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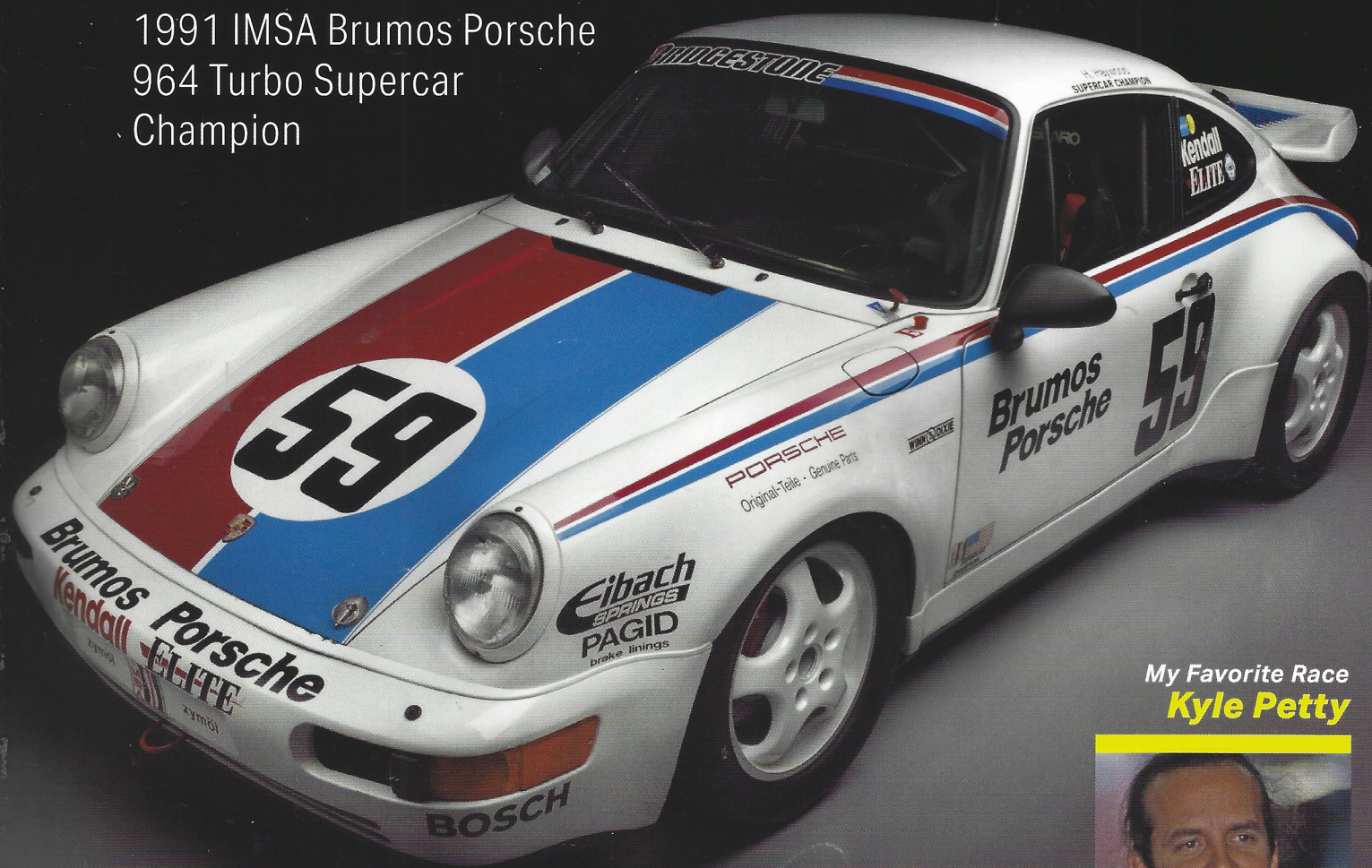
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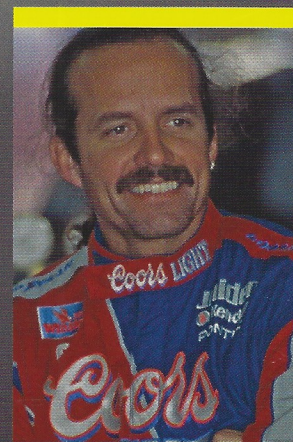
THE JOURNAL OF MOTOR RACING HISTORY

King Maker

1991 IMSA Brumos Porsche
964 Turbo Supercar
Champion



My Favorite Race
Kyle Petty



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KYLE PETTY

1995 Dover Miller Genuine Draft 500

BY GARY WITZENBURG | PHOTOGRAPHY BY DON SMYLE

WHEN WE ASKED KYLE PETTY about his all-time favorite race, his response was unexpected: "Actually, my two favorite races are not my own," he said. "The two that mean the most to me are my dad's 1979 Daytona 500 win and my son, Adam's, 1998 ARCA win at Charlotte." Then he told us about those.

"We were struggling at Petty Enterprises in '79," he says, "and we had struggled during the previous season. STP had decided to reallocate some of their funding, so our sponsorship took a hit, we had to lay off some guys at the shop, and we made the switch from Dodge to GM. I had just started my career in the ARCA race the week before, and my ARCA car was sponsored by Valvoline, not STP. My dad had Southern Pride Car Wash, a local company, on the hood and sides of his car."

Kyle had worked at Richard's shop since he was eight, advancing from sweeping floors to magnafluxing, sandblasting and painting

parts. He was welding by the time he was 11. He had graduated from high school the previous June and that January won his very first race, that 1979 Daytona ARCA 200, in one of his dad's 1978 Dodge cars, which made him the youngest driver to win a major-league stock car race.

"Because we had to lay people off, that 1979 Oldsmobile was the first car that I helped build. I helped weld, make crush panels, put the floor pan in and hang the body panels. We put that car together and went to Daytona and struggled mightily the whole time there. But it got a little better, a little better and a little better. Then Donnie and Cale wrecked on the backstretch, Bobby got into the fight in Turn Three, and while that was going on, my dad won the race. That celebration, that moment of pride that I had a small part in, was unforgettable. That was the first car that won a race that I had

helped build, helped mechanic and worked as a tire guy on the pit crew. In all the times I had been to Victory Lane from when I was six months old, that was the first time that I ever felt like I was part of the winning team."

Kyle's other favorite is Adam's 1998 ARCA win at Charlotte. "He crashed in practice, backed it into the wall between Three and Four, and they let us stay in the garage area that night to put new quarter panels on it. I had my own PE2 race team, and we stole a decklid off a Hot Wheels car because that was my sponsor at the time. We put that car back



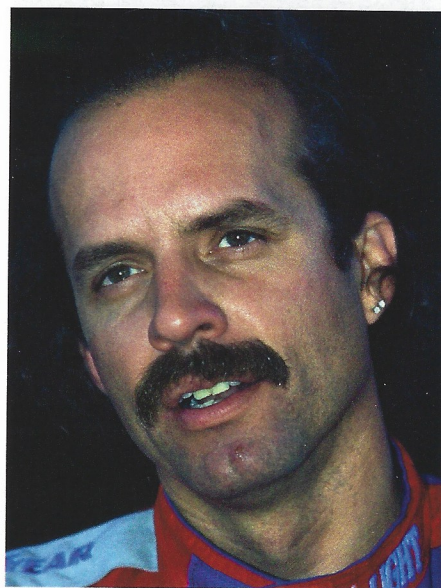
together, painted it with a spray bomb out in the middle of the parking lot, and he won the race, beating Mike Wallace to the line on the last lap. When you're watching your son, it hits a different chord. He was just 18 at the time, younger than I was when I won my first race, so he broke my record. It was amazing the way that played out."

Then we talked about Kyle's own favorite race, his last NASCAR Cup win in 1995 at the newly repaved Dover one-mile oval. "That was the first race there on concrete and might have been the last 500-mile race there," he relates. "They went to 400s after that. Barry Dotson was my crew chief, and we went up there, and we were terrible. I loved Dover. We went up there, they had repaved it, and we were just terrible. I think we qualified 36th, or 38th. I had been bad at racetracks before, but we were *really* bad."

Tread Lightly

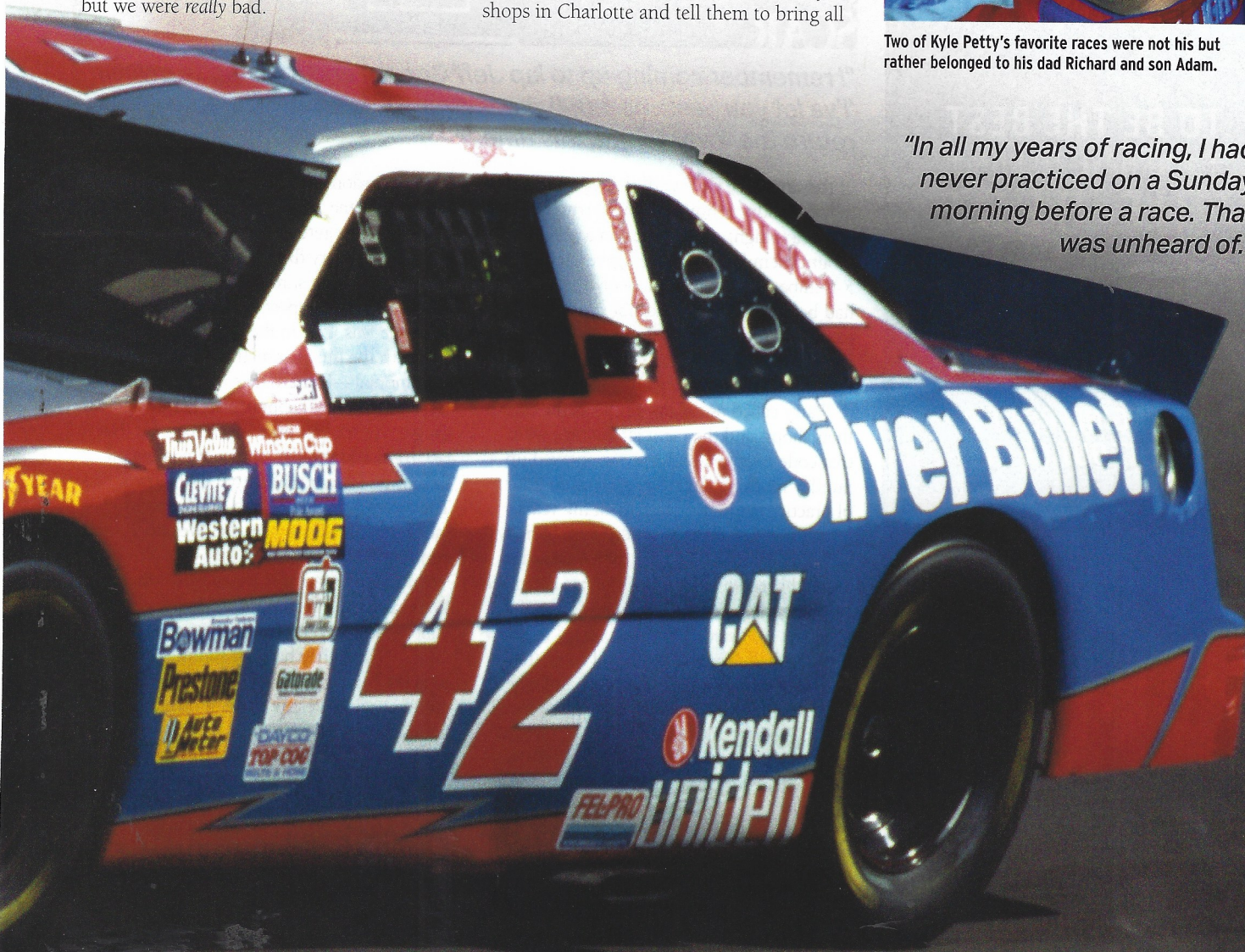
"And when they ran the Busch race that Saturday, Goodyear had a tire issue. The new concrete surface was tearing up the tires into the cords in a very short time. They were having to throw cautions and pit for tires, and it got worse and worse. But they finally got that race in, and as soon as it was over, Goodyear and NASCAR got together and decided on a tire that would work. But they didn't have enough of those in their warehouse."

In those days, the teams bought and owned their tires and after a race took any that were left back to their shops. "So, when Goodyear decided to change to a different tire code for the Sunday Cup race," he continues, "they got all the teams together and said, 'We need this tire code, so call your shops in Charlotte and tell them to bring all



Two of Kyle Petty's favorite races were not his but rather belonged to his dad Richard and son Adam.

"In all my years of racing, I had never practiced on a Sunday morning before a race. That was unheard of."



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My Favorite Race **KYLE PETTY** 1995 Dover Miller Genuine Draft 500



NASCAR/Getty Image

"I remember coming up to lap Jeff Gordon and thinking to myself, 'I've let you pass me 1,000 times over the last few years, so please return the favor for me this time.'"

of the tires they have with that code on them to the Goodyear building. We'll truck them up here tonight, throw them in a pile and mount them for you." They gave each team X number of tires regardless of whose they had been, and they could not give any to a teammate if their cars fell out. They would have to give them back to Goodyear for redistribution to other teams.

"Barry called our shop, all the teams called their shops, and they sent all the tires with that code over to Goodyear. We showed up Sunday morning, and they gave us an hour of practice before the race. In all my years of racing, I had never practiced on a Sunday morning before a race. That was unheard of. We had been so bad, so bad that we discussed skipping the practice to not waste a set of tires. But we decided that we needed to know what we had. We put on a set of those tires and went out for four or five laps, and when I came in, they said, 'What can we do to fix it?' I said, 'Nothing! This thing is perfect!' We had made no adjustments on the car, and those tires matched it perfectly. It was miraculously healed."

Kyle started so far back that he easily avoided a multi-car wreck on lap two. "Then I worked through the pack, took the lead and never looked back. I think we made one chassis adjustment during the race, but for whatever reason, that car came to life on the tires they brought. I remember coming up to

lap Jeff Gordon and thinking to myself, 'I've let you pass me 1,000 times over the last few years, so please return the favor for me this time. It isn't every day you can put a lap on Jeff Gordon. And, sure enough, he did. That's what you would expect from him as the great driver he was. Late in the race, I was tired and sick with the flu, or something [it was double pneumonia]—I had to take oxygen after the race—and Bobby Labonte and Ted Musgrave caught me. We put on a decent race for the last 10 or 15 laps, but I was not coming off that white line on the bottom of the track. They were going to have to drive around me on the outside to beat me. We ended up winning the race."

Another favorite was Kyle's 1992 win at Watkins Glen. He enjoyed road racing when a lot of Cup drivers didn't, especially at the Glen. "I think they had just put the chicane in at the bus stop, and we were good there and through the esses. Ernie Irvine and I had a good race. He would pass me one lap, I would pass him the next lap, and that day the rain was coming and we really had to hustle. He and I hustled and hustled and got faster and faster, and I was fortunate to be leading when the rain finally came, and they stopped the race."

And legendary King Richard's son Kyle is just the kind of guy who would put one of his father's significant triumphs and his son's first win ahead of his own favorite race. 🏆