

Moore Still Revving at 95

Is oldest living NASCAR driver

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FREWSBURG -- One day this summer, a young man was doing resurfacing work on Frew Run Road. He worked in front of a modest, beige-and-brick two-story house, the one with the American flag atop a flagpole out front and a placard of the Ten Commandments resting among flowers at its base.

And the young man knew who lived inside.

So when Lloyd Moore walked to the foot of his gravel driveway to see what was going on, the young man introduced himself and the two got to talking.

"He said, 'You're so-and-so, ain't ya?'" Moore recalled. "This guy says, 'I used to do some racing myself,' so we ended up having a jam session right down there in the middle of the road. It was fun."

The young man knew Moore because Moore has lived in that house his entire life -- all 95 years of it - which makes him the oldest living NASCAR driver.

Moore will tell you that, sure, he drove for a living, but that was at the steering wheel of a school bus, or as he puts it, "haulin' kids." And he worked with cars, but that was "slingin' wrenches" as a mechanic for the Studebaker garage on Washington Street in Jamestown.

But for a little more than six years, he skidded through the sand on Daytona Beach and drove dirt tracks against stock car legends such as Lee Petty, Buck Baker and Fireball Roberts. Moore was part of the Strictly Stocks season in 1949, the first year of what is now known as the NASCAR Nextel Cup.

His distinction as the oldest living driver -- his birthday is June 8, 1912 -- has brought him letters from racing fans -- some from schoolchildren, some looking for autographs, even one from Australia. He's even had a few people, eager to hear his story, wind their way down Frew Run Road, about 5 miles from the center of the hamlet of Frewsburg. There they've found the house Moore's father built in the 1890s on what was the family farm. It's where Moore and his wife of 60-plus years, 84-year-old Virginia, have raised six daughters and a family that has grown to 13 grandchildren and 30 great-grandchildren.

Moore tells his story with sharp detail -- and maybe even sharper wit -- from the living room. That's where the television and his easy chair are, where Moore sits and watches what NASCAR has become.

"There's too much baloney," he says with a smile.

He tunes into today's races and revels at the money and the speeds, questions why there needs to be an hour-long show before the race starts, and wonders how they go through all that gas and all those tires.

Today's NASCAR drivers take jet planes and helicopters each week to the track, to which their race cars -- including a backup car -- are transported in huge tractor-trailers.

In Moore's day, he'd drive overnight to a race, unload the trunk, then roll that same car out on the track.

"We just stuck a number on the side, took 'em down and raced 'em," Moore said. "Today they talk about putting in a half-pound of air. When we raced, we just made sure we had air in the tires. The suits these guys wear, they're spotted with advertisements. We used to climb in just about like this [pointing to his buttoned shirt and slacks] with tennis shoes on. On the dirt tracks, you'd get so filthy you wouldn't be recognized.

"Of course, when they do get going, it's good to watch. The only thing is, it'd be nice if they slowed them down some so I can see them when they go by the camera."

When he invites people to the back room to see his small collection of racing memorabilia, he moves slowly but steadily. Moore is fully recovered from a stroke he suffered last year, and his doctors tell him he is in good health. He wears special eyeglasses for his double vision, which halted his driving in recent years; Virginia drives him to doctor's appointments.

"I've got my tractor, and they can't stop me from driving that," says Moore, who still gives his great-grandkids a ride from time to time and regularly hops on his riding lawnmower to cut 2 acres.

On the wall in the back room, there's a framed picture of Moore and fellow driver Bill Rexford. Moore and Rexford, of Conewango Valley, were something of a Southern Tier racing team for car owner Julian Buesink of Findley Lake.

Moore had raced what he calls "jalopies" on Southern Tier tracks in Busti and Leon as well as Sugar Grove, Pa. One day in 1949, Rexford asked to borrow Moore's helmet.

"I asked him what was going on, and he said he was going to race NASCAR with Buesink," said Moore, who was then 37 years old. Moore asked Buesink if he could race and made his first NASCAR start in Heidelberg, Pa., near Pittsburgh, earning \$150 for a sixth-place finish behind winner Petty.

The 1950 season would be the most notable for Moore as well as Rexford. Moore earned his only NASCAR win, at Winchester, Ind., and finished a career-best fourth in the standings behind winner Rexford.

"Nowadays you look up and see a \$5 million purse," said Moore, his eyes wide behind his wire-rimmed glasses. "Boy, they used to come out and hand us a couple hundred bucks for winning first place. But we didn't know any different at the time, we were just starting in it. NASCAR, the way it was started, it's a miracle it turned into the thing it is today.

"Because it was started on moonshine. Guys were racing to get away from the cops, and [NASCAR founder Bill France Sr.] put them together and let them race against themselves. It sure turned out to be something."

Petty -- a three-time series champion, the winner of the first Daytona 500 in 1959 and the father of Richard Petty and grandfather of current driver Kyle Petty -- was a friendly foe of Moore.

"Bitter enemies on the track but the best of buddies off of it," Moore said.

At Moore's first visit to the deep paved bowl at Dayton, Ohio, Petty offered the use of his car since it was set up for that track. But in a race at Detroit, Petty rammed Moore in the back bumper and offered Moore an explanation that's still around today: "That was an accident on purpose."

Another framed picture shows Moore's No. 59 charging through the sand on Daytona Beach's North Turn. Before building Daytona International Speedway, France held February races on a 4.1-mile course that ran its front-stretch down an asphalt road parallel to the beach and the backstretch right on the beach.

"When the tide came in too much, they'd have to stop the race," said Moore, who finished third at Daytona in 1950 and 10th the next two years.

The only trophy in Moore's back room is for winning the Metropolitan 300 at Dayton Speedway in 1954. That wasn't a NASCAR race but was sanctioned by the Midwest Association for Race Cars, which is now known as ARCA.

Soon, the responsibilities of home, farming and his family put an end to his racing.

"I'd had my fill of it," he said. "All that gallivanting around the country caught up with me. I just decided that my family was more important than driving cars in circles."

After working as a mechanic and an independent school bus driver, he ran the school bus garage for the Frewsburg school district for 17 years, retiring in 1974. There's a picture of Moore and his bus driving corps on the wall as well.

The garage at the end of the gravel driveway houses his beloved baby blue 1949 Ford tractor, a 1970s Ford lawnmower and the Moores' tan Ford Taurus sedan. Guess which NASCAR drivers he roots for?

"Anybody who drives a Ford," he says. "I'm a Ford man."

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