



## **NASCAR FANS HAVE UNPARALLELED AWARENESS OF SPORT'S SPONSORS, NEW STUDY FINDS**

### ***JMU Center for Sports Sponsorship study concludes, "NASCAR sponsorship is the best buy in marketing"***

Harrisonburg, VA, February 7, 2005 – Fans of NASCAR have extraordinary awareness of the corporate sponsors in the sport, according to a new national study released by James Madison University's Center for Sports Sponsorship.

"We've all heard about NASCAR fans' legendary fan loyalty, but that doesn't mean anything if fans don't know who the sponsors are. Our study shows that NASCAR fans' sponsorship awareness is both extensive and accurate," said Larry DeGaris, Director of the JMU Center for Sports Sponsorship. "For example, 96% of self-described 'big' fans of NASCAR correctly identified Budweiser as a sponsor of Dale Earnhardt, Jr. What's more impressive is that awareness remains strong among most drivers in the NASCAR NEXTEL Cup Series. I've conducted similar studies for every major sport in the U.S. and nothing comes close."

Unaided sponsorship awareness averaged 36% for the top 30 NASCAR NEXTEL Cup drivers, the study found. Additionally, nine drivers topped the 50% unaided awareness level for their primary car sponsors.

The JMU Center for Sports Sponsorship study concludes, "NASCAR sponsorship is the best buy in marketing. The combination of awareness, favorability, and effectiveness is unparalleled in the sports world or anywhere else."

The study also found strong awareness for "official" NASCAR sponsors. Unaided awareness for these companies – which use the NASCAR logo in marketing and advertising – averaged 48% across nine product categories. Despite heavy NASCAR involvement by competitors of official sponsors in many product categories, incorrect responses averaged only 20% across the 9 categories. "With NASCAR doing such a good job of protecting its official sponsors I think you'll see a lot more new product categories opening up," DeGaris said.

The JMU study also confirmed NASCAR fans' strong loyalty to sponsors:

- **Fans recognize and appreciate sponsors' contributions.** 93% of fans said corporate sponsors are "very important" to NASCAR. 76% agreed that, without corporate sponsors, there would be no NASCAR.
- **Fans "like" corporate sponsorship of NASCAR.** 83% of fans said they "like" ("somewhat" or "a lot") corporate sponsorship of NASCAR. 43% like it "a lot."
- **NASCAR fans feel empowered by purchasing sponsors' products.** 51% of fans agreed that, when they buy a NASCAR sponsors' product, they feel like they are contributing to the sport.
- **NASCAR sponsorship touches the soul.** 47% of fans agreed that they *like* a sponsor's brand more because it sponsors NASCAR.

The Chase for the NASCAR NEXTEL Cup, the sport's format for choosing a champion instituted in 2004, is a success, according to fans. A majority of NASCAR fans (60%) said that the new system made the season more exciting. Only 19% said that the Chase made the season less exciting. "There was a

strong relationship between familiarity with the new system and excitement about it, suggesting that the Chase will gain momentum as fans gain a better understanding of how the system works,” DeGaris said.

NASCAR fans tend to be long-time followers of the sport and have a high regard for their drivers, according to the study:

- **Fans regard NASCAR drivers as “real athletes,” good role models and credible endorsers.** 56% of fans agreed that drivers actually use the products they endorse.
- **Fans tend to be long-time supporters of the sport.** On average, fans reported having been NASCAR fans for 18.6 years.
- **Live events linked to fan intensity.** There is a strong relationship between fan avidity and race attendance. A majority (57%) of fans reported having personally attended a NASCAR race. Almost a quarter (22%) attended a race in the 2004 season. “Attending a NASCAR race is a very visceral experience and easy to get hooked the first time,” DeGaris said.

While results are very positive, the JMU Center for Sports Sponsorship issued a call to action for sponsors to put more behind activating their NASCAR sponsorships. “While fans feel positive toward sponsors, we found room for sponsors to activate their relationships more effectively,” DeGaris said. “For example, only 17% of fans agreed that they receive special benefits from NASCAR sponsors, such as promotions or discounts. There is clearly room for sponsors to connect even more with fans that embrace corporate support of NASCAR.

“Additionally, fans believe that while the sport faces some challenges, NASCAR leadership is taking the sport in the right direction. We found that 78% of fans agreed that NASCAR is headed in the right direction,” DeGaris said. “However, 42% said that NASCAR has lost some of its traditional appeal. Clearly, the sport needs to continue to stay true to its roots as it continues to grow its fan base and enter new markets.”

### **Survey Methodology**

The NASCAR Sponsorship Study is a national telephone survey of 1000 NASCAR fans, conducted during December, 2004. Participants in the study were drawn from a panel of NASCAR “enthusiasts” and further screened for fan avidity to ensure valid results.

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