

# McMurray wins!

## Villagers nuts about NASCAR

Local race fans cheer for favorites at Pepsi 400 in Daytona Beach

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By Katie Evans

Wendy Touchette is a racing fan. She smiled Friday as cars raced by her at 180 miles per hour at Daytona International Speedway, unimpressed when a car passed by any slower.

But she was counting down to when the Pepsi 400 started.

"The 43 cars going by at 100-something (mph) is my thing," Touchette said. "Just that sound; it's just awesome."

"Once you hear that live, you don't want to watch it on TV, you can't turn up your surround-sound loud enough."

Donning Tony Stewart flip flops, No. 20 earrings and a Stewart hat, Touchette held up her camera in an attempt to get a picture of Stewart as he flew by during his qualifying laps for the Pepsi 400.

Touchette wasn't alone in her fanaticism Friday and Saturday at the super speedway; she was in the company of 16 other members of The Villages Motor Racing Fan Club, all doing the same thing – with their respective racer of course.

The club traveled to Daytona Beach to experience the Pepsi 400 for the first time as a group, and the members loved it.

"We came alone (once) and we didn't know anyone, and we just wandered around," said Ted Cahalane, remembering one of his first race experiences. "Coming with the club is a lot more fun."

Touchette, special events coordinator for the club, organized a race package for interested club members that included the trip to Daytona on Friday and Saturday with access to the Fan Zone on Friday. The Fan Zone provides diehard racing enthusiasts with a peek at the drivers' garages, plenty of food and entertainment.

The two-day trip was in response to multiple requests from club members to travel to some of the bigger races.

On the bus ride down, the group talked about odds of collecting autographs from some of their favorite racers in the Fan Zone, in addition to some friendly trash talking as they discussed which driver would win the race.

But once they got to the track, the members were so enthralled by the Fan Zone, looking into the garages, watching inspections and getting a panoramic view of the race track, that it was all they could focus on.

"This was really interesting," Cahalane said, amazed at how thorough the inspectors were. "I asked one how they catch things, and he said that they see the cars so often that they can see when something is wrong."





Bill Mitchell / Daily Sun  
**Villager Wendy Touchette** climbs out of a Tony Stewart show car Saturday at Daytona International Speedway, as T.J. Lyons of the Richard Petty Driving Experience watches. Touchette and other members of The Villages Motor Racing Fan Club trekked to the speedway to see the Pepsi 400 and participate in track activities.

of the engines; I get goose bumps just thinking about it.”

Christina Perry didn’t go to the race with The Villages fan club, but the Lady Lake resident is just as big a fan.

“NASCAR is in my blood,” Perry said.

She and her husband Justin had seats so close to the track that she was anticipating feeling rubber hit her as it came off the tires, and she couldn’t have been more excited.

“I want to go home smelling like fumes,” Perry said.

Perry and Justin showed up with signs to cheer on Dale Earnhardt Jr., including a pit board they had painted green, anticipating the change in Earnhardt’s colors next year.

“There’s Junior,” Perry’s husband, Justin, said, pointing to Earnhardt’s No. 8 car that could be seen at the start/finish line on the track.

“I know, I saw it coming out and took a picture,” Perry said with a smile.

While many fans can pinpoint exactly what it is they love about racing, Perry has a hard time narrowing it down.

“Everything,” Perry said. “There’s nothing I don’t like about it.”

“It has the best fans,” Justin said.

There were also race cars on display in the Fan Zone, and Touchette was the first club member to climb into the Stewart car.

Beaming, she decided the car was a perfect fit for her.

“I told them I wasn’t getting out, that they would have to call security,” Touchette said.

She said it was the best part of the trip for her.

“It was fun,” she said. “Just to climb in and see what it’s like.”

Silky Meegan, much as Touchette, was looking forward to the race, excited to feel the full body experience.

“I love experiencing the sound and the feel; your body just vibrates,” Meegan said. “It’s the roar

