



NASCAR driver Dale Jarrett drives his Toyota Camry during a practice session Feb. 9 at Daytona (Fla.) International Speedway. This season, Toyota has become the first Japanese automaker to participate in the Nextel Cup, NASCAR's top series.

# Cheating dominates Daytona discussions

By JENNA FRYER  
THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

**DAYTONA BEACH, Fla.**  
The Daytona 500 was supposed to be a celebration of all that's right with NASCAR: the debut of Toyota and much-heralded rookie Juan Pablo Montoya, and a new format that emphasizes winning.

Instead, this version of the Great American Race has been all about a cheating scandal that forced NASCAR to throw six people out of the garage long before Sunday's race.

It's a drama that generated the mainstream attention NASCAR desperately covets, but for all the wrong reasons.

"I think it gave the sport a black eye, (and) we've got to recover from that," said driver Joe Nemechek. "I know this is the most stressful Daytona 500 I've ever been in."

That seemed true for almost everyone in the Nextel Cup garage. It was a chaotic Speedweeks, with twists and turns, allegations, bombshell announcements, emotion and apologies.

"This week has been mindboggling," said three-time winner Jeff Gordon. "I've been glued to the TV as much as anybody else waiting to see what's going to happen. Between that and Anna Nicole Smith, I just can't seem to get myself away from the TV."

The words were barely out of his mouth when Gordon learned the spotlight had shifted to him: The car he drove to victory in a Thursday qualifying race had failed inspection, making him the sixth driver to fall on the wrong side of NASCAR law.

But before the label "cheater" could be stitched to Gordon's name, NASCAR said the problem with his Chevrolet was unintentional and simply stripped him of his starting position, sending him back to the 42nd spot for Sunday's season-opening race.

It was a relative slap on the wrist for the four-time series champion, especially in light of NASCAR's weeklong crackdown on rule-breakers.

The crew chiefs for 2003 series champion Matt Kenseth, Kasey Kahne, Scott Riggs and Elliott Sadler all were kicked out Tuesday, and NASCAR took the unprecedented step of docking the drivers points before the season even started.

## THE LINEUP

After Thursday qualifying; race Sunday at Daytona International Speedway  
Daytona Beach, Fla.  
Lap length: 2.5 miles  
(Car number in parentheses)

1. (38) David Gilliland, Ford
2. (88) Ricky Rudd, Ford
3. (20) Tony Stewart, Chevrolet
4. (2) Kurt Busch, Dodge
5. (8) Dale Earnhardt Jr., Chevrolet
6. (40) David Stremme, Dodge
7. (31) Jeff Burton, Chevrolet
8. (5) Kyle Busch, Chevrolet
9. (11) Denny Hamlin, Chevrolet
10. (17) Matt Kenseth, Ford
11. (07) Clint Bowyer, Chevrolet
12. (18) J.J. Yeley, Chevrolet
13. (1) Martin Truex Jr., Chevrolet
14. (99) Carl Edwards, Ford
15. (55) Michael Waltrip, Toyota
16. (12) Ryan Newman, Dodge
17. (25) Casey Mears, Chevrolet
18. (13) Joe Nemechek, Chevrolet
19. (21) Kenny Schrader, Ford
20. (96) Tony Raines, Chevrolet
21. (48) Jimmie Johnson, Chevrolet
22. (109) Mike Wallace, Chevrolet
23. (160) Boris Said, Ford
24. (26) Jamie McMurray, Ford
25. (16) Greg Biffle, Ford
26. (01) Mark Martin, Chevrolet
27. (43) Bobby Labonte, Dodge
28. (9) Kasey Kahne, Dodge
29. (45) Kyle Petty, Dodge
30. (19) Elliott Sadler, Dodge
31. (66) Jeff Green, Chevrolet
32. (10) Scott Riggs, Dodge
33. (41) Reed Sorenson, Dodge
34. (29) Kevin Harvick, Chevrolet
35. (6) David Ragan, Ford
36. (42) Juan Pablo Montoya, Dodge
37. (22) Dave Blaney, Toyota
38. (14) Sterling Marlin, Chevrolet
39. (7) Robby Gordon, Ford
40. (00) David Reutimann, Toyota
41. (70) Johnny Sauter, Chevrolet
42. (24) Jeff Gordon, Chevrolet
43. (44) Dale Jarrett, Toyota

# Toyota seeks acceptance both on and off track

## Cheating scandal hasn't advanced automaker's cause

By CHRIS JENKINS  
THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

**DAYTONA BEACH, Fla.**

Amid the flag-waving, domestic beer-drinking atmosphere at Daytona (Fla.) International Speedway, Toyota has taken to the track.

Will hard-core fans accept them or simply welcome a new villain?

Three-time NASCAR champion Darrell Waltrip, who started a Toyota Motor Corp. team when the automaker first entered the minor-league level Craftsman Truck series in 2004, said the make of the car takes a back seat to the personality of the driver for many fans.

"I think that rivalry of Ford versus Chevrolet and all that, I think that's kind of an old-school thing of the past," said Waltrip, also a Fox Sports analyst. "So I think it's a great time for a Toyota, or anybody else as far as that goes, to come into our sport."

Toyota is the first Japanese automaker to compete in NASCAR's top series. But as it revs up its Nextel Cup series racing program, officials and drivers have not-so-

subtly noted that while the passenger-car version of the Toyota Camry is made in the United States, the streetgoing version of the model Ford races, the Fusion, is made in Mexico. The Chevrolet Monte Carlo and the Dodge Charger are made in Canada.

That doesn't seem to make a difference to old-timers and hard-core fans in the grandstands who still aren't comfortable with Toyota in NASCAR.

"I think they shouldn't be in here," said fan Brian Ragusa, 17, from Jacksonville, Fla. "It's an American sport."

Ragusa, wearing a camouflage jacket as he checked out Dale Earnhardt Jr.'s souvenir trailer, said he doesn't approve of former Earnhardt teammate Michael Waltrip, Darrell Waltrip's younger brother, move from Chevrolet to Toyota this year.

"What was he thinking?," Ragusa said. It hasn't helped Waltrip's cause, or Toyota's, that Michael Waltrip Racing has been at the center of a major cheating scandal. Waltrip's team was caught tampering with its fuel, leading to crewmember ejections, large fines and a 100-point deduction.

"You can't be skeptical of Toyota," Waltrip said. "You just have to look straight at me."

But he isn't the only Toyota driver who has faced a fan backlash. When Dale Jarrett announced last season that he was switching from Ford to Toyota, some fans were outraged.

"There was a lot of stuff in the papers, 'I was a Dale Jarrett fan and a Ford fan, I loved Dale Jarrett, but I'm not going to pull for him any more because he's doing this,'" said two-time champion Tony Stewart, a Chevy driver. "And everybody has a right to do that. But I don't know that it's been that big. You pull for your guys, and if you were really a Dale Jarrett fan, you're still a Dale Jarrett fan."

There aren't too many overt signs of anti-Toyota sentiment at Daytona — no domestic pickups with anti-Toyota decals on their back windows. Actually, a Tundra pickup or two has popped up on the infield.

You might start to see more. "All we're saying is, if you haven't considered us previously, maybe now's the time," said Greg Gollands, Toyota's national NASCAR marketing manager.

## Stewart

(CONTINUED FROM PAGE B1)

Stewart the heavy favorite to win.

Three-time 500 winner Jeff Gordon, who won Thursday's other qualifying race, agreed.

"He looks like he's just been hooked up," Gordon said. "The thing is, you need a great car, a little luck and a lot of confidence to win this race. It looks like Tony has all of that right now."

But Stewart, whose best finish was second in 2004, has been the guy to beat before.

"I'm excited where we are starting the race," said Stewart, who will start third, on the inside of the second row in the 43-car field. "Having had the best car in the past and not being able to finish it off kind of leads me to think it's one lap at a time for 200 laps on Sunday."

And he insists he would give every Daytona win for just one 500 victory.

"I feel like this is the best opportunity that we've had so far to win the 500," Stewart said. "This is definitely the most mo-

## Stewart poised for Daytona win

Tony Stewart, the favorite for Sunday's Daytona 500 — a race he has never won — has 11 victories at the speedway.

### Career wins at Daytona

- NEXTEL CUP SERIES**
- ▶ Pepsi 400 • 2006, 2005
  - ▶ Budweiser Shootout • 2001, 2002, 2007
  - ▶ Gatorade Duel • 2005, 2007
- BUSCH SERIES**
- ▶ Hershey's Take 5 300 • 2005
  - ▶ Hershey's Kissables 300 • 2006
- INTERNATIONAL RACE OF CHAMPIONS**
- ▶ Crown Royal IROC XXX, Race 3 (road course) • 2006
  - ▶ True Value IROC XXVI, Race 1 • 2002



SOURCE: NASCAR

mentum we've had going into it."

Stewart just missed making NASCAR's 10-man Chase for the Championship last year but won three of the 10 chase events. Over the winter, he won a pair of midget races in Fort Wayne and the sprint car Chili Bowl in Tulsa, Okla.

Even crew chief Greg Zipadelli, who has been with Stewart since he came to Cup racing in 1999, is whispering in his driver's ear about how this could be the year.

"I'm superstitious about everything, and I kind of feel, the way things are lining up, like maybe

we'll have the opportunity to get it done this year," Stewart said.

A native of Indiana, Stewart finally got to kiss the strip of bricks at the Indianapolis Motor Speedway finish line after winning the Brickyard race in August 2005.

"I'm very goal-oriented," Stewart explained. "I said the weight of the world was off my shoulders when I won the Brickyard, and I thought, 'All right, I can die happy.' Then I thought, 'Now I've got to win Daytona.'"

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