



ASSOCIATED PRESS PHOTO/RICK HAVNER

Carolina Panthers top draft pick and former Memphis running back DeAngelo Williams holds his jersey at a press conference Sunday at Bank of America Stadium. Williams boosts Carolina's depth at running back behind starter DeShaun Foster.

Contender Panthers draft to boost depth

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Branch, who is expected back after missing all of last season with a knee injury.

The team also has signed veteran free agent Shaun Williams at the position after last year's pleasant surprise, Marlon McCree, signed with San Diego as a free agent.

Salley spent two years in the same Ohio State defensive backfield as Panthers starting cornerback Chris Gamble. Fox said he liked Salley's experience in a high-level program and the fact that he functioned as "quarterback" of the Buckeye secondary.

"I never thought the Panthers would be the ones to pick me," Salley said by telephone from Fort Lauderdale, Fla., on Sunday. "It's a blessing right now."

Most of his experience at Ohio State was at free safety, Salley said, playing to his strengths of physicality and range. He said he hopes to become a more sure tackler in the NFL.

In the fifth round, with the 155th selection, the Panthers took Virginia Tech's Jeff King, a 6-foot-5, 256-pound tight end who will be groomed as a potential successor to longtime starter Kris Mangum. Though tight end is not a high-profile position in the Panthers' offense, Mangum is entering his ninth year and backups Mike Seidman and Michael Gaines have failed to assert themselves as potential successors.

"Obviously Carolina's going to run the football and I'm going to pride myself on

blocking and hopefully catch some balls as well when called upon," King said by telephone. "No question, my blocking is going to have to be really good and I'm going to work on that and improve on it if there's some weaknesses there."

Fox said he sees King as capable of playing both full-back and tight end.

In the seventh round, the Panthers added a third Virginia Tech player, drafting center Will Montgomery as a potential backup to free agent pickup Justin Hartwig. It's the first time the Panthers have drafted three players from the same school in the same NFL draft.

Carolina wrapped up the draft Sunday by selecting defensive end Stanley McClover from Auburn three picks later, the 237th overall selection.

Meanwhile, three of the Panthers' Day One selections — first-round running back DeAngelo Williams and third-round picks Rashad Butler, an offensive lineman, and James Anderson, a linebacker — toured Bank of America Stadium with Panthers owner Jerry Richardson and showed off their new jerseys for reporters Sunday.

The 5-9 Williams, the nation's leading rusher as a senior at Memphis, was given No. 34, the same number he wore in high school in Arkansas when he idolized Texas running back Ricky Williams.

DeAngelo Williams will be in the mix with two other

backs — second-year player Eric Shelton and veteran backup Nick Goings — for the carries not given to lead back DeShaun Foster. Foster has not been particularly durable during his first four seasons in the NFL, which could mean an early opportunity for Williams to make an impact.

Butler, from Miami, and Anderson, from Virginia Tech, played opposite one another in college, first as Big East rivals, then over the last two years in the expanded ACC.

The Panthers' second-round pick, Richard Marshall, a cornerback from Fresno State, was the only early draftee not able to make the trip, he and the other draftees — plus free agent newcomers like wide-out Keyshawn Johnson — are due in Charlotte for a mini-camp that begins Friday.

Anderson spoke for all the players — especially the madly grinning Williams — when he said, "Right now it feels like I'm dreaming. ... Just sitting here wearing a Carolina Panthers hat, I just put down a jersey that had my name on it. I'm like a little kid in a candy store, walking around."

Williams couldn't stop smiling about his selection.

"I'm still jacked up," he said. "When I found out I was getting (No.) 34, I was excited about that. Everything is exciting. ..."

"Carolina, it's still in the South. I don't have to worry about mixing sugar in my sweet tea."

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Diesel Benz isn't blowing smoke with performance

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While some carmakers kick around the merits and draw backs of hybrids, Mercedes and a handful of others keep plugging away with the diesel.

Yes, the diesel. You know, those cars that blow out the smelly black smoke and clanky valves.

Nope, those were your father's diesels. Most are as quiet as any other car and spew nary a cloud of ebony fumes.

The biggest advantage of diesels is the great gas mileage without a pricey penalty. Mercedes offers a diesel E-Class that's not much more than a regular sedan but gets nearly 40 mpg in highway driving — with a six cylinder. The E320's 3.2-

liter 24-valve, turbocharged engine makes 201 horsepower, which is just OK. But the torque produced is an amazing 369 pounds-feet, which launches the car with authority. The car clicks through its five-speed gearbox to 60 mph nearly as fast as its gasoline counterpart.

You don't notice much lag. Press the accelerator and you're off. There is a bit of noise under hard acceleration but it's nearly completely muted if the windows are up and the exceptional Harmon Kardon stereo is playing.

Driving this diesel is no different from any other Mercedes. It's rock solid on the open highway, giving you the feeling you are protected by a tank.

It certainly doesn't feel as if you are driving a tank. The steering could use a little more feel, but communicates the road to the driver wonderfully well. The ride is favorite-armchair-comfort-

able, but has enough sport to lead you toward a few twisties.

At \$51,050, the E320 CDI is nicely equipped, but a few things I think should be standard at that price are optional. Another \$2,950 gets you a six-disc changer (replaces a single unit), glass sunroof, heated rear window shade, heated front seats, upgraded surround stereo system and DVD-based navigation system. That takes the as-tested price to \$55,465 once you throw in the \$690 for paint and \$770 for destination.

That's more than I can pay for a car, but the 27 city/37 highway figures makes this luxury car seem more sensible and attractive. It's available in all but five states due to emissions regulations. It's those states' loss. This diesel is a sweet ride that sips gas (expect a 700-mile cruising range per fillup) and looks good. Is there more to ask of a car?