



# WELCOME TO 'DEGA NATION:

*Every year a racetrack becomes a city within itself. Talladega SuperSpeedway is more than just fast, it is red hot. Photography and captions by Meg McKinney*

*For thousands, Talladega is more than a place. It is Mecca. It is a pilgrimage, a place to come home to for people that appreciate the nature of speed. Photographer Meg McKinney ventured into this high velocity world. She not only lived to tell the tale, but brought us back images that capture the 'Dega Nation in its natural habitat, an explosive mixture of roaring engines, larger than life personalities, steely nerves and one really great party.*



## Scenes Behind the Starting Line .....

A city within Talladega Superspeedway comes to life in the infield and along Pit Road, where pit crews work at fever pitch. Covered work trailers line Pit Road for the 44<sup>th</sup> Annual Good Sam Roadside Assistance 500 in the NASCAR Sprint Cup race.

Opposite page, top left: Rows of tires are stacked for servicing at the Goodyear Building. Each column of four tires is assigned to a race car or truck; each tire has a bar code and microchip to document wear.

Prayers for safety and good racing are said at a Driver and Crew Chief meeting.

Buckled into his car, Jimmie Johnson chats with Chandra Johnson, his wife, and crew team, before making his qualifying lap for the 500 mile race.

Each tiny nub on each racing tire is removed by hand. Drivers and racing crews say those tiny nubs may adversely affect the speed of the car.

Sunlight streams into the NASCAR Sprint Cup Garage as each car is thoroughly checked for potential flaws by each car's team.

Previous pages: Victory Lane's winning tradition is a Gatorade shower. NASCAR truck driver Parker Klige-man and his crew celebrate after winning the Fred's 250 Powered by Coca-Cola race on Saturday, October 6, 2012.





Above: NASCAR drivers and their families are on the road many weeks each year. Two-year-old Genevieve Johnson giggles during her father's - Jimmie Johnson - interview with Claire Lang, Sirius XM NASCAR Radio.

Opposite: Pit crews hand-push cars and trucks in the service areas to conserve fuel, and work at lightening speed to re-fuel and change tires during a race. NASCAR drivers are fan- and media-friendly. Drivers Jeff Gordon (black shirt) and Dale Earnhardt, Jr. (green shirt) have Q & A's with sports media. During an autograph session, drivers sign hats, meet fans, and pose for pictures.



A shiny, new Chevrolet Impala, driven by Tony Stewart, stands first in the lineup for the 500-mile race on October 7, 2012. Stewart completed 188 laps at 190 mph, was in position to win, but he made a critical maneuver on the final turn of Lap 189, causing an historic 25-car wreck, and lost the race. The same Impala, now smashed, is hand-pushed by the pit crew to its awaiting 'hauler', a custom 18-wheeler. Large, multi-car accidents at Talladega are called 'the big one.'

## before & after THE BIG ONE



## NASCAR racing is not for the faint hearted.

Opposite, below: The field of cars at Turn 2 appear to be still, but they are racing at 190-mph on a 33-degree incline.

Opposite, center: Celebrities are sighted on race days. "Duck Dynasty" stars Willie and Korie Robertson pose with a fan.

A new car and new sponsor is big NASCAR news. Driver Tony Stewart presents his new 2013 car sponsored by Bass Pro Shops, to sports photographers.

Opposite, top: Talladega's infield is a village of RV's and campers, with a reputation

for legendary partying. Friends and family of Jim Jackson, Nashville, TN, celebrate his 50<sup>th</sup> birthday and 27<sup>th</sup> year of attending Talladega races. Surrounded by the comforts of home, Joe Jackson, Meridian, MS, checks for e-mails.

# HOT LAP



Talladega from the front seat: NASCAR officials invite the media, like photographer Meg McKinney, to ride one lap in a pace car, early morning on race day. Retired NASCAR driver Brett Bodine drove the pace car - at 120-mph.

Her observations: "It's a thrill! I could feel the g-forces on the 33-degree turns. But the high speed hugging on the back stretch wall were scarier. My one-lap ride around the 2.66 mile track was over before I knew it."

Asked how he brought the pace car so quickly and smoothly to a complete stop, Bodine replied, "very good brakes."