



Coach Owners, Start Your Engines!



by Sharleen Nelson

The smell of the tires, the roar of the engines—and they're off! Whether you're a NASCAR fan or not, Marathon-sponsored NASCAR rallies offer something for everyone—from friendly camaraderie and fabulous food, to opportunities to meet and chat with NASCAR's top race drivers, plus three full days of thrilling, edge-of-your-seat racing.

Although they may wrangle over which driver will make it to Victory Lane, Marathon coach owners and racing enthusiasts Loren Steele and Jim and Beth Pillion agree on one thing: If you're not a race fan now, after you attend a Marathon NASCAR rally, you will be!

According to Loren, he and his wife Gayle base their yearly travel plans around Marathon's NASCAR rally in Las Vegas. "All of the Marathon activities we've participated in have been terrific," he said, "but the NASCAR rallies

are really the highlight of our experience."

Jim and Beth are also no strangers to racing—both are amateur stock car racers in their own right—and have attended approximately two dozen Marathon NASCAR rallies. "We've only missed one NASCAR rally over the years," said Jim. "These are wonderful, laid-back events. Once you get to the track and park your coach, you never have to leave. Everything is set up for you when you get there, whether you're sitting in the grandstand or in the luxury suite. These events are really amazing and really fun."

Since the first Michigan Speedway Rally held in 1995, several clear distinctions have set the NASCAR event apart from Marathon club rallies, which are held at various locales around the country. As Jim put it, "At NASCAR you're right where the action is!" With the NASCAR race serving as the backdrop, Marathon sets



Loren & Gayle Steele with NASCAR legend Richard Petty.

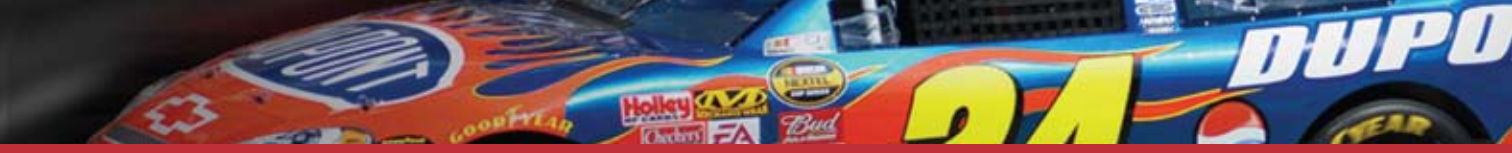


up a small “community” within the much-larger event, complete with its own private, fenced-in area, catered dining, and live, on-site music. “Everybody is drawn in by a couple of common things right away—the coaches and the racing,” said Jim. According to Beth, the consortium of 150,000+ race fans is what makes the rally super exciting. “Although we’re not constantly hanging around 150,000 people—we’re in a small group—we’re surrounded by people from all across America who are all rooting for different drivers, so there’s a sense of unity there,” she said. And if you don’t want to watch the races, there’s always interesting people to watch.

“I’m a people watcher, and that’s a lot of fun” Beth said. “People watching is hysterical.” Jim likes the informal atmosphere the NASCAR rallies afford. “Sometimes you go to a rally and you have to get gussied up and get on a bus to

go somewhere,” he said. “At the NASCAR rallies you don’t do that. You’re in comfortable clothes and jeans and there’s no place that you have to go. These rallies are very casual.”

The atmosphere may be casual, but coach owners that attend Marathon’s NASCAR rallies are treated to a first-class, turn-key event. Everything is preplanned. All attendees have to do is show up! A giant tent serves as a common area where guests can meet and socialize, hear live entertainment, and enjoy meals provided daily by a full catering staff throughout the weekend. “The atmosphere is fun from the minute you get there,” said Loren. “The NASCAR rallies are well organized, with the big tent and the area for social hours; and the food is always terrific. There’s a good cadre of people who work hard to make sure everyone is well fed, and it’s just exceptional.”



Jim & Beth Philion have only missed one NASCAR rally over the years.

Jim concurred, saying, “The way Marathon handles these rallies, they’re just elegant. And I always look forward to the lobster and steak on Saturday night—it is great!”

Mornings are also a treat, thanks to long-time coach owners Leroy Bracelin, Jack Cook, Shelly Ward, and Bob Grover, who serve up a mean pancake breakfast with all the fixins’ during the rally. According to Leroy, they started doing the breakfasts on Saturday and Sunday mornings seven or eight years ago. “We were at one of the rallies and were asked to do the hotcakes,” said Leroy. “So we put a little group together, three or four of us, and started doing it. You get a lot of neat people at these rallies. They’re a lot of fun and there’s always plenty of food!”

Marathon’s service truck and technicians are also on-site at the rallies to provide service to coach owners. “The Marathon crew waits on us

hand and foot,” said Jim. “They are just unbelievable. And with the techs there to take care of problems, that’s a big deal. It’s wonderful!”

The main event, of course, is the NASCAR racing itself, and Marathon goes out of its way to ensure that their guests won’t miss a second of the action by offering coach owners a grandstand seating option or the opportunity to take advantage of the skybox, which is fully catered and provides an amazing view of the track in a safe, weatherproof environment. Adding to the excitement are the track scanners, which guests can rent to listen to live communications between the drivers and their teams during the races.

Speaking of drivers, because of Marathon’s connection to NASCAR and its drivers—many drivers own Marathon coaches—attendees have the unique opportunity to meet some of the



NASCAR drivers usually come to the Marathon tent to sign autographs. Left: Kurt Busch; top right: Kyle Busch; bottom right: Jeff Gordon.

race car drivers face to face. Past rallies have included meet-and-greet sessions with drivers such as Kurt and Kyle Busch, Danica Patrick, Jeff Gordon, Ryan Newman, Richard Petty, and Kevin Harvick. "At almost every event there's at least one driver who comes to our tent; we get to chat with them and also get their autograph," said Jim. "The drivers are incredibly cordial, and because they're also Marathon owners, we have a commonality that allows them to really open up with us."

Loren has met and talked with a number of NASCAR drivers. "They come over and sit and chat with us and sign autographs, and it's extra special because we get that personal attention from them," he said. "Danica Patrick was in our suite with us one time. That was when she was

considering becoming a NASCAR driver. That was really exciting and special."

As if meeting the top drivers wasn't enough, attendees can also get a behind-the-scenes garage tour where they not only meet the drivers, but also view their cars. "We've had guys take us back and introduce us to drivers and get to see the cars and be right up front and touch them," Loren said. "It's a lot of fun and it definitely adds to the whole experience."

Adding to the fun and excitement of the races, meeting the drivers, and taking a garage tour is the good-humored betting that goes on via Marathon President Steve Schoellhorn's friendly, gambling race pool. Jim described it as the "highlight" of every NASCAR rally. "There's always this camaraderie and good-natured rib-



bing and betting on your favorite driver and where they're going to end up," he said.

"There are so many dimensions to racing that you never know who'll win," said Loren. "It could be the best driver or it could be somebody who has the most luck that day, but there's always a lot of allying back and forth—you support their favorite driver while the guy next to you might be rooting for somebody else—it's all good-natured fun."

But the betting doesn't stop there. According to Loren, a variety of side bets make it even more interesting. "There's always a pool with all sorts of divisions and elements to add to the experience," he said. "You can bet on the number of cautions or the brand of car that's going to win, or of course, the driver, and all of those things, which give it a lot of interest and make it that much more fun."

In between races, there is certainly no shortage of things to do in Las Vegas. In addition to many off-site activities such as casino tours, go-cart racing, blackjack tournaments, and ATV riding in scenic areas, the track is located adjacent to Nellis Air Force Base, where attendees can watch a free fighter jet aerial show. "They put on a heck of a show," Leroy said. "I've heard people say it's worth going to the NASCAR Las Vegas rally just to watch all of the planes flying over."

Located inside the track facility is an extensive promenade with souvenir trailers and ex-

hibits, a great place to look at things, shop, stroll, or just people watch. "You don't have to be a NASCAR fan to attend these rallies because there are many other non-NASCAR things to see and do," said Jim. "The promenade has lots of exhibits; they're mostly all car-related, but nevertheless, they're kind of fun."

"Vegas, of course, is a wonderful town for other activities, and you can get in and out to go shopping or to a show," Loren said, "but come Friday, you don't want to be anywhere but at the track. That's where all the action is going on and where the *real* fun is!"

So whether you're a race fan or you own a Marathon or another brand of coach, come out and experience a Marathon NASCAR rally firsthand. These events are wonderful opportunities to make new and long-lasting friendships. "Marathon coach owners are just the best, but the Marathon NASCAR fans are at the top of the list," Loren said. "We always have a lot of fun together. It's a terrific experience and we look forward to each race. I enjoy it and I plan to continue going to NASCAR rallies as long as Marathon has them." Beth agreed: "It's one of those experiences in life that you don't want to miss."

If you are interested in attending Marathon's next exciting NASCAR Sprint Cup Rally in Las Vegas March 4-6, 2011, sign up today because seating is limited. For more information, please call 800/234-9991. •