

'Dale' captures Earnhardt, warts and all

NASCAR legend's family 'blown away' by movie that shows racer's sensitive side

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THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

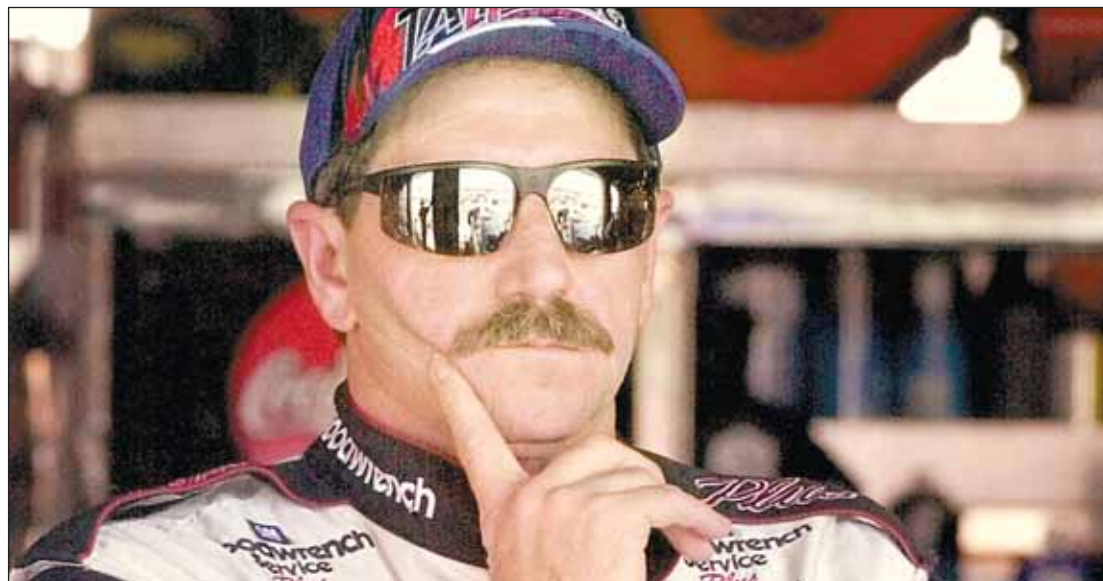
CHARLOTTE, N.C.

Nearly six years after his death, Dale Earnhardt's family is finally in total agreement about something: The biography "Dale" definitively captures the life of NASCAR's seven-time champion.

"I was amazed, blown away," Dale Earnhardt Jr. said of the movie that opened this week. "Couldn't believe how good it turned out."

Produced by NASCAR Images and CMT Films and narrated by Paul Newman, the documentary allows Earnhardt to tell his own story. Made with raw footage — much of it long forgotten, some of it never before seen — the film is spliced together around a reflective interview Earnhardt did one day while fishing on his North Carolina farm.

Using racing scenes, photos, present-day interviews and old family videos, the film chronicles Earnhardt's rise from an eighth-grade dropout living in a depressed mill town to a NASCAR hero.



NASCAR driver Dale Earnhardt looks out of the garage at the Talladega (Ala.) Superspeedway while crew

members work on his car Oct. 13, 2000. A documentary about the racer's life was released this week.

He was killed on the final lap of the 2001 Daytona 500 at age 49.

"I was thinking, 'What have I not seen? Am I just going to be sitting through a whole bunch of stuff I've already watched?'" Earnhardt Jr. said. "But all the

footage that they got, the entire movie, I'd never seen any of it before. If it felt behind-the-scenes for me, imagine how it's going to feel for the fans."

The project was a collaboration with Earnhardt's widow, Teresa,

and car owner Richard Childress, who have been reluctant to authorize or endorse Earnhardt projects. Childress refused to watch the first Earnhardt movie, ESPN's "3," which Teresa described as "someone's dramatic piece."

But the two people closest to The Intimidator had no qualms about this project.

"Richard and I both knew that they respected Dale as much as we did, and we felt very confident in their motive in doing this," Teresa Earnhardt said. "This is the first thing that I know of that's endorsed, and I really think people will love it when they see it."

"It just shows a lot of the raw Dale, and that Dale's personality was more than just the racing champion."

"Dale" will be released as NASCAR moves across the country this season, opening in theaters near each week's race. It will air on CMT later in the year and eventually be released on DVD.

The story traces Earnhardt's life from birth until death, with a never-before-seen in-car camera shot from the second before he hits the wall in Daytona. And it doesn't sugarcoat the controversies or criticisms that shadowed his career and his personal life.

Video footage shows the strained relationship he had with a young Dale Jr., who desperately longed for his father's attention but often

was squeezed out of the spotlight. But there are tender moments, too, including a scene where Earnhardt tries to teach his son to water ski and another where a young Junior pretends to interview his father in Victory Lane.

There's a part in which Earnhardt professes his adoration for Teresa and, after often failing as a father to his first three children, scenes show him flourishing in the role with youngest daughter Taylor Nicole.

"Time is really short to spread between a family, home, racing, the dealership, the farm," he says in the movie. "You just try to have something for the future for the wife and the kids if something happens to me."

The film shows a sensitive side to the hard-nosed racer, and it's sure to surprise many fans. He regrets dropping out of school and, despite his success on the racetrack, professes a constant fear of it all falling apart one day.

It's why, despite 76 career wins and more than \$41 million in earnings, he continued to labor on his farm each week and did most of the chores himself.

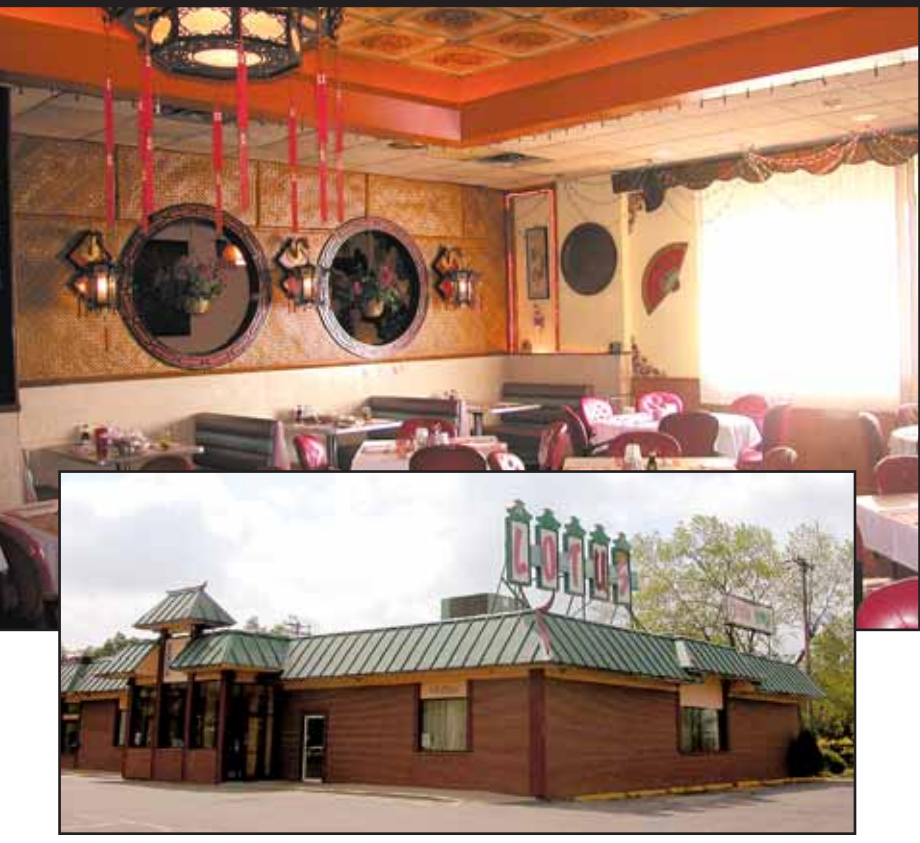
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