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BEAU DEBARD

RACING TO THE TOP

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story Bob Carnahan photo Jeff Dow

It's a long way from the pine trees of Verdi to the steep-banked asphalt track of NASCAR's Daytona 500 but one young McQueen graduate can already see the checkered flag.

While many high school boys strive to be fast on the football field, the basketball court or the running track, McQueen High graduate Beau DeBard wanted to be fast on another type of track: the race track. And he's done just that, in record time (literally). Since beginning his racing career in 2002 at the ripe old age of 14, Beau DeBard has garnered an impressive collection of record-setting lap times, race wins, series victories and season championships. He now has his sights set on the crown jewel of auto racing, NASCAR.

Gentleman, Start Your Engines

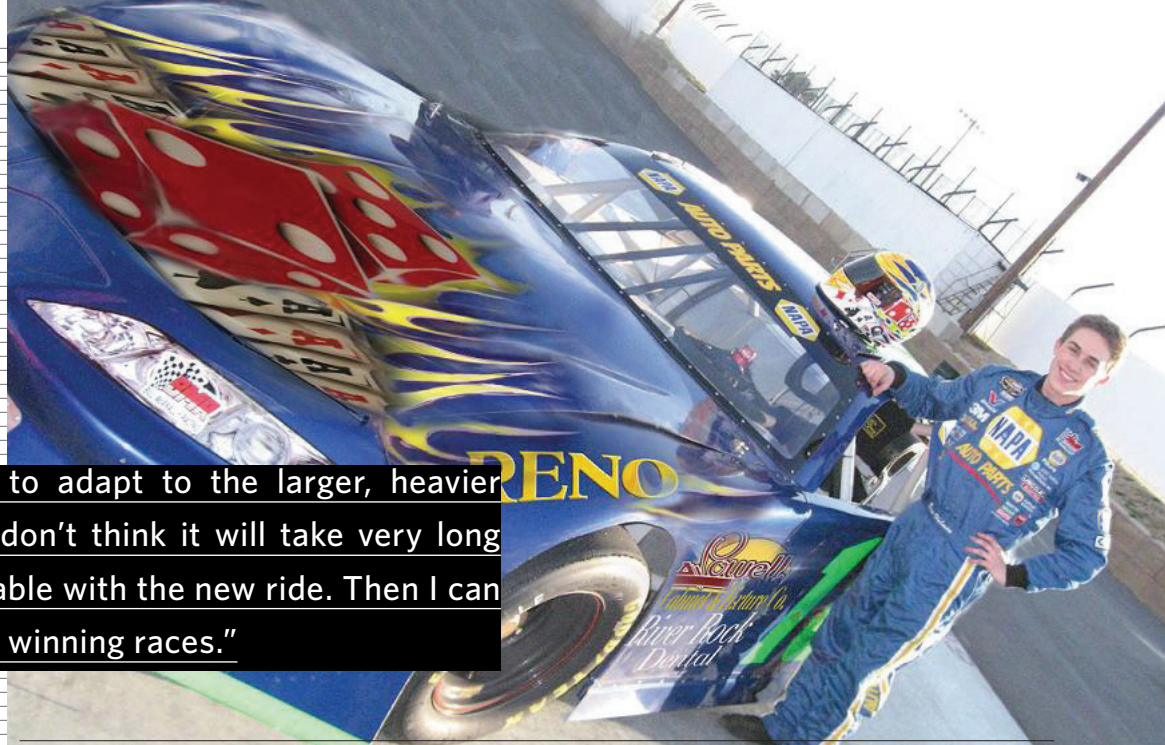
Starting out in small but surprisingly fast go-karts, DeBard consistently honed his racing skills in a variety of racing classes: shifter carts (a slightly larger and faster than average go-kart featuring a shiftable transmission); open-wheeled road racing (Indy style) cars; asphalt sprints (usually run on short, fast ovals); and late-model (NASCAR-style) stock cars. DeBard's superior driving abilities caught the eye of a number of racing talent scouts around the country after he won the Skip Barber Scholarship Shoot-Out at Sebring International Raceway in Florida last year. More than 500 drivers from across the country vied for a spot in the prestigious event. The competition pitted the top 48 young drivers from all across the U.S. in

various races, tests and interviews. DeBard's victory in the Barber event won him a racing "scholarship" that would have allowed him to race, fully sponsored, in a series of open-wheeled road races in the 2007 season.

Just one small problem: DeBard's true passion is to race in NASCAR, which is second only to the NFL in spectator/fan popularity in the U.S. He had to make the choice to either keep the scholarship and go the Indy car route, or move to stock cars. Enter Ron Sutton's Winner's Circle (RSWC), a race driver development team looking to groom fresh young talent for the NASCAR ranks. DeBard was invited to try out, and he won a spot on the team.

After an outstanding season with RSWC in open-wheeled sprint cars, DeBard was courted by Bill McAnally Racing, a stock car driver development group based in Sacramento. McAnally said, "Beau impressed me when we met and had our first test session. He's a fine young talent with a lot of potential."

BMR is a proving ground for Richard Childress Racing, which is one of NASCAR's winningest and most respected race car teams. DeBard will run the full 2008, 21-race series at All American Speedway in Roseville, California under the Bill McAnally Racing banner. ▶



"I really want to adapt to the larger, heavier cars quickly. I don't think it will take very long to get comfortable with the new ride. Then I can concentrate on winning races."

photos "Young racer Beau DeBard stands poised to take the stock car racing world by storm, having successfully steered his way to a number of driver development teams. NASCAR is right around the corner. Photo courtesy of Bill McAnally Racing [Bottom] 19 year old Beau DeBard speeding to an impressive victory over 48 other competitors in the Skip Barber Shoot-out in Sebring, Florida. Photo courtesy of Rick Rosso

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▶ Not All Checkered Flags and Trophy Girls

On November 3, 2007, DeBard was racing an open-wheeled sprint car in a race at Lake Havasu, Arizona. Mid-race, working his way through the pack, he attempted to avoid another car that had spun out in front of him. As he veered right, another slowing driver tangled with DeBard's car, flipping it on its side as it sped out of control into the rock-solid concrete safety wall. At nearly 100 mph, DeBard smashed into the barrier, top first, in his open cockpit car, crushing the protective steel roll cage a full four inches.

He was airlifted to a medical facility in Las Vegas, where he was diagnosed with a concussion, multiple hairline fractures of his pelvis and other internal

injuries. But the safety gear on the car saved his life. And after only eight weeks of recovery, he was ready to climb back into the driver's seat.

Steering Toward Success

A lot of folks think racing means slamming the gas pedal to the floor, slowing slightly for the corners and accelerating again. It's not quite that simple. DeBard's mom, Maree DeBard, says hand-eye coordination is one factor that has led to her son's success on the racetrack.

"After a few times around a track, he memorizes

the hot spots. He figures out how far he can run a car into a corner without crashing and come out ahead of the other drivers," she says. She explains that, as a youngster, her son would win online racing games against Internet veterans and would kick their butts. They accused him of hacking the system, but he's just good at what he does. He has transferred that hand-eye (and, of course, gas pedal) coordination to the racetrack with impressive results.

The Final Lap

Motorsports racing, even in the amateur ranks, is dependent on sponsor support. Very few car/driver teams are self-sufficient. Sponsorships for racecar teams are the lifeblood of the sport. NASCAR sponsors like Home Depot, UPS, M&M's, Tide and dozens of other major, well-known sponsors realize the potential of their huge monetary investments. With a typical weekly viewership of 15 to 20 million households, it's a good bet for them. Even for local up-and-coming racers like Beau DeBard, sponsorships are an integral part of their racing program. DeBard's 21-race series in Northern California could run into the low six-figures, and he's still looking for sponsorship and support.

Asked about his plans and strategy for the 2008 season, DeBard says, "I really want to adapt to the larger, heavier cars quickly. I don't think it will take very long to get comfortable with the new ride. Then I can concentrate on winning races." And with his track record, winning is a very good possibility.^[R]

Bob Carnahan is a freelance writer from Reno and a former motorcycle racer who still enjoys all forms of motorsports.

