st to successfully run a multi-car team. Hendrick initially did it with 2 race teams, and today there are 4 teams under the Hendrick Motorsports banner.

In the 1st year All Star Racing scored 3 victories and finished 9th in the championship point standings with just 5 employees.

But before going all-out as a car owner Rick Hendrick tested the waters by partnering with Robert Gee to field a car in the Busch series on a limited basis --the 2 men hired a hotshot driver named Dale Earnhardt. By the way, Gee is Dale Earnhardt Jr's grandfather.

Now that partnership has come full-circle with Dale Earnhardt Jr set to drive for Hendrick Motorsports in 2008.

At Home with Dale Jr

The town that Dale Jr calls home these days is so small that it isn't even on some major maps. Cleveland North Carolina is just a blip on the road to Salisbury when you're leaving Junior's native Mooresville.

A modular home sits at the end of a mile-and-a-half driveway in the middle of 140 acres of land that Dale Earnhardt Jr calls home.

The 3 bedroom house with gray siding, trimmed in mountain stone, looks nice -- but it's far from a mansion

Big Red, his customized Chevrolet Silverado, can sometimes be seen in the driveway.

In the backyard sit's a go kart track that Junior built to race with his buddies. The track is concrete, and too bumpy for Dale Jr's liking. He would like to get it paved in asphalt -- but it seems the asphalt contractors have bigger jobs to do than repave someone's go kart track - - even Juniors.

There's a pool out back that is landscaped with natural stone around an irregular border, so that it looks more like a pond at first.

There is a huge flagpole out front that once had a pirate flag flying from it -- complete with skull and crossbones -- that read "Surrender the Booty."

A player piano sits in an upstairs room just off the deck that overlooks the pool.

The house is perfect for having a few friends over -- hanging out -- and having fun. There is a billiard room with a regulation-size pool table in the basement. On the wall hangs movie posters from one of Dale Jr's favorite movies -- *Cast Away* starring Tom Hanks.

There is also a well stocked bar nearby.

Just outside the garage and down the hill is Dale Jr's own private 6 hole par 3 golf course with manicured greens and flag stands.

A replica of vintage 1960's Union 76 gas station sits out back. It looks so authentic that I swear if you pulled up you'd expect Goober or Gomer to stroll out asking "fill 'er up?"

There's a pair of old gas pumps out front That look to be expertly restored. Between the pumps sits a stock of motor oil.

An old RC Cola cooler sits at one end of the station -- while a sign hangs on the other end that reads simply "Jr's Place."

The simple white building has an orange stripe just like the old Union 76 gas stations used to have.

Walk inside the gas station and you'll find a fleet of go karts that Junior races with his friends on a race track nearby.

There's a huge garage on the property that houses some of Junior's cars, including the yellow Corvette that he raced in the Rolex 24 at Daytona.

The property seems to suit Dale Jr perfectly.

Mooresville North Carolina

When Dale Earnhardt Jr talks about the "Dirty Mo Posse" he's referring to the close-knit group of friends from his hometown -- Mooresville, North Carolina.

If you want to visit Mooresville just head up I-77 about 25 miles north of Charlotte near the shores of Lake Norman.

In a CNNMoney.com poll Mooresville was named 1 of the Top 100 Best Places to Live. The town of 23,000 people was ranked 65.

Mooresville is home to the NASCAR Cup teams of Dale Earnhardt Inc, Penske Racing South, and Team Red Bull Racing.

The Nationwide shops of JR Motorsports, Dale Jr's team, plus Roush Racing are also located here.

CNBC rated Mooresville No. 5 in the state for business due to its 2 main industries; tourism and racing. With more than 60 professional race shops and racing-related businesses located in Mooresville the racing industry draws the tourism industry.

In downtown Mooresville the town retains a historic charm, with many of the 1800's era buildings preserved and in use today.

If you go downtown be sure to visit the D.E. Turner & Co. Hardware Store building. The inside of the building hasn't changed since it was built in 1899.

For \$14 you can enjoy a round of golf on the Town of Mooresville Golf Course, and you may bump into some racers while you're there.

For groups who want to combine race shop tours with business meetings the Charles Mack Citizen Center, with seating for 235, is available for rental. The site is perfect for business meetings, luncheons and as a base for corporate hospitality during your visit to Mooresville.

Race fans will want to visit the North Carolina Auto Racing Hall of Fame, which serves as Mooresville's official visitor's center. There you'll find Curtis Turner's "Purple Hog," a 1956 Ford NASCAR race car, and Alan Kulwicki's 1992 Championship winning No.7 Ford on display.

Mooresville is home to the NASCAR Technical Institute, a school and training ground for aspiring NASCAR crew chiefs, fabricators, engine and chassis specialists and pit crew members. There students can prepare for a career with a NASCAR team.

Fox broadcaster and former NASCAR crew chief Jeff Hammond owns PIT Instruction & Training in Mooresville. The facility is specifically for the training of NASCAR over-the wall crew members who change the tires and fuel the cars on race day.

The school helps qualified graduates find a job in racing, and many of the top teams actively recruit there.

The city is also corporate headquarters for Lowes Home Improvement Warehouse.

Mooresville is a growing city, with over 800 new residents moving in each year for jobs in the motorsports industry, corporate jobs at firms like Lowes, or just for relaxing lakefront living on Lake Norman.

This town is a must see for any race fan, especially if you are an Earnhardt fan.

JR Motorsports

Originally a management company formed to handle Dale Jr's licensing and business deals, JR Motorsports became a full-on race team in 2002 when a late model stock car race team began operating out of a small building on Junior's property near his home in Mooresville, North Carolina with just 1 employee.

Today the race team operates out of a modern 66,000 square foot race shop near downtown Mooresville and employs over 60 people,

JR Motorsports operates a NASCAR Nationwide team.

The roster of drivers who have competed in the Nationwide series for JR Motorsports include Brad Keselowski, Mark McFarland, Shane Huffman, Robby Gordon, Martin Truex Jr, and Dale Earnhardt Jr.

In 2010 Kelly Bires will take over driving duties on the No. 88 – replacing Keselowski who is headed to Penske Racing and the Sprint Cup series

T.J. Majors drove the first race for the new team at Concord Motorsports Park in the Street Stock division. The team would compete in 10 races that first year.

Majors is now Dale Jr's spotter.

The team got its first feature win in Late Model Stock Car race at Motor Mile Speedway in Radford, Virginia on August 21, 2004.

Shortly after his move to Hendrick Motorsports Earnhardt announced that he and Rick Hendrick had merged their Nationwide programs. Dale Jr is listed as the owner of the No. 88 car, while Rick Hendrick is listed as the owner of the No. 5 car.

"It's a great opportunity to have the wholesale support that Hendrick Motorsports is going to provide," said Earnhardt. "Being a relatively new team owner in this sport, this is a huge step for me and everyone at JR Motorsports. It was never part of the equation when I was deciding

where to drive next year, but it seemed to be a natural progression once Rick and I began talking about the transition."

Earnhardt says he has no immediate plans to field a cup team out of JR Motorsports, but left the door open, saying it was a possibility "years down the road."

"It was just so, so far down the road, it was ridiculous to even think about or dream about it," Junior said of becoming a car owner in NASCAR's premiere series. "Being closer and closer to something like that being a reality, it's always a possibility."

Dale Jr has looked to his past for help running the company. In June 2007 Tony Eury was hired away from Dale Earnhardt, Inc to become Director of Competition at JR Motorsports.

That move led to Eury being named crew chief for Brad Keselowski. The pair became regular visitors to Victory Lane in 2009.

Eury was Junior's crew chief beginning when Junior first started in the Busch series. Together they won 2 Busch championships before moving on to NASCAR's Cup series.

"Tony Sr. brings wins, championships, and an immeasurable amount of knowledge to JR Motorsports," Earnhardt Jr. said. "He also brings a sense of trust that you only have in family. This company needs his expertise, and I'm glad he sees the potential at JR Motorsports to want to work here. I hope I can provide him the same amount of success here that he has achieved over the years, and I hope he enjoys working here as much as I know he enjoyed working at DEI."

Eury had been a full time employee of DEI since 1987, and had worked with Dale Earnhardt both as a part-time employee and unpaid helper since 1976.

Before joining up with Dale Jr, Eury had been a crew chief for several Busch series drivers at DEI including Neil Bonnett, Michael Waltrip, Steve Park, and Dale Earnhardt.

"I remember Dale coming up to me and asking if I could make a driver out of Dale Jr.," Eury said. "My remark to him was I don't know why we can't. Why would you want to spend money on someone else's kid when you can spend money on your own kid?"

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Speed 1

JR Motorsports teamed with the cable channel SPEED to provide a SPEED 1, a fleet of demonstration cars for the 2007 NASCAR Sprint Cup series.

Dale Jr's race shop built a fleet of Car of Tomorrow, Superspeedway, and intermediate track cars that SPEED broadcasters use in their NASCAR coverage.

The cars were driven by Jimmy Spencer and Kenny Wallace during Speed's pre-race and post-race coverage of NASCAR.

SPEED wanted to let its viewers experience actual race conditions in a real race car.

We wanted to do more than cruise around the track in an old show car," said Hunter Nickell, SPEED Executive VP & General Manager. "We want

to take viewers and fans as inside as we can get them with real equipment. If we do our job right, SPEED is not just telling viewers what's going on, we're showing them. By creating the SPEED 1 program, we will give the viewers an opportunity to watch a race like they've never watched it before."

The cars traveled to NASCAR Sprint Cup races each weekend, but during the week they are on display to the public at JR Motorsports in Mooresville, North Carolina.

The cars were filmed on the track using multiple camera angles to give viewers a true-life experience of passing, getting on to and off of pit road, making a pit stop, and where the fastest line is around the track.

The cars were built especially for the SPEED Channel project, with Richard Childress Racing providing the engines, so as to give viewers the most realistic experience possible. Kenny Wallace took one up to 190 MPH at Daytona and was so impressed he wanted to put his sponsor's logo on the side and race it. Apparently these aren't recycled show cars, but the real deal race cars.

Jr Joins Professional Bull Riders

The world's greatest bull riders showed up for cash and bragging rights in the Dale Jr PBR Clash.

The Professional Bull Riders event was sponsored by Wrangler -- a major supporter of Dale Earnhardt Jr -- at Charlotte's Bobcat Arena just across the street from where Junior plans to open a bar in December.

PBR billed the event as the union of the most popular name in racing with the toughest sport on the planet.

Dale Jr didn't just put his name on the event, he sat in the arena watching the bull riders intently. Other NASCAR notables were in attendance as well, including team owner Richard Childress.

At one point Dale Jr decided he had been a spectator long enough and demanded that PBR officials put him on a bull.

Soon one of the “meanest” bulls was put into the chute for Junior -- his name was Fluffy, and I think he may have moved once before Dale Jr dismounted after having a little fun.

45 of the world’s best bull riders participated in the 3 day competition with 1 goal in mind -- to stay on that bull for 8 seconds.

Like in NASCAR, the competition began with a little showmanship. As the bull riders were introduced American flags were flying and a burst of fireballs jumped into the air as the house lights dimmed.

Competing in the bull riding competition was 2 time world champion bull rider Adriano Morales, 2005 champ Justin McBride, Sean Willingham and Ross Coleman along with a host of other Professional Bull Riders. All were set on winning the Dale Jr PBR Clash title.

“The PBR has some of the toughest bull riders in the world,” said Earnhardt. “They are great guys but to do what they do you not only need to be an excellent athlete but a little psycho too.”

Junior went on to say he’d prefer to be behind the wheel going 200 mph than to ride one of the bucking bulls.

David Allen, the sports marketing guru who worked with Dale Earnhardt Sr for over 20 years, masterminded Junior’s association with the event.

Allen has worked with the PBR since its inception in 1993, so the racing and bull riding connection was easy for him to make.

100 million viewers tune in to watch Professional Bull Riders on Fox, NBC and other networks annually -- attesting to the sports growing popularity.

The networks air around 500 hours of PBR programming each year.

Additionally, 1.5 million people attend the events in person.

Over 1,200 bull riders will compete in more than 300 PBR events this year.

A Favorite Quote of Dale Earnhardt Jr

This is one of Dale Earnhardt Jr's favorite quotes. These are not Dale Jr's words — they're Abraham Lincoln's. But Junior must have got a lot out of them to say this is his favorite quote.

It's pretty patriotic and timeless — the words are as meaningful today as they were 170 years ago.

Here it is. What do you think?

At what point shall we expect the approach of danger? By what means shall we fortify against it? Shall we expect some transatlantic military giant, to step the Ocean, and crush us at a blow? Never!

All the armies of Europe, Asia and Africa combined, with all the treasure of the earth (our own excepted) in their military chest; with a

Buonaparte for a commander, could not by force, take a drink from the Ohio, or make a track on the Blue Ridge, in a trial of a thousand years. At what point, then, is the approach of danger to be expected?

I answer, if it ever reach us it must spring up amongst us. It cannot come from abroad. If destruction be our lot, we must ourselves be its author and finisher. As a nation of freemen, we must live through all time, or die by suicide. — By Abraham Lincoln — from The Collected Works of Abraham Lincoln edited by Roy P. Basler, Volume I, “Address Before the Young Men’s Lyceum of Springfield, Illinois.”

Sony Sponsor Profile

Sony has added some horsepower to their marketing efforts by signing Dale Earnhardt Jr to a multi-year personal services endorsement deal.

Sony has enlisted Dale Jr for advertising and promotions as well as in store point-of-purchase merchandising.

"I'm a big electronics fan. I'm a big computer guy. It's products I can dig," said Junior.

Junior has appear in Sony TV and magazine ads.

Dale J promotes a variety of Sony consumer electronics including their new line of BRAVIA HDTVs.

He will also make personal appearances for Sony at electronics industry events and trade shows.

"I always check out the latest electronics available and Sony delivers the best," Earnhardt Jr said. "The company is a leader in the industry and offers great technology. It's cool to be associated with a brand that's known for its innovative, high-quality products."

Earnhardt likes computers and high-tech equipment. He's an avid online gamer who enjoys competing in simulated racing events with his NASCAR buddies and anyone else who is online racing at the time.

"His love for our products was a big benefit," said Sony vice president Stuart Redsun. "I know he was really excited to get his hands on a lot of our games."

According to Sony, Dale Jr will mainly pitch their high-definition TVs, camcorders, cameras and Blu-ray disc players.

Junior was able to score some Sony swag out of the deal, scoring a new digital camera.

According to Sony, their BRAVIA line of HDTVs deliver outstanding lifelike picture quality by focusing on color, motion and resolution providing smoother and more subtle transitions in colors and hues.

BRAVIA also features high speed response times in order to display a smooth, lifelike motion on the screen.

Advanced BRAVIA models feature Sony's Motionflow™ High Frame Rate technology to preserve the resolution of fast moving objects like Dale Jr's race car.

The BRAVIA Engine™ in Sony HDTVs can even enhance standard TV that is not broadcast in HD, showing a cleaner, crisper image.

Sony HDTVs are also extremely easy to use. A simple on-screen menu allows users to easily access menus and controls.

Dale Earnhardt Jr seemed pleased with the financial arrangements of the deal, but he seemed as much impressed with representing a quality company like Sony.

"The cash is great, but the product is good, too," he said.

Sony has had a presence in NASCAR before. Besides being the official HDTV, they have sponsored several Sprint Cup series races. The deal with Dale Jr takes their visibility within the NASCAR community to a whole new level.

Big Red

Dale Earnhardt Jr may have been half-joking when he told GM designers he wanted a train horn on his new truck -- like the one he has at home that was bought on eBay -- but that's exactly what Earnhardt got on "Big Red," his custom built 2007 Chevy Silverado crew cab.

The truck is designed after a truck Dale Jr actually owns. He has an older Silverado that sits in his driveway in North Carolina. He's customized it himself, with a little help from his buddies -- and it really does have a locomotive horn.

This may be the ultimate off road custom truck. Chevrolet debuted it at the SEMA show in Las Vegas with Dale Jr riding in the passenger seat.

"Everybody always asked me what I drive as a race car driver, well I drive a Silverado," Earnhardt said. " I like to trick mine out a little bit."

This is definitely the only truck of its kind, but based on public demand GM may build a production version of it for you.

Junior gave GM designers his opinions on the truck's design, from the custom upholstery to the light bar -- and , yes, the train horn.

The truck is jacked up with an off road suspension, and sits on custom 1 of a kind 20" alloy wheels.

The roll bar with integrated lights is in a "flying bridge" style -- and looks like it belongs on a mega-yacht instead of a truck.

The truck's interior is done in a rich black leather with Dale Jr signature embossed in the seats. The carpet, trim and headliner are also done in all black.

Under the hood is a 6.2 L Chevy V-8 that produces 380 H.P. and 417 lb-ft of torque.

Eaton ELocker differentials help provide power to all 4 wheels.

A high mounted front brush guard gives the truck a Baja racer look. The fenders, hood and grille are all exclusive to the Dale Earnhardt Jr Silverado.

There is even a 6000 lb. Warn winch bolted to the front end.

Custom Spectra Flair paint highlights an understated Dale Jr signature on the side of the truck.

In true off-road style the truck doesn't have a tailgate. Instead, a spare tire is mounted in the bed for a quick change.

A custom roll pan with 6" exhaust pipes sets off the truck's rear.

Custom No. 8 graphics and emblems give the truck an unmistakable finishing touch.

Wrangler Sponsor Profile

Wrangler Jeans has a personal services endorsement deal with Dale Earnhardt Jr -- in fact , they even created a new line of Jeans, Wrangler Hero, just for the Dale Jr sponsorship deal.

Wrangler is the official jean of Dale Earnhardt Jr.

To promote the tie-in with Junior Wrangler has created a mix of TV, radio and print ads featuring the racer.

In one TV spot featuring Dale Jr, Sheryl Crow can be heard singing her high-powered "Steve McQueen" on the soundtrack.

Wrangler print ads featuring Junior have appeared in Rolling Stone and ESPN The Magazine.

In stores you'll find Dale Earnhardt Jr on Wrangler Hero ticketing, as well as on promotional signage.

The jeans company chose Dale Jr as their spokesman because of his high profile personality and immediate name recognition -- and the fact that Wrangler once sponsored his Dad's car didn't hurt either.

"It's awesome to have the Wrangler name back on an Earnhardt car," said Dale Jr.

The Wrangler Hero line is targeted at young men who want fashionable jeans with a contemporary style and fit.

But when Wrangler first approached Earnhardt Jr about a sponsorship he turned the company down, saying he didn't like the product.

He only agreed to do the deal when Wrangler agreed to create the Hero brand -- and give Junior a lot of input in the design.

Wrangler's "Take a Test Drive with Dale Jr" promotion raised \$42,100 for the American Red Cross.

The Dale Earnhardt Jr Foundation came up with the idea of an eBay auction for the opportunity to ride with Dale Jr for 3 laps at Lowe's Motor Speedway.

The auction was at the top of eBay's "Most Watched" list for 7 days shortly after it opened for an initial bid of \$888 -- with the entire \$42,100 final bid going to the Red Cross.

Don Crawford of Ocala, Florida was the high bidder who won the auction as a gift for his wife Debbie, who is a huge fan of Dale Earnhardt Jr.

Besides a ride with Junior, Debbie was also treated to lunch in the DEI Trophy Room and a private tour of the race shop.

Payback: Junior Pays Kelley Back

Dale Earnhardt Jr owed his sister, Kelley Earnhardt Elledge, big time.

After all it was Kelley who had helped him pay his bills when he was living in a doublewide and working at his Dad's Chevy dealership.

It was Kelley who helped him manage his business affairs when he 1st started racing.

It was Kelley who ran JR Motorsports when it was just a licensing and marketing tool for Dale Jr.

And it would be Kelley who would help Junior negotiate the deal of his career when he left DEI to drive for Hendrick Motorsports.

So when Dale Jr had the chance to surprise Kelley on the Speed reality TV show "Payback" with a new Chevrolet Tahoe SS he jumped on it.

If you've never seen the show the story line is usually about a famous celebrity who has someone in their life who has helped them immensely -- and now needs to be paid back.

The show's producers work with the celebrity to customize a vehicle just for that person who is going to be paid back.

Dale Jr chose a Chevrolet Tahoe SS for sister Kelley, and the crew went to work making it unique for her.

During the show clips of the Tahoe being customized were mixed with interviews with Dale Jr and Kelley.

Dale talked about how much Kelley had helped him with so many things -- while the Tahoe was being equipped with special wheels, chrome and custom leather inside.

At the end of the show Junior hands Kelley - who had no idea about all this -- the keys to her new Tahoe.

She seemed genuinely surprised as she drove away in it.

Bubba Calls Out Dale Jr

Controversial radio shock jock DJ Bubba Clem has called out not just Dale Earnhardt Jr – but the entire Junior Nation.

When Bubba made his predictions for Talladega, he made the statement that “any Hendrick driver can win, except the 88.” He went on to say that “the new car of tomorrow has accentuated that Junior is a mediocre driver.”

Obviously, Bubba hasn’t been paying attention. Dale Earnhardt Jr has [5 wins](#) at Talladega, including 4 in a row at the 2.66 mile Superspeedway, and he almost always runs well there.

So what makes Dale Jr so good at Talladega? "I go in with a real good attitude," said Earnhardt. "When you go into something with a good attitude you normally get good results."

“Dad was real good at it. We always just put a little extra attention into those races and those race cars that we took to those tracks. We spent a little more time with them, and we just take it very, very seriously.”

Bubba Clem, better known on the radio as Bubba the Love Sponge, is an outspoken radio personality on Sirius Satellite Radio's Howard Stern channel. He's set to be the [Grand Marshall](#) for Saturday's Aarons 312 Nationwide race. I doubt he'll get a warm reception from Junior's fans in Talladega

Bubba went on to say that "Dale is on the back side of the learning curve for the COT."

"One way for Hendrick to figure out whether it's Junior or not is to give him Chad Knaus," said Bubba.

If Rick Hendrick wants to put the No. 88 in Victory Lane then swapping Tony Eury Jr and Chad Knaus is not the answer. That will never happen.

Chad Knaus and Dale Earnhardt Jr would never have the chemistry that Knaus and Jimmie Johnson have.

I think Bubba is flat wrong.

Dale Jr's First Win

Dale Earnhardt Jr's first win in the cup series came on April 2, 2000 in the DirecTV 500 held at Texas Motor Speedway in Fort Worth, Texas.

"I really didn't know what to expect this year," Earnhardt said. "I didn't know if we were going to kick butt right out of the box or whether we were going to be lousy for a year or two."

Dale Jr started the race from outside the second row in the 4th qualifying position driving the No. 8 Budweiser Chevrolet owned by Dale Earnhardt, Inc.

His margin of victory was an impressive 5.920 seconds over second place finishing Jeff Burton who led 37 laps.

The young Earnhardt was dominant in his first win, leading 106 of 334 laps on his way to victory lane.

His winnings for that first win were \$374,675.

This was the 7th race of the 2000 season, which was Dale Earnhardt, Jr's rookie year, and his first full-time season in the cup series.

Junior had made 5 cup appearances in the 1999 season, so that means he won his first race after only 12 attempts -- a feat accomplished by only a handful of other drivers.

When asked if he thought he would get to Victory Lane so soon, Earnhardt Jr replied "I didn't think it was actually coming this quick. I can't believe it. When you put together a car that good, it's going to get you to victory lane sooner or later."

"I didn't know how quickly this would come and I'm kind of overwhelmed by it," Earnhardt Jr said. "But I think we're going to see a couple of rookies get into victory lane this year."

"We've got an awesome car," Jr said. "It did whatever I asked it to do. We didn't change nothing all day long. That tells you how good a race car we had."

"I couldn't believe our car was that good, but it was. I could adjust my driving line and style to each set of tires. I'd point and shoot and that thing ran. That's all there was to it."

"After the last three weeks, it was fun to go get out front and show these guys I could use my head and make smart decisions," Dale Jr said "Even when I've got a real fast car and I'm not up front, I can be patient and pick my way through there."

"It was fun to prove that to them and prove my status as far as being a driver goes."

The time of the race was 3 hours, 49 minutes, 12 seconds, at an average speed of 131.152 MPH.

There were 12 caution periods for a total of 62 laps.

Car owner and father Dale Earnhardt posted a 7th place finish parked his # 3 Chevrolet next to Victory Lane and joined his son to congratulate him in Victory Lane.

"He told me he loved me and then he said he just wanted to make sure I took the time to enjoy this and realize what we accomplished today," Earnhardt Jr said.

"That was pretty cool on his part to be thinking about that at that particular time. This was a product of his work. He's proud of his son, but he's also proud that he built this team and the team won the race."

As Dale Earnhardt watched his son celebrate his first Cup win he smiled and quipped "That's crazy, isn't it."

"I'll tell you, he's something else," The Intimidator said, "He was talking about coming to Texas and winning his first Winston Cup race. I knew the kid could do it. This kid has worked hard, had a good car and drove a good race."

This was also the first Cup win for crew chief Tony Eury. "It's hard to keep him slowed down when the car's good," Eury quipped "He wants to show it. We just keep him toned down all the time. He's like a wild horse."

He obviously had a good car. Earnhardt Jr continually built up big leads over the competition, only to have them erased by cautions. He took the lead for the final time on lap 289, passing DEI teammate Steve Park.

Earnhardt Jr's best finish prior to this race was 10th in Las Vegas earlier in the season.

His first Busch Series victory also came at Texas Motor Speedway.

Eury Out – McGrew In

The heat was just turned up a few degrees on Dale Earnhardt Jr when Tony Eury Jr was been replaced as his crew chief.

That leaves no more excuses for poor performance. Dale Earnhardt Jr has just been handed all the resources Hendrick Motorsports has to offer. There will be no one left to blame if the 88 car does not see improvements on the race track.

It sounds like Rick Hendrick has hired a committee of crew chiefs to run the No. 88.

Hendrick Motorsports announced that Lance McGrew would become *Interim* Crew Chief for the No.88 car starting with the June 7 Pocono race.

Brian Whitesell will fill in as crew chief for one race this weekend at Dover.

The plan is for Whitesell and Rex Stump – two of the best engineers in all on NASCAR – to provide support to new crew chief Lance McGrew to get the No. 88 car back on track.

Brian Whitesell was Ray Evernham's right-hand man when the No. 24 team of Jeff Gordon was winning all those races and championships.

Rex Stump is the man behind the famous T-Rex car that Jeff Gordon won the All Star race with in 1997. That car was banned by NASCAR – not because it was illegal, but because it was so advanced. NASCAR had no rules against the car, but they had never seen anything like it, and told the No. 24 team not to bring the car back.

Stump is the lead chassis engineer at Hendrick Motorsports.

Tony Eury Jr had Dale Jr's Dover cars loaded on the hauler and ready to go before he got the news from Rick Hendrick that he was out as Junior's crew chief.

McGrew, Whitesell and Stump didn't waste any time making changes. They unloaded Junior's cars, removed Eury's setup, and tuned the chassis similar to what the other 3 Hendrick cars have.

After Dale Jr's 40th place finish at Lowe's Motor Speedway this week something was bound to happen.

"Our performance hasn't been where it should be," said Rick Hendrick, owner of Hendrick Motorsports. "It's impossible to pin that on any one factor, but a change is the right decision at this point. We have a plan in place, and we're going to move forward with it."

McGrew has won championships before. He was crew chief for Brian Vickers when the two won the 2003 NASCAR Nationwide Series championship.

He has won as recently as February at Daytona when he was crew chief for Tony Stewart in the Nationwide race.

But McGrew has little experience with today's Sprint Cup cars.

But you have to admit that Rick Hendrick has a pretty good track record when it comes to picking crew chiefs. He hired Ray Evernham and Chad Knaus. The two of them have 6 championships.

Tony Eury Jr will move to a position in the Hendrick research and development shop. "I have mixed feelings," Eury said. "I'll do whatever I can to help all of our teams. I think a new challenge will be good."

I'm not so sure that a crew chief that has just been bumped up from the Nationwide Series is the answer – but I guess we'll find out shortly.

Maybe that's why his title carries the word "interim."

If this deal is going to work it will require co-operation n from all parties involved – including Dale Earnhardt Jr.

Junior needs to precisely describe how the car is performing, and then let the crew chief fix the car. No more crew-chiefing from the driver's seat.

We'll see if this is the right move. Do you think Rick Hendrick has made the right call?

Kyle Busch: It's Never Junior

In the NASCAR world you can't escape the topic of Dale Earnhardt Jr and his crew chief. Kyle Busch was no exception. Here's what he had to say about Junior.

"You got to make the most popular driver in the sport competitive. So you got to do what you got to do, I guess. He's the one who brought that crew chief on. He's the one who pulled so hard to bring Eury, Jr. in. It looked like it was working there in the beginning and it hasn't worked since the summer of last year, really. Whatever makes them better, I guess."

"If Junior doesn't run well, the crew chief is going to be the problem. You know, it's never Junior, it's always the crew chief."

"He's got his hands full, I guess, having to deal with what's going on," said Kyle Busch, talking about Dale Jr's new crew chief Lance McGrew. "And if Junior doesn't run well, then he is going to be the problem again."

"It's never Junior, it's always the crew chief."

Funny Dale Jr Quotes

When Dale Earnhardt Jr has something to say people listen very carefully. Sometimes what he says makes you think about his unique view of the situation, and sometimes it's a little funny, or downright hilarious. Here are a few quotes from Dale Jr.

Have you heard something funny or interesting from Junior? Be sure to let us know.

Here are some favorite Dale Jr quotes:

Doctor: "Alright, we checked you out, and you look to be alright. You will still be able to have kids."

Dale Jr.: "Just not tonight" During a routine visit to the infield medical center following a crash.

"If I could'a, I would'a." Junior's reply to Dave Despain on Wind Tunnel after Despain asked about why he didn't pay Jeff Gordon back for a bump and run.

"Take it easy" -- Junior saying goodbye to George W Bush after the President called to congratulate him on winning the 2004 Daytona 500.

"It don't mean shit, my daddy won here 10 times!" Dale Jr after being asked what it meant to win 5 times at Talladega. That one cost him 25 points and \$25,000.

"Don't let 'em throw the green flag again here, it'll happen all over again. Let me explain it to ya: when it's raining, the ground gets wet, OK?" On the team radio after a rain shower.

Engine tuner: "How do the gauges look?"

Dale Jr: "Nice. They're silver and they all have nice little red needles."
Junior's response to the engine tuners question during an extended
caution period.

"Just because I've got Bud on the car doesn't mean I've got Bud in the
car." From the Bud Apocalypse commercial.

"We'll find something else to run into each other with if it ain't the front
bumper." On bump drafting.

"Well looks like Olive Oil got him one." On the radio to his crew
responding to Kurt Busch's Atlanta win as a race was called due to rain

"You would not believe how loose this car is for two laps after the green.
Then, just like that, it's back to how it was before. But, those first few
laps, damn, it's loose! Junior no likey." Junior describing his ca's
handling.

"Coming into a man's victory lane, no matter what the circumstances, you don't go into a man's victory lane. That's rude. That's uncouth. I been waiting all year to use that word." Dale Jr on Carl Edwards following Edwards's crash and Dale Jr's subsequent win at Michigan.

"I hit everything but the hotdog stand" Describing his race at Martinsville.

"The motor's like an old man -- it'll get up, run for a while and then fall back asleep," --- Dale Jr after the 2006 Daytona 500 where he posted an 8th place finish with an engine that just wouldn't go.

"Beer's for drinkin', toilet paper is for throwin'." After fans threw beer cans at Jeff Gordon following his win.

The Cool Down Lap

I hope you enjoyed these stories about Dale Earnhardt Jr. Feel free to pass this e-book on to a friend.

Please visit RacingWin.com for more news and info about NASCAR and it's drivers.