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A Pioneering Driver Spins Tales, Not Wheels Lloyd Moore, 96, Left the Farm for Dirt Tracks

FREWSBURG, N.Y. - There was a faraway look in Lloyd Moore's eyes as he recalled racing against a NASCAR legend.

"That Petty was a tough driver, good guy," he said. "We became good friends, but it almost didn't happen. Once, in Detroit, he booted me, hit my car in the rear. He teed me off. Afterward, I asked him what his idea was. He said, 'It was just an accident on purpose.' We both laughed and we shook hands. He was always smiling. All the Pettys smile."

This Petty was not Kyle, who is 47 and close to retiring as a driver. It was not Richard, Kyle's father, who is 70 and still the icon of the sport. This was Lee Petty, Richard's father, who died in 2000 at 86.

Moore, his contemporary, will turn 96 next month. NASCAR says he is its oldest living driver. In an interview last week at his home here, he gave evidence that he may be its best storyteller, too.

He lives 80 miles south of Buffalo in the farmhouse where he was born. His village, in the foothills of the Alleghenies, has two service stations, one full-time police officer, no stoplights and road forks that do not show on maps.

Moore drove from 1949 to 1955 in the Grand National series, a predecessor of the Sprint Cup. In his 49 races, he won once, finished in the top five 13 times and in the top 10 23 times. Most of his career earnings of \$10,493 went to the car owner. He often paid for his meals on the road.

That was NASCAR in its infancy, when many stock car racers made a living as moonshiners delivering illegal booze.

"They were Southern boys," Moore said. "No one would admit it, but the woods were full of stills. They would deliver a batch, and the cops would chase them. They'd outrun the cops because they had bigger engines in their cars."

After races in the South, Moore and Petty often drove to the Petty home in Randleman, N.C., and sunned themselves on the lawn. Young Richard would join them. One day there, Moore learned about moonshine life.

"I told Lee we had a guy in our garage who loves to taste that medicine," Moore said. "Lee drove me to an open well where there were ropes. He pulled

the ropes and pulled up a basket with a lot of bottles with corks. He gave me one bottle and said to give it to my friend. I did, and my friend said, 'Take off the cork,' He smelled it and said, "That's it, all right."

Moore's first NASCAR race was in Heidelberg, Pa., outside Pittsburgh. Lee Petty won. Moore was sixth and earned \$150, which he split with the car owner.

The fifth-place finisher was Sara Christian.

"I got raspberries from the guys at the track," Moore said, "and when I got home it was just as bad. Beaten by a woman? Hah, hah."

His one victory in NASCAR came in 1950 at Winchester Speedway in Indiana over a half-mile dirt track. He finished the season fourth in points. His teammate, Bill Rexford, won the title. Among Moore's celebrated rivals were Buck Baker, Fireball Roberts, Curtis Turner, and the brothers Tim and Fonty Flock.

Moore's car owner was Julian Buesink, a car dealer.

"We took cars off the showroom floor and drove them to the next race," Moore said. "Then we reinforced the wheels and maybe got away with doing something with the shocks and steering. We all did it. We never got caught. After the race, we'd drive the car back to Julie's used-car lot.

"One day, we took Julie's wife's car, a Mercury, and it rolled over in practice. I hurt my neck. He got her a new car fast."

The fast driving was not confined to the racetrack.

"After one race, we were driving home on the Pennsylvania Turnpike," Moore said. "Bill Rexford was in front of us and Julie was sitting with me. Julie said, 'Will this thing go any faster?' So Bill and I started racing side by side on the Pennsylvania Turnpike at 100 miles an hour."

In Moore's early years, he struggled to find racing time. He was the only boy among five children, and when his father lost a leg in a farm accident when Lloyd was 5, he had to take much of the workload. He quit high school after a year and a half to maintain the farm. He began racing at 18.

"I would run a tractor around the farm at maybe 12 or 13 miles an hour," he said. "Then we raced cars on the roads. There were no speed limits then, so the cops couldn't get us for speeding. They called it reckless driving."

He raced Model A Fords in the mid-1930s in a little gravel pit, now a

reservoir, in Onoville and at a half-mile horse racing track in Leon, N.Y.

"There were 12 or 15 of us," Moore said. "We paid a \$1.50 entry fee and put the money in a hat. That was the prize money. We also raced at Satan's Bowl of Death in Sugar Grove, Pa. That was an obstacle course; uphill, downhill, through a stream, through the woods. I never dreamed auto racing would go this far."

He also worked at a Studebaker garage. One day, Rexford asked to borrow his helmet because he was going to a race in NASCAR. Moore said he would not mind doing that, either. Rexford told Buesink, the car owner, and soon Rexford had a teammate.

In 1945, Moore bought a plane. He never took a flying lesson, but he said he learned from a handbook. On his first flight, he took off and rose to 100 feet when the engine quit. He crashed in the woods, but escaped serious injury.

"I forgot to turn on the gas," he said.

Moore, who owned a school bus business until he retired in 1974, now finds adventure watching NASCAR races on television. He does not seem thrilled.

"We drove maybe 110 to 120 miles an hour at Daytona and far less on smaller tracks," he said. "Now they might hit 220. I never thought they would go that fast. That's O.K., but I don't like all the talk on TV before the races. It never ends. It's Hollywood: too much show, not enough racing.

"Those ads on cars and uniforms are ridiculous. I wore a helmet, T-shirt and chopped-off pants. These guys look like a Christmas tree. And at a time when some people don't have money to buy food, these guys spend so much on gas and tires. But I watch the races on Sundays, although my eyes get kind of dreary because the races are so long."

His wife of 61 years, Virginia, amended that.

"He watches the beginning of races," she said, "and I wake him up for the end."

Moore raised 6 daughters and has 14 grandchildren and 32 great-grandchildren. All live within 25 miles. He stopped driving three years ago because of double vision.

"I don't like to go to many places," he said. "I figure I've traveled enough."

In March, Moore slipped in mud and broke his right ankle, so he used a

wheelchair or a walker.

"I drive him to the doctor and church," Virginia, 84, said. "Except for that, we don't go out a lot because he's not up to it."

One frequent visitor is Reggie Houghwot, 53, who lives nearby.

"He grew up with my uncle and I've known him my whole life." Houghwot said of Moore. "He's a sweet old man, like your grandpa. He's pretty darn sharp. Give him a refresher, and everything comes out."

Moore seems happy, if ambivalent.

"My driving career ended because I realized I should be doing more work on the farm," he said. "I had a lot of kids to feed and my mother and father to take care of. I had been on the road long enough. It was the right decision. I never wanted to go back to racing. I haven't been to a track since. It seems like when you give it up, you give it up."

"But if I didn't have such a big family, I would have raced probably another 10 years. There's nothing like sliding into a car and competing. I like speed. I like the competition. I miss it."