

## DID YOU KNOW?

A tornado caused extensive damage to Atlanta Motor Speedway last summer

# NASCAR INSIDER

## THIS WEEK

Race: Golden Corral 500  
Where: Atlanta Motor Speedway  
When: Sunday, 1 p.m. ET  
Television: Fox  
Defending race winner: Carl Edwards



Carl Edwards (99) leads the pack on his way to victory in last year's Golden Corral 500. Edwards said he loves races at Atlanta Motor Speedway, a track that provides drivers with numerous racing grooves.

## Atlanta: Where drivers go to have some 'fun'

By RICK MINTER  
Cox News Service

Atlanta  
After two consecutive races at tracks that tend to produce boring stretches of racing, the NASCAR circuit is headed to a place where the drivers can really race.

The Nextel Cup, Busch and Craftsman Truck Series will run this week at Atlanta Motor Speedway, where a combination of wide, high banking and worn asphalt make for a three-groove race track that tends to produce three-wide racing with an occasional photo finish.

Few have mastered the 1.55-mile track as well as Carl Edwards. In his three Cup starts at Atlanta, he has won twice and finished third. He won his only AMS start in the Busch Series and was seventh in his only truck race there.

Edwards said he liked the track from his first practice lap because it offers a driver so many alternative racing grooves.

"I go out there and run five different lines," he said. "[My crew members] tell me my lap times and whichever one is fastest, I stick to it."

Usually Edwards prefers the high groove he learned to love as a dirt racer years ago, but he said the multiple grooves at AMS allow drivers the luxury of solving handling problems on the go.

"At Atlanta, if your car's real tight running around the bottom, you can go up top and

maybe it'll work up there. If it doesn't work there, I can go to the middle."

Multiple grooves also add an element of drama because a driver never knows whether the challenge for position will come on the inside or outside.

Edwards slipped to the outside of Jimmie Johnson off Turn Four on the final lap of last year's Golden Corral 500 to get his first Cup victory in his 17th career start.

"That pass on the last lap of Jimmie Johnson, that's a perfect example," he said. "You can go anywhere here. That's what makes it so exciting."

Matt Kenseth has three career victories at California (one) and Las Vegas (two), the two tracks preceding AMS on the Cup schedule. He has never won at Atlanta, but he likes racing there.

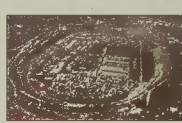
"I like all the beginning tracks, [but] the most fun track as a driver is probably Atlanta,"

he said on NASCAR's weekly teleconference. "You can run the white line or you can have the right rear scraping the fence like Carl [Edwards] does and probably run the same lap times around there."

"You never have an excuse for not passing the car in front of you. If you're faster, there's no excuse for not getting around them."

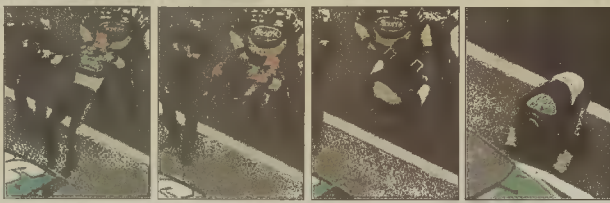
Oddly, Edwards said running the Busch race on Saturday, which he and a host of other Cup drivers typically do, doesn't give him a huge heads-up on racing conditions for Sunday's 500-mile Cup run.

"This is one of the places where running the Busch car can't help you a ton because the speeds are so high," he said. "The spoiler's differences [rear spoilers in Busch are 6 1/4 inches tall, 4 1/2 in Cup] and the horsepower differences [less power in Busch] make the two series quite different."



### ATLANTA MOTOR SPEEDWAY

Track length: 1.54 miles  
Race length: 500.5 miles (325 laps)  
Grandstand seating: 124,000  
Banking in corners: 24 degrees  
Banking on straights: 5 degrees  
Frontstretch: 2,332 feet  
Backstretch: 1,800 feet  
Qualifying record: Geoffroy Bodine, Ford; 197.478 mph; Nov. 15, 1997  
Race record: Bobby Labonte, Pontiac; 159.904 mph; Nov. 16, 1997



DAVID TULIS / Cox News Service

Flippin' out: In the above sequence of photos, Carl Edwards flips from the roof of his No. 99 Ford after winning last year's Golden Corral 500 at AMS.

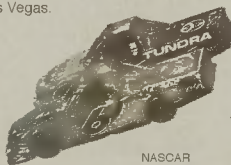
## NUMERICALLY SPEAKING

36

Consecutive laps in which Stacy Compton passed another driver without being passed himself in the Sam's Town 300 Busch Series race at Las Vegas. That leads all other drivers.

270

Races run in the Craftsman Truck Series, including Friday's John Deere 200 at Atlanta Motor Speedway



NASCAR

Keep on truckin': Mark Martin (6) and Mike Skinner race during the GM FlexFuel 250 truck race Feb. 17 at Daytona International Speedway.

What ever happened to ...

## Gerald Duke

By Rick Minter / Cox News Service

Gerald Duke, 77, of College Park, Ga., had a very impressive start to his brief career on the circuit now known as Nextel Cup. He ran one race in 1959, but in 1960 he had seven top-10 finishes including a fourth in the inaugural World 600 at Charlotte — in 11 starts in a Ford Thunderbird he built and prepared himself.

He also had one front-row start, at Spartanburg, S.C. By 1962, his family was growing and his bank account was shrinking. Four blown engines in a short span put him out of the series for good. For the past 36 years, he has operated Metro Transmissions in his hometown.

• On his early superspeedway races. "In the first World 600, they started 60 laps and I was 44th. I finished fourth. That was a miracle. Then at Daytona, I was running third on the last lap and ran out of gas, so I finished ninth."

• On his biggest career mistake: "Lee Petty came to me and said he was starting a third team at Petty Enterprises and offered me a job driving for him. I didn't take it because I had my own T-Bird running pretty good."

• On being away from the sport. "I miss it every day. If I was a young man, that's where I'd be."

• On what he does for thrills today. "I still ride motorcycles, and my daughter Terra and I fly my 210 Mooney. And sometimes I still jump out of airplanes. I guess you could say I've lived a pretty exciting life."

Catching up with ...

## Jeremy MAYFIELD

Jeremy Mayfield, a five-time winner in the Nextel Cup Series, has qualified for the Chase for the Cup the past two seasons. A nine-time pole winner, Mayfield made his Cup debut in 1993 when he finished 29th in the October race at Lowe's Motor Speedway in Charlotte. His only victory last season came at Michigan in August. The 36-year-old Mayfield, a native of Owensboro, Ky., drives the No. 19 Dodge for Evernham Motorsports. He sat down with Cox News Service writer Jeff Hood to talk about racing and his likes and dislikes:

Q: What do you like to watch on TV?  
A: "I'm not real big on TV. I do watch 'The Apprentice.' I think that's pretty cool. [Donald] Trump, he's pretty bad. I like action movies and I like watching the news."

Q: What about your music tastes?  
A: "I'm kind of all over the board. I can listen to rock and hip-hop. I've got to listen to the good stuff to get me fired up, like Eminem. And I like Charlie Daniels and Hank Williams Jr., too."

Q: What about the NASCAR hall of fame selection?  
A: "I'm sure the hall of fame will be a

tremendous success. But it depends on how it's marketed from here on out. If you just let it sit there and hope people come by and stop and look at it, it's probably not going to happen. Everybody is busy. Race fans have to work, and they're busy every day, too. If you don't have excitement, nobody is going to come."

Q: How do you feel about NASCAR going international?

A: "I think you've got to be careful there. I don't know how people in other countries perceive our type of racing. I know we went to Japan, and it wasn't much of a hit. You take people like us who go over there and can't speak the language, and it makes it hard on us. I don't know if sponsors would go for that. Right now we're peaked-out running what we're running. How would you add any races to our schedule? Are we going to take out Martinsville and add Tokyo? I think it would be so expensive that no one would be able to do it. We've got it covered pretty good right now in the United States."



## STANDINGS

### NEXTEL CUP

Following the UAW-DaimlerChrysler 400

1. Jimmie Johnson 540; previous: 1
2. Matt Kenseth 488; previous: 3
3. Kasey Kahne 455; previous: 4
4. Casey Mears 454; previous: 2
5. Mark Martin 430; previous: 6
6. Kyle Busch 403; previous: 12
7. Clint Bowyer 389; previous: 8
8. Elliott Sadler 365; previous: 10
9. Jeff Gordon 374; previous: 15
10. Jeff Burton 373; previous: 14



A third-place finish at Las Vegas lifted Kyle Busch six spots in the Cup standings  
Cup next up: Golden Corral 500; Atlanta Motor Speedway  
TV: 1 p.m. ET, Sunday; Fox  
Busch next up: Nicorette 300; Atlanta Motor Speedway  
TV: 3 p.m. ET, Saturday; FX  
Truck next up: John Deere 200; Atlanta Motor Speedway  
TV: 9 p.m. ET, Friday; Speed Channel

### BUSCH SERIES

1. Kevin Harvick 642; previous: 1
2. J.J. Yeley 600; previous: 3
3. Denny Hamlin 535; previous: 2
4. Jamie McMurray 560; previous: 4
5. Clint Bowyer 538; previous: 5

### TRUCK SERIES

1. Mark Martin 380; previous: 1
2. Todd Bodine 350; previous: 2
3. Ted Musgrave 335; previous: 3
4. Jack Sprague 320; previous: 5
5. David Reutimann 303; previous: 9