

# HISTORY OF THE NATIONAL ASSOCIATION FOR STOCK CAR AUTO RACING (NASCAR)

## BACKGROUND

Private production of distilled spirits came to the Colonies with Scots-Irish immigrants who became corn farmers in Appalachia. Whiskey became a popular drink, and Appalachian farmers found it easier and more profitable to distill their excess grains than to transport them across the mountains. Whiskey also served as a medium of exchange on the Western frontier.

In 1791, the newly formed federal government imposed an excise tax on domestic distilled spirits (the first-ever tax on a domestic product). The tax was met by violent resistance, which became known as the Whiskey Rebellion. The federal government drafted an enormous army of 13,000 men to put an end to the insurrection in October 1794.



Because private whiskey production was a primary means of offsetting the extreme poverty in the Appalachian region, the industry went underground to avoid paying the tax. Stills would often operate “by the light of the moon” so that smoke from the wood-fired stoves would not reveal their location to tax collectors. This practice led to the term “moonshine.”

On January 29, 1920, the 18<sup>th</sup> Amendment went into effect, marking the beginning of the Prohibition era. This increased the demand for moonshine considerably.

Each illegal distillery needed “runners” to distribute its goods to customers throughout the region. Runners began modifying their cars with high-powered engines and heavy-duty suspensions to facilitate evading the authorities and soon became adept at negotiating hairpin curves and other high-speed maneuvers.

Moonshine runners had a need for speed and began competing among themselves in their spare time. This competition developed into a hobby and eventually became the international racing sport we have today:



**1930s** In 1932, Franklin Roosevelt wins the presidency on a platform to repeal Prohibition. The 18th Amendment dies with the ratification of the 21st Amendment on December 5, 1933, although some states continue to ban alcohol for several more decades.

The country remains in the grips of the Great Depression (October 29, 1929 – 1939) and moonshining is a means to offset the crippling poverty. The end of prohibition, however, significantly dampens the moonshine business. Former moonshine runners continue to race for competition. Florida’s Daytona Beach becomes the primary gathering place for these competitors.

In 1935, William France Sr. moves from Washington, D.C. to Daytona Beach, where he races in the 1936 Daytona event and wins fifth place. He begins managing and promoting the Daytona Beach race course in 1938.

**1940s** On December 14, 1947, William France meets with a group of drivers, car owners, and mechanics to develop standardized rules for the races. In February 1948, the National Association for Stock Car Auto Racing (NASCAR) is formed and holds its first official race in Daytona Beach, Florida. William France serves as the first president of NASCAR.

On June 19, 1949, NASCAR’s first “Strictly Stock” race takes place at the Charlotte Fairgrounds Speedway in North Carolina. Sara Christian is the first woman to race in NASCAR and takes 14<sup>th</sup> place.



**1950s** The first official NASCAR race track, Darlington Raceway in South Carolina, opens in 1950. On July 1, 1952, Buddy Shuman wins at Stamford Park, Ontario, Canada, the first NASCAR race to be held outside of the U.S.

In 1953, William France founds the International Speedway Corporation (ISC) to build and manage tracks where NASCAR races are held.

On February 22, 1959, Daytona International Speedway opens. Lee Petty—father of 7-time Daytona 500 winner Richard Petty—wins the first Daytona 500. William France Jr., son of William France Sr., begins working at ISC. He later becomes its chairman of the board and executive vice president of NASCAR.

**1960s** On December 1, 1963, Wendell Scott races at Jacksonville Speedway in Florida and becomes the first African-American to win a NASCAR race.



**1970s** In 1970, Bill France Jr.’s daughter, Lesa France Kennedy, becomes an employee at ISC and eventually becomes vice-chair of the Board of Directors and vice-chair of NASCAR. Bill France Jr. becomes NASCAR’s second president on January 10, 1972. His leadership catapults NASCAR into the major international sport that it is today.

On February 20, 1977, the first woman to compete in the Daytona 500, Janet Guthrie, takes 12<sup>th</sup> place in the race.

Richard Petty wins the first Daytona 500 to be broadcast live on television on February 18, 1979. Cale Yarborough, Donnie Allison, and Bobby Allison end up fighting in the infield, which becomes big news. This event is considered to have been the launch of NASCAR’s popularity as a national sport.

**1980s** Up to now, drivers had raced cars that were essentially the same as those of an average driver on the street. In the 1980s, however, drivers and their teams began building their race cars from scratch.

On July 4, 1984, Richard Petty wins the Firecracker 400 at Daytona International Speedway, marking his 200<sup>th</sup> win. President Ronald Reagan is in attendance.

**1990s** On May 16, 1992, the first superspeedway race is held at night at the Charlotte Motor Speedway in North Carolina.

The Atlanta Motor Speedway sees Richard Petty run his last NASCAR race and Jeff Gordon run his first NASCAR race on November 15, 1992.

On August 6, 1994, Jeff Gordon wins the Brickyard 400 at the Indianapolis Motor Speedway, which was recently added to the racing series.

On October 23, 1994, Dale Earnhardt wins his 7<sup>th</sup> NASCAR championship at Rockingham, North Carolina, tying Richard Petty’s win record.

**2000s** On February 18, 2001, Dale Earnhardt Sr. loses control of his car and slams into the wall on the last lap of the Daytona 500, killing him instantly. Race fans everywhere are shocked and saddened, and the day becomes known as Black Sunday. Many new safety standards are implemented in the sport following the tragic event.

In January 2003, the NASCAR Research and Development Center opens in Concord, North Carolina.

**2010s** On May 23, 2010, the NASCAR Hall of Fame begins with Bill France Sr., Bill France Jr., Richard Petty, Dale Earnhardt, and Junior Johnson becoming the first group of inductees.



Danica Patrick becomes the first woman to win the Coors Light Pole Award for the Daytona 500 on February 17, 2013.

On November 20, 2016, Jimmie Johnson joins the NASCAR Hall of Fame by becoming the third person to win seven NASCAR championships.

In 2017, Monster Energy becomes the third company to officially sponsor NASCAR, a position previously held by RJ Reynolds (1972-2003) and Sprint/Nextel (2004-2016).

Spring NASCAR Weekend kicks off the 2018 season, with the Sunday race at the new ISM Raceway, formerly known as Phoenix International Speedway, in Arizona, March 9-11, 2018.