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NASCAR championship history races into the Towe Auto Museum



Now that the Daytona 500 has kicked off the 2008 stock car racing season, fans can satisfy their “NASCAR fever” and see a piece of championship history up close with the latest addition to the Towe Auto Museum.

1996 marked the debut of Chevrolet’s Monte Carlo in NASCAR’s premier circuit, then known as the Winston Cup. The #5 NASCAR, sponsored by Kellogg’s Cereal, was driven locally in Northern California by Terry Labonte as he won his second of two NASCAR driving championships. The car is now on display at the Towe Auto Museum and is on loan from Bill McAnally Racing of Antelope, CA.

“This is an opportunity for race fans to get a close up look at NASCAR history and it’s a rare opportunity see a car that was part of a championship winning team,” said Karen McClafin, Executive Director of the Towe Auto Museum.

As stock car racing became more sophisticated, teams built cars tailored to different types of race tracks, recognizing the importance of gaining valuable championship points every week.

The ’96 Monte Carlo was built specifically for road racing at Infineon Raceway in Sonoma and Watkins Glen, N.Y., where features such as bigger brakes and ducting to cool them, as well as a more nimble suspension, were more important than aerodynamic streamlining used on superspeedways.

In the 1996 race at Infineon Raceway, then known as Sears Point, Labonte finished fifth, running 165 of 185 laps in a race won by Rusty Wallace. Labonte, from Corpus Cristi, Texas, finished one spot behind the legendary and seven-time NASCAR champion Dale Earnhardt and one spot ahead of a then up-and-coming driver from nearby Vallejo, CA, named Jeff Gordon.

That finish helped Labonte win his second championship (the first was 1984) and the first Cup championship for Hendrick Racing, which since has become a powerhouse in NASCAR, winning seven overall championships, including the two most recent with driver Jimmy Johnson and four others with Gordon.

Between 1978 and 2007 when he retired as a driver, Labonte, older brother of current NASCAR driver Bobby Labonte, claimed 27 pole positions as fast qualifier and won 22 races in 831 starts.

Don’t miss your chance to get up close and personal with a bit of NASCAR history! The Towe Auto Museum is open seven days a week from 10am – 6pm, taking the last admission at 5pm. \$7 for adults, \$6 for Seniors (65+), \$3 Students (with current ID), and under 5 is free. Group rates and special discounts available. Visit www.toweautomuseum.org for information on other exciting Museum activities and exhibits!

The mission of the Towe Auto Museum is to preserve, promote, and teach automotive culture and its influence on our lives – past, present, and future.
