

Dale Earnhardt

SOURCE: DEI Web site (daleearnhardtinc.com)

Among the great drivers in racing history, the name Dale Earnhardt has become legendary. Both on and off the track, Dale Earnhardt re-defined the modern-era NASCAR driver.

Fiercely competitive Dale Earnhardt was one of NASCAR's first true superstars, a title earned as a result of his record as one of the winningest drivers of his generation and because of his driving style – a unique, forceful, never-say-quit attitude that earned him the nickname, "The Intimidator."

But Dale Earnhardt endeared himself to the public by making himself accessible to his fans. He was not just another faceless, anonymous driver, characteristic of so many drivers in other forms of racing. Rather, Earnhardt established and cultivated a driver-spectator relationship that is now considered to be a true hallmark of NASCAR racing.

As a young boy, Dale would sit in the garage, watching his father build dirt track cars. He would also accompany his father to races, dreaming that one day he would do the same. When Ralph Earnhardt died of a heart attack in 1973, Dale Earnhardt was crushed, but determined to continue his family's racing legacy.

Dale Earnhardt used that motivation to work his way to the top. Beginning in his late teens, Earnhardt raced on local tracks around North Carolina, building, repairing and financing his campaigns by himself, often borrowing money to do so, and hoping to win in order pay off his debts.

In 1979, team owner Rod Osterlund offered Dale his first full-time ride in the NASCAR Winston Cup Series. That year, he started 27 races, had 17 top ten finishes, 11 of those being top five finishes, earning him Rookie of the Year honors.

The very next year, he won his first NASCAR Winston Cup Championship, edging out veteran Cale Yarborough to do so. In the middle of the 1981 season, Osterland decided to sell his team. Earnhardt, not pleased with the new situation, finished the season with team owner Richard Childress.

Childress recognized the incredible talent of Dale Earnhardt, and was also keenly aware that his cars at that time were not performing well enough to justify a driver of Earnhardt's ability. Making a very difficult decision, Childress urged Earnhardt to leave for a more competitive team, the well-established Bud Moore Racing team. For two years, Earnhardt drove the Bud Moore Fords, winning once at Darlington in 1982, and winning twice in 1983, at Nashville and Talladega.

During the two-year stint with the Bud Moore team, Richard Childress was



busy rebuilding his own team, investing in equipment and talent.

Dale Earnhardt rejoined Richard Childress Racing in 1984, the start of a professional relationship and a personal friendship that is becoming increasingly rare in sports. Over the next 18 years, the Earnhardt/Childress combination would capture six NASCAR Winston Cup Championships

Despite the incredible success, the one race Dale Earnhardt could not win was the Daytona 500, considered the greatest crown in NASCAR, and one of the most coveted wins in all of racing.

But in 1998, after 20 attempts, the great Dale Earnhardt finally won the elusive Daytona 500, the 71st win of his career. His career, though not over, was now complete.

In a horrible twist of fate, it was also the Daytona 500 that took Dale Earnhardt's life, in the 2001 race, with just one lap remaining.

In a career that may never again be equaled, Dale Earnhardt tied Richard Petty's record for most NASCAR Winston Cup Championship titles, winning seven times. Having won nearly every major event and title available to NASCAR drivers, NASCAR, in 1998, honored Earnhardt and his father Ralph, by naming them two of the 50 greatest drivers in NASCAR history.

Dale Earnhardt's signature black No. 3 Chevrolet, his identifiable "get to the front" racing style, and his larger-than-life persona have been forever cemented in racing history.