

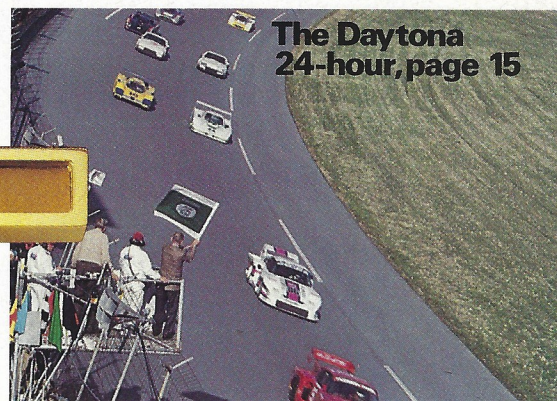
DEDICATED TO  
THE PURSUIT  
OF EXCELLENCE

# XL

MAGAZINE 75¢

December 1983

## BASS Masters Classic



The Daytona  
24-hour, page 15



**Dave Winfield**  
**Yankees' Santa Claus**

**Do-it-yourself kits**  
**You can be a jet pilot!**



# DAYTONA 24-HOUR

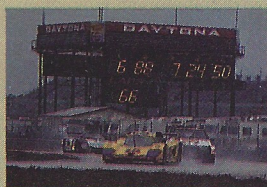
*Different things to different drivers*



3:30 PM SATURDAY



9:30 PM SATURDAY



3:30 AM SUNDAY



9:30 AM SUNDAY



3:30 PM SUNDAY

**By Gary Witzenburg**

PHOTOS COURTESY OF DAYTONA INTERNATIONAL SPEEDWAY



**T**

he famous driver stares absently out of the window as his plane begins its final approach into

Daytona Beach Regional Airport. Below him, the sleepy seaside vacation town awaits the annual onslaught of race fans that will clog its streets and feed money into its cash registers for weeks to come.

Daytona's "Speed Weeks" begin with the early February 24-Hour and peaks with the Daytona 500—America's biggest and richest stock car race—and continues into March with the Daytona 200 Motorcycle race. Indianapolis—flat, narrow, dated and dangerous—is a phenomenon largely for its tradition and its \$1 million-plus purse. Daytona International Speedway, with its 2.5-mile tri-oval, its 3.84-mile road course and its awesome 31-degree high-banked turns, is a multi-event Mecca for America's racing drivers, teams and enthusiasts.

All this is lost on the famous driver. He's competed here hundreds of times and has won more than his share. Racing has made him wealthy. He still loves what he does; but somewhere on the road from rising star to top-rung pro, it became more challenge than thrill. As the Speedway passes beneath the wing of his plane, his mind is on business deals, sponsorships, endorsements and the family he sees far too little of.

He is met at the terminal and driven to his hotel. He showers, shaves, dresses and heads for a dinner appointment with the owner and the sponsor of the car he's going to drive. In the hotel lobby, people stare and nod in recognition. He is thankful that it's early in the week; these are fellow racing people, not fans, and no one pesters him for autographs.

A half-mile up the beach, a battered van pulls up to a smaller, much cheaper hotel. Behind it, on a trailer, is a veteran Corvette race car. The van's driver is sleepy-eyed, unshaven. He has driven halfway across the country with his wife and two friends, (his crew), for the thrill of driving the 24-Hour. After checking in, they walk down the street to McDonald's for dinner.

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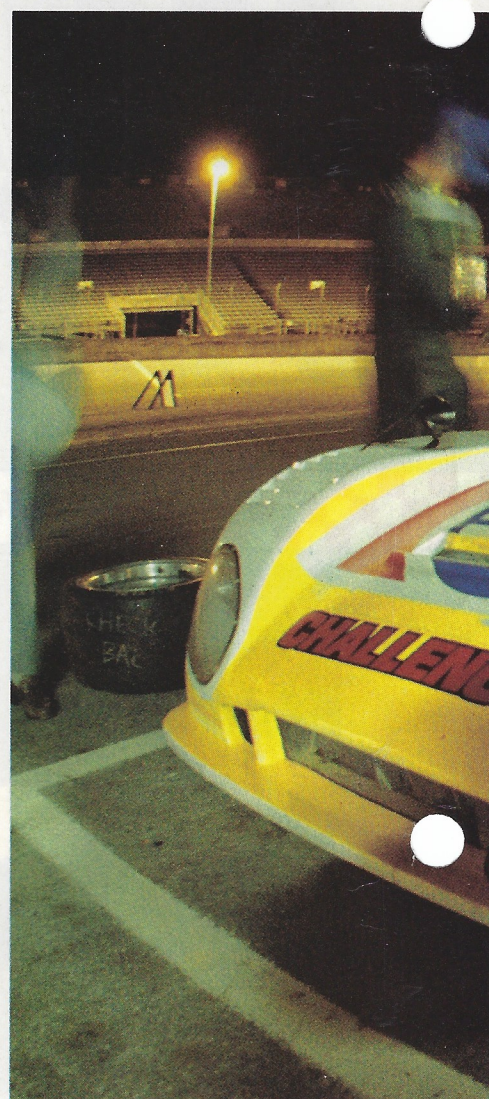
*Once on course, he builds up to speed very carefully on the wet track, tip-toeing through the slippery infield road course and up onto the west banking. The car feels good, and he lets it out down the long back straight, straining to see through the mist and spray.*

The next day, it rains. The famous driver sits inside his team's tractor/trailer, watching the neatly uniformed crew prepare his prototype-class car in a garage a few feet away. It is a mechanical work of art, all tubular chassis and roll cage, lightweight aluminum suspension and brightly painted fiberglass bodywork. With 550 horsepower from its rear-mounted V-8 engine, it is capable of more than 200 mph on Daytona's high banks. It is ready a few minutes before the practice session begins, and he straps himself in and fires it up.

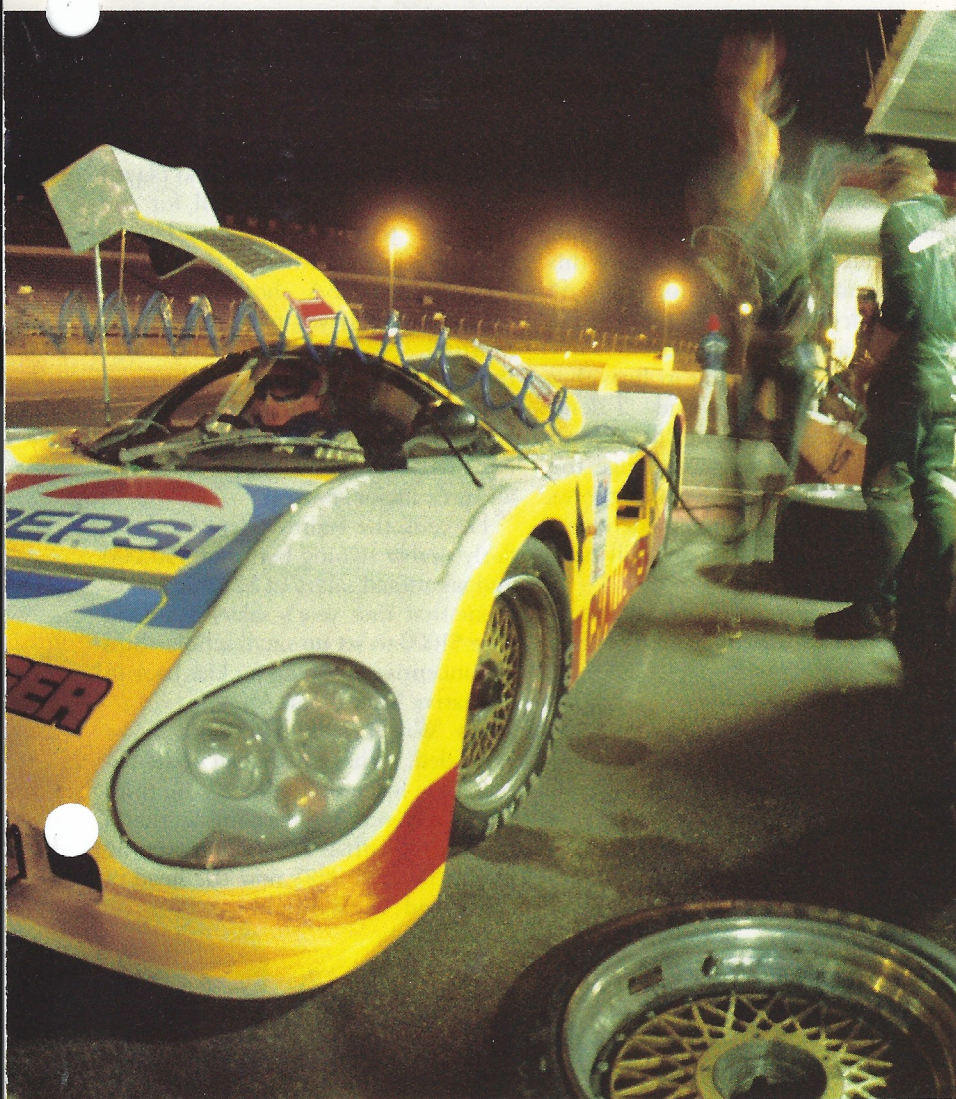
The Corvette driver still is on his back under his car, making some last-minute adjustments. His crew is pinning down the hood, checking the wheel nuts and setting pressure in the massive, treaded rain tires. He hears

the roar of other cars already on the track as he finishes, scoots out from under the car, wipes grease off his hands and reaches for his helmet. His fireproof driver's suit is grey from years of accumulated grime.

Once on course, he builds up to speed very carefully on the wet track, tip-toeing through the slippery infield road course and up onto the west banking. The car feels good, and he lets it out down the long back straight, straining to see through the mist and spray. A slower car looms up ahead, and he dodges quickly around it, returning to the inside lane. He approaches the east banking at 180 mph, backs off slightly and watches the horizon turn 31 degrees to the left as the Corvette's suspension takes a set in the low







groove. A prototype passes him on the right going 20 mph faster.

The famous driver meets his co-drivers for dinner that night, and together they endure a press reception put on by the sponsor. One is an American stock-car champion, the other a Frenchman with years of European endurance racing experience. Between interviews, they trade stories about places like Indianapolis, Talladega and LeMans, then excuse themselves to turn in early. Tomorrow is qualifying and night practice.

The Corvette driver and his volunteer crew are in a rented garage replacing a broken transmission. His wife arrives with hamburgers and coffee, and they take a break to eat. They finish in the early morning, load up and

head for their hotel for a few hours' rest.

The famous driver qualifies second behind a twin-turbocharged Porsche. The Corvette driver qualifies 37th in the 80-car field, 17th of 40 in his class. They take the green flag at 3:30 Saturday afternoon, and both drive hard but carefully, preserving their machinery and staying out of trouble in the heavy early-race traffic.

The famous driver takes the lead a few laps into the race and holds it until pitting for fuel at the one-hour mark. Back on track, he runs third for a while, then overtakes another prototype for second. The car still is running flawlessly when he turns it over to the stock-car ace four hours into the race. He watches for a few minutes, then walks to the drivers' lounge and

changes into street clothes. He has almost eight hours to relax before driving again.

The Corvette driver also is doing well, moving up several positions as others pit to attend to various mechanical problems. His co-drivers, who paid for the privilege of sharing the ride, await their turns anxiously. Both are experienced, and he trusts them to take good care of the car; but they are slightly slower than he is. Still, he owes them their money's worth. At his second fuel stop, he relinquishes the wheel and watches as his crew performs its routine checks and sends the second driver on his way. He opens a soft drink, checks his lap times on the pad where his wife has recorded them, and sits down wearily on a stack of tires to wait.

At 3:30 Sunday afternoon, it is over. The winners are sipping champagne and answering reporters' questions in the crowded press box. The famous driver already is on his way home, because the Frenchman had crashed his car in the night. No matter; he was paid well for the drive and will hardly miss his share of the purse that they might have won.

The Corvette driver and his wife and crew and rent-a-ride co-drivers are enjoying their own small celebration over beer and potato chips in their van. They had endured a heavy morning rain and nursed an overheating engine and fading brakes to the end, finishing a very respectable 14th overall and 4th in class. They are bone tired and bleary-eyed, but very happy. Merely finishing such a day-long grind is a triumph in itself; finishing well up in the field is a budget racer's fantasy. The \$1500 prize money will just about pay their travel expenses. ■■■

