



Dodge: Then & Now

Contact: Dave Elshoff, 248-512-2690
Molly Morter, 312-729-4355

Dodge Daytona Development Team Has Reunion With Record-Setting Car

By Bill Hamilton

TALLADEGA, Ala., Oct. 17, 2001 – A special hole in the dash for instrument wires. Bits of foam insulation from underneath. Peeling paint that revealed a previous coat of “corporate blue.” A number stamped on the frame. Those were some of the clues that told a small group of men they were indeed in the presence of the No. 88 Dodge Charger Daytona that set two infamous records at Talladega Superspeedway.

The first record was set September 10, 1969 during qualifying for the inaugural race at the speedway. The race was also the inaugural event for the Dodge Charger Daytona and factory engineers were concerned that teams and drivers wouldn’t qualify well with Chargers so recently converted to wing cars. As a precaution, the Dodge factory team brought along their engineering test car. It was entered as a Ray Nichols Engineering car and assigned No. 88.

With Charlie Glotzbach at the wheel, the engineering Dodge Daytona ran a record-setting qualifying lap at 199.466 mph. The No. 88 was not raced that weekend due to a driver boycott, but earlier in practice Glotzbach went even faster with a lap at 199.987 mph.

In the spring of the following year, Dodge decided to set another record by breaking through 200 mph on a closed-course. The factory team returned to Talladega on March 24, 1970 with the No. 88 engineering car and driver Buddy Baker. After a few laps to warm up the engine and tires, Baker and the engineering Dodge Charger Daytona circled Talladega at 200.447 mph.

In addition to those two special records, the engineering car was also used for dozens of tests at the company’s proving grounds and at race tracks around the country as the engineers developed and perfected the winged Dodge Charger Daytona. Despite its glorious history, the car was later sold and used for short-track racing in the Midwest. A

fresh coat of yellow and black paint hid the car's history from most viewers. The car lost more of its identity later when it was stripped of its wing and rounded nose.

After a few seasons of racing, the owner switched to a newer model and the old engineering car was moved out behind the race shop and mostly forgotten. Until DaimlerChrysler exhaust system technician Greg Kwiatkowski heard about it. An avid wing car enthusiast and the owner of a Plymouth Superbird – the sister car of the Daytona – Kwiatkowski ultimately made finding, owning and restoring the No. 88 engineering car his personal quest. Kwiatkowski has already achieved the first two goals – he found the car and now owns it. Restoring it after years of neglect won't be as easy. He literally had to pull the car out of the weeds where it had been abandoned behind the race shop. Time and the elements have taken their toll.

The men who made the pilgrimage to see the car again in June had assembled in Auburn Hills, Mich., for the 2001 Aero Warrior Reunion. They came to see each other, tell stories and view the large collection of wing cars that assembles at every reunion. During the festivities on Saturday, Kwiatkowski invited them to see an old friend. They eagerly accepted and a very special aero warrior reunion took place.

The engineering group included Larry Rathgeb, the man in charge of Dodge race car development in the late 1960s and early 1970s; John Pointer, who developed the sheet metal and is known as the father of the Dodge Charger Daytona; George Wallace, most famous for riding in race cars at high speeds to record test data; Bill Wright, manager the Dodge race car garage when it was in Huntsville, Ala., and John Vaughan, who helped Wright develop special aerospace-based instrumentation for the test car. Most of them had not seen the car for 30 years.

"It needs a lot of work," admitted Kwiatkowski. "It is what it is, but it's weathered. It sat outside." The car is now torn down to the frame rails, the firewall, the roll cage, the dashboard, rear springs and mounts, the trunk floor, the rear wheel housings and the drive tunnel sheet metal. The original fenders and nose clip hang on the garage wall. "At this point, the car looks like a big dune buggy with all the sheet metal cut off."

Pointer says it looks like a five-day-old turkey carcass that has been picked at continuously since Thanksgiving dinner. But stripping the car is a necessary first step and revealed important testimony to the car's heritage. "I pulled this door panel down and there's the roll cage exposed, painted in the original blue," said Kwiatkowski. "The original blue paint is still on the roll cage on the side facing the outside of the car." Parts that faced the inside had been painted black. Some of that paint is flaking off and there is Chrysler's "corporate blue" underneath.

The pedigree of the car is important because another Dodge Charger Daytona, set up and painted to look like the No. 88 engineering car, has been on display for many years at the International Motorsports Hall of Fame and Museum in Talladega. When the replica arrived at the Museum, no one had reason to suspect that it was actually a clone. So

when Kwiatkowski said he found the real No. 88 engineering car, there were skeptics and doubters.

“There’s no question about it,” said Wallace, who was on the scene with the car for both record-setting events at Talladega. “When we were there looking at the car, there were hundreds of things on it that point it out as the right car.” Wallace is so confident it’s the right car he wrote a letter of authenticity for Kwiatkowski, which was signed and notarized. In addition to certifying it is the car that made the record runs, Wallace revealed some additional history about the car.

“The car was originally built as a 1969 Dodge Charger 500 and raced in the 1969 Daytona 500 using number 99 and painted dark blue,” wrote Wallace. “It was driven by Paul Goldsmith. The car finished third in the second 125-mile race on February 20, 1969, but crashed in the Daytona 500 on February 23, 1969. The car is credited with completing 62 laps and finishing 41st.” Among the many clues for Wallace was the serial number 093 stamped into the frame.

Rathgeb echoed Wallace’s conclusion. “It was great to see it again and it certainly was the right car,” said Rathgeb. “It was the engineering test car for all those years we did the test work, and we were out almost every other week to another race track testing. We were not home that often, usually on the road testing a couple of weeks before a race to get track information for the guys that were running.

“It was great – touching – to see that again,” continued Rathgeb. “It’s definitely an old friend. I recall when it left Nichols engineering and Fred Scampf and Larry Knowlton came and picked it up on a trailer and pulled it down to Huntsville, Ala., and worked on it down there.”

“I’m glad they found it,” added Wright, who found a hole in the dash that told him he was looking at the No. 88 engineering car. Before being recruited to help develop race cars, Wright worked at Chrysler Aerospace in Huntsville where he developed on-board instrumentation for NASA space flights. Borrowing sensors, Brush recorders, accelerometers and other equipment from the laboratories there, Wright and others mounted them in the engineering car to collect data. While visiting the car in June, Wright found the hole he made to mount a button to start the recorder.

Wright also added space-age foam insulation to reduce heat inside the car. “The drivers were still running with the windows in the car then,” said Wright. Driver Charlie Glotzbach told Wright he liked the insulation. “He said it was like having air conditioning in the car compared to what it was like without insulation,” recalled Wright. Seeing pieces of the insulation Kwiatkowski had removed from the bottom of the car was more evidence of authenticity for Wright.

While it is gratifying to confirm the car’s history, the affirmation also added to the weight on Kwiatkowski’s shoulders. He feels he owes something to the car. “Like I’m its keeper,” he said. “Kind of like I have a responsibility as the keeper of the history. And

from a historical standpoint, the car is phenomenal,” he continued. “Not only did it set a stock car record of 200 mph, at that point in time it was a world record. That to me is huge; it is huge. It is a world-record setter. You didn’t have anything in Europe going that fast; Indy cars were going 180 mph at Indy; nothing in Europe could touch it.”

His June visitors are pleased to see the car in Kwiatkowski’s garage. “I’m happy that someone like Greg got it, who is enthusiastic about restoring it,” said Rathgeb. “Everybody that had something to do with it feels a responsibility to the car. I think we all feel the same way – that we’d like to see it restored and restored properly, and I think Greg is the guy to do it.”

Kwiatkowski continues restoring the car – off and on as his life and resources permit. For now, rescuing the car and putting it on the road to recovery is victory enough.

Who will Kwiatkowski cheer for Sunday when the green flag drops to start the EA Sports 500 presented by Dodge? True to his obvious love for speed records, he says he’ll be rooting for Bill Elliott, the all-time Talladega and NASCAR Winston Cup record holder with a qualifying lap of 212.809 mph. “I’d like to see Bill win because he’s long overdue,” said Kwiatkowski. “He deserves a win. He’s a nice guy. He doesn’t have to knock people off the track to win. I think he’ll run pretty good.”

This week in Dodge history:

- **10/18/53** – Jim Paschal of High Point, N.C. won his first NASCAR Grand National race driving a George Hutchens-owned Dodge at Martinsville Speedway in Virginia. Lee Petty took second place in a Petty Engineering Dodge.
- **10/20/68** – Charlie Glotzbach won the National 500 at Charlotte Motor Speedway to post his first Grand National victory. A frequent test driver for Dodge, Glotzbach drove a Cotton Owens-prepared Dodge in winning both the pole and the race – 11 days apart due to Hurricane Gladys. Paul Goldsmith finished second in a Nichels Engineering Dodge.
- **10/17/69** – Bobby Isaac and the K&K Insurance Dodge took the lead for the fourth lap and stayed in front the rest of the way in a 100-mile race on the paved half-mile track at Savannah Speedway in Georgia. Isaac also won the pole.
- **10/19/69** – Bobby Isaac made it seem like déjà vu as he and the K&K Insurance Dodge won two days later on a paved half-mile track, this time at Augusta Speedway in Georgia. Finishing second, third and fourth, respectively, in both races were Ford drivers Richard Petty, David Pearson and LeeRoy Yarbrough.

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