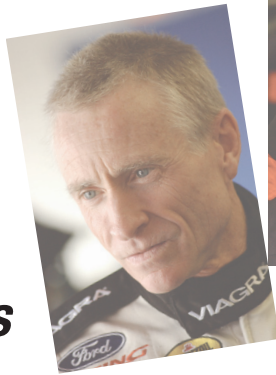


By Larry Jewett

When the Cheering Stops



Rusty's Last Call, the final season of Rusty Wallace racing on the Nextel Cup circuit, is about completed. Mark Martin's departure from Nextel Cup racing is a few months away. The first phase of Terry Labonte's gradual departure from competition is about over. The second phase of Bill Elliott's retirement is coming to a close.

There has been plenty of talk about who's going to fill their driving shoes when they move on to other aspects of the business or maybe even spend more time in the leisurely pursuits that were neglected during the heydays of their respective careers. Most of them are going to stay in racing in some form. It's just what retired racers do.

Short-track racers often follow the same path, but they generally do it without the hype. For the most part, they just announce from Victory Lane that they're hanging it up. Those

are the fortunate ones. Some don't even get the chance to make an announcement. One day, they just don't show up anymore. Their name usually appears in the sentence "Whatever happened to . . ."

Some stick around. You'll see them wandering the pits. They may be helping a son-in-law. They might even be turning wrenches for a former rival. Some just can't bear it though. When the cheering stops, there is a certain hollowness that goes with it. For some, it becomes more than they can bear. That's when you stop seeing them around the track anymore.

There will always be drivers to come along and fill the fields, but those retired drivers make indelible marks on those who have seen them compete. Whether you rooted for them or rooted against them, you were stirred up enough to get involved. As your favorite or nemesis steps aside, you'll find someone else to fill the void and move right along.

As the retired racers move into the grandstands, they begin to see what they were missing. Oh, sure, the best seat in the house is behind the wheel, but now you can have a chance to see the passion and enthusiasm that you couldn't witness. It completes the understanding of why we do what we do.

The thought of retired racers comes not from the parade of superstars who are mentioned in the first

paragraph. The idea actually stems from making the correlation between race car drivers and other racers. Retirement is inevitable, hopefully at the pinnacle of a career. Sometimes, the retirement comes when someone else decides it's time.

That's what happened with Bosley, the newest member of our family. Bosley is a retired racing greyhound, adopted through the local chapter of the Greyhound Pets of America. He didn't come with any trophies. There are no trading cards with his pictures on them or a diecast collectible to put on a shelf. He was a working dog, bred to race. We can argue ethics of dog racing, but that's not the issue at hand. We wanted a family pet. We chose a greyhound because it fits our lifestyle and it helps out a fellow racer. It's as simple as that.

If Bosley heard the cheers, he didn't comprehend their meaning. His life away from the track will be pretty good, even if he didn't have a farewell tour. He hasn't even expressed a desire to go watch races.

Our heroes, though, may be sitting in the stands a few rows away on Saturday night. If you spot a guy, now retired from competition, who brought you some joy or maybe even raised your blood pressure in a past event, just say thank you. You have both enjoyed the sport together, and your involvement has made it stronger. Now, your involvement is on the same plane. **CT**

MICHELE JEWETT



A pair of retired racers unite.