



Nobody's fuel

Is racing a waste of gasoline? NASCAR says it's all relative

By JEFF HOOD
Cox News Service

Atlanta
Despite coming off a year in which consumers paid record-high prices at the pumps, it will be business as usual in 2006 for NASCAR and its gas-guzzling, 850-horsepower stockcars.

While some drivers across the country faced gas shortages in the weeks following Hurricane Katrina, gas tanks in NASCAR continued to be fueled and refueled.

Just a month after Georgia Governor Sonny Perdue closed the state's public schools to conserve fuel, an estimated 125,000 spectators packed Atlanta Motor Speedway Oct. 30, where nearly 5,000 gallons of racing gasoline were consumed during a four-hour span.

Add in practice sessions and two other races, NASCAR's Craftsman Truck Series and the International Race of Championships, and the total weekend fuel consumption amounted to more than 8,000 gallons, according to Brandon Hutchison, AMS director of events.

Roush Racing President Geoff Smith believes the American public doesn't view auto racing as a waste of energy.

"I think the fuel consumption is insignificant compared to the number of people who are enjoying the consumption of the fuel," Smith said. "When you've got up to 200,000 people at some tracks getting some pleasure out of the consumption of 10,000 gallons of fuel, that's a much better ratio than the person who commutes 50 miles back and forth to work alone in his SUV."

Many race fans, who drive hundreds of miles to watch a race, agree.

"Personally, this is America, and people have a pastime," said Krista Partin of Stockbridge, Ga. "And this is my pastime. And this is what they have to use to make the cars run."

NASCAR Vice President Jim Hunter defended fuel usage by equating racing to a professional sports team jetting coast-to-coast in a jumbo airliner.

"We would hope to educate people that we are not wasting any fuel," Hunter said. "And like any other entertainment industry, we would hope they would view NASCAR just like they do any other entertainment activity, like a football game,

baseball game or a movie." When the engines on the 43 high-powered stockcars, which average just more than 3.5 miles per gallon, are running during a typical race, a race of another kind begins. That's when teams members make the first of five anticipated trips to the gas pumps behind pit road to fill three 11-gallon cans.

To make certain there is an ample supply of fuel each race weekend at Atlanta Motor Speedway, the Henry County speedway is equipped with two underground tanks, each with a 12,000-gallon capacity.

As a bonus, Cup, Busch and Craftsman Truck cars that display the logo of Sunoco, the official fuel supplier of NASCAR, are not required to pay for the 112-octane fuel.

Racers in NASCAR's grass-roots programs, such as Lanier National Speedway in Braselton, Ga., are not as fortunate. Those drivers must ante up \$6 per gallon for racing gasoline.

When the 1970s fuel shortage struck the United States, NASCAR chose to shorten many of its events during the 1974 season.

But two former champions, Bobby Allison and Benny Parsons, disagree on whether the reduction in distance was an actual success.

"At that particular time, I thought it was a great move," Allison said. "There was a crisis at the time, and it took fuel to run our events. So NASCAR voluntarily cut the length of the events back so that would reduce the demand on fuel."

Parsons, a NASCAR analyst for NBC, offered a different perspective.

"I think that was basically a PR move back then because they cut back the length of the races only 10 percent," he said. "So instead of a 500-mile race, it would be a 450-mile race. What we're talking about saving is a few gallons, probably no more than a 100 or 200 gallons. That's just simply a drop in the ocean as to what we need to really conserve in this country."

"It's up to the commuters to be able to find additional people to ride with them, so that we end up with three or four people in a car going to work, instead of one. If we can't do that, then we can't conserve fuel."

Hunter said NASCAR considered reducing the length of the Oct. 2 UAW-Ford 500 in Talladega, Ala., which ran its advertised distance



JOHNNY CRAWFORD / Cox News Service

Donald Hall fills up a Craftsman Series truck at the Sunoco pumps at Atlanta Motor Speedway before the Oct. 29 race at AMS. Two 12,000-gallon tanks ensure there is enough gas for the vehicles to complete the weekend's competition.

just days after Georgia's governor requested a voluntary closure of schools.

Realizing the instability in price and supply of consumer fuel, Hunter said NASCAR is prepared to react accordingly.

"We would certainly plan for that and have contingency plans such as car-pooling, cutting the distance of the races, possibly even trying to complete events in a shorter period of time ... instead of being there three days, be there two days or one day," Hunter said.

Mileya Storey of Tallahassee,

Fla., thinks that would be a good idea.

"Perhaps less practice, shorter races, maybe make it a shorter show," she said.

Gerald Davis, manager of media and public relations for Sunoco, said fuel conservation would be NASCAR's decision.

"We're the official fuel supplier for NASCAR, and that's the relationship we have," Davis said. "NASCAR makes those determinations, not us. ... The use of racing fuel has not had an impact on price or availability on gas purchased by consumers."

NOTEBOOK

Dale Jr. tabs McFarland to drive No. 88 Chevy

Cox News Service

Dale Earnhardt Jr. has selected Mark McFarland, the 2003 Dodge Weekly Racing Series national champion, to be the first Busch Series driver for his Mooresville, N.C.-based company, JR Motorsports.

McFarland will drive the No. 88 Chevrolet as he competes for Rookie of the Year honors.

McFarland spent the 2005 season competing in the USAR Hooters Pro Cup Series for JR Motorsports, compiling one win, 10 top-five finishes, 13 top-10s and a series-best seven pole awards.

While McFarland will have the rookie yellow stripe on his bumper next season, he does have 10 Busch Series starts under his belt. The most recent came in the 2005 Ford 300 season finale at Homestead-Miami, his first race in the U.S. Navy-sponsored Chevrolet that he will pilot in 2006. He qualified 18th and finished in 20th place.

McFarland's best Busch Series finish came at Richmond in the fall of 2004, where he finished 16th.

This is Earnhardt Jr.'s first solely-owned Busch team.

"I'm proud to be entering a relationship with an organization like the U.S. Navy," Earnhardt said. "When you consider the history and the accomplishment the Navy has, it's overwhelming."

Tires to get chip implants in '06

Goodyear will install computer chips in its Eagle racing radial tires and Wrangler radials to be used in the Nextel Cup, Busch and Craftsman Truck series in 2006. The Radio Frequency Identification unit — about 3 inches long and consisting of an antennae that's about the diameter of dental floss with a quarter-inch by eighth-inch chip in the center — will be used to track inventory initially though its uses can be expanded to other areas in the future.

The tires, which previously were tracked using bar codes on the stickers affixed to the new tires, will be tracked using the "RFID" chips implanted in the rubber's sidewall.

Stewart coaches hockey

Tony Stewart added another accomplishment Jan. 6 to his impressive career résumé: hockey coach.

The native and resident of Columbus served as "honorary assistant coach" of the Indiana Ice, when they played the Sioux Falls Stampede at the Indiana State Fairgrounds.

The Tony Stewart Foundation, which supports numerous local and national youth-focused charitable causes, benefited from the game as the Ice pledged \$2 from every ticket sold to the foundation.

"I've been a big fan of hockey since I attended a Dallas Stars game in Texas several years ago," Stewart said.



NASCAR
Tony Stewart kisses the bricks following his victory in the Allstate 400 at the Brickyard in August.

The 10 best stories of 2005

He won a race, kissed some bricks and in the process fulfilled a lifetime dream of winning at Indianapolis Motor Speedway.

Tony Stewart's victory in the 2005 Allstate 400 at The Brickyard ranked as the top story of the 2005 season, according to a recent poll of media representatives on nascarmedia.com, NASCAR's media Web site.

Stewart also produced the season's third-best story, according to the poll — winning the Nextel Cup championship at Homestead-Miami Speedway in the season's final race.

In between those Stewart stories, at No. 2, was Carl Edwards' March weekend sweep of both the Busch Series race and the Nextel Cup race at Atlanta Motor Speedway, a weekend that propelled Edwards into championship contention in both series.

Following are the remaining top-10 stories.

No. 4: Greg Biffle finishing second in the Nextel Cup Series, and having the most series wins.

No. 5: Jeff Gordon winning the Daytona 500 for the third time.

No. 6: The Busch Series hosting its historic first race in Mexico City.

No. 7: Ted Musgrave winning his first Craftsman Truck Series championship and becoming the oldest national series champion in NASCAR history.

No. 8: Martin Truex Jr. repeating as Busch Series champion.

No. 9: Rookie of the Year Kyle Busch winning two Nextel Cup events.

No. 10: Kasey Kahne finally getting his elusive first Nextel Cup victory, in the spring race at Richmond.

— Source: NASCAR

Veteran NASCAR driver Elliott to drive a Chevy at Daytona

By RICK MINTER
Cox News Service

Atlanta
Bill Elliott will get another chance to add to his Daytona win total next month, and the longtime Ford and Dodge driver also will have a chance to size up a Chevrolet.

Elliott, who has four wins at Daytona International Speedway, including two in the prestigious Daytona 500, said that he'll be driving the No. 36 Chevy for MB2 Motorsports in the sport's showcase event.

"I wanted to run the 500 again, one more time at least," said Elliott, who has run a part-time schedule for the past two seasons after ending a full-time career that saw him win a Nextel Cup championship, 44 races and 55 poles. "I've always enjoyed running Daytona."

It'll mark one of his rare starts in a General Motors car, although he did run Chevys and an Oldsmobile in the late 1970s. "The General Motors stuff has been awfully good on superspeedways," he said. "We'll see what they're all about."

He still plans to run some races in a Dodge for his regular car owner, Ray Evernham, but those starts will come later in the season.

Elliott said it's best for Evernham to focus on getting his third full-time team up to speed at the start of the season.



DAVID TULIS / Cox News Service

NASCAR veteran Bill Elliott will be driving a Chevrolet for MB2 Motorsports in the 2006 Daytona 500.

The Drive to Daytona

Here are some key dates leading up to the Daytona 500, the first points race of the 2006 Nextel Cup season.

- Feb. 6: Speedweeks, NASCAR's two-week countdown to the beginning of the season, begins.
- Feb. 11: The Budweiser Shootout is the first major race of Speedweeks.

- Feb. 12: The pole and outside pole for the Daytona 500 will be determined on Bud Pole Day.
- Feb. 16: Two 150-mile races set starting positions 3 through 36 of the Daytona 500 field in the Gatorade Duel at Daytona.
- Feb. 17: The IROC and the Craftsman Truck Series start their seasons.

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