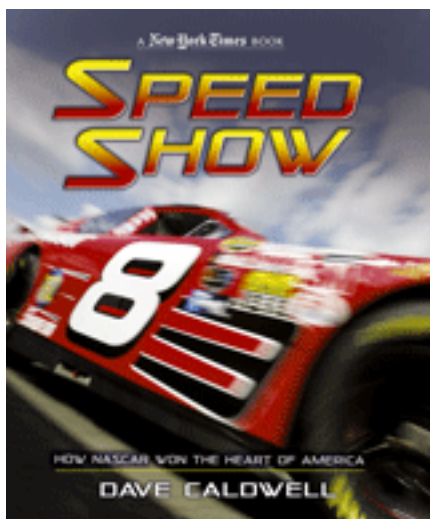


Press Release



Speed Show

by Dave Caldwell

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I opened my laptop and started writing. Time passed with no word on Earnhardt. Maybe it was just my imagination, but the room seemed to get quieter with each passing minute. No news, in this case, was definitely not good news. I overheard another reporter make a call on his cell phone. He spoke in a whisper.

"They said it was instant," he said.

Instant? Did that mean what I thought it meant?

About the Book

Today, stock car racing boasts 75 million fans; that equals more than a quarter of the U. S. population. How did a sport that once struggled for TV airtime skyrocket to the status of the most popular sport in America today?

Dave Caldwell has some interesting answers to this intriguing question, and, in his opinion, it all began on the day racing's most popular competitor died on the track. Dale Earnhardt's sad and shocking demise propelled racing to the top of the headlines and into the American consciousness, and it looks as though it is here to stay.

Published through a unique partnership between the *New York Times* and Kingfisher Publications, an imprint of Houghton Mifflin for young readers, *Speed Show: How NASCAR Won the Heart of America* introduces young readers to this immensely popular sport. Filled with fun and interesting facts and full-color photographs, Dave Caldwell's easy-to-follow history of NASCAR and its stars is both informative and exciting.

Just a sampling of some of the fascinating facts to be found in *Speed Show*:

- An estimated four thousand American children, ages five to thirteen, participate in some form of youth car racing.

- Of the twenty sporting events in the United States that drew the largest attendance in 2004, seventeen of them were NASCAR events.
- NASCAR has become increasingly aware of the sport's need to invite diversity; to date there have been no nonwhite, female, or foreign champions in the sport's main divisions.

Speed Show is a comprehensive look at NASCAR, from its Prohibition-era inception to its current rank as the number-one American pastime. Perfect for the young racing enthusiast or anyone who is curious about the NASCAR phenomenon, *Speed Show: How NASCAR Won the Heart of America* is an exciting, informative look at this thrilling sport.

About the Author

Dave Caldwell has worked as a *New York Times* sports correspondent since 2000. He has reported on a variety of sports, including hockey, major-league baseball, college and professional football and basketball, and stock car racing. He lives in New Jersey.

A Conversation with Dave Caldwell

Why did you write this book?

The idea came from Alex Ward, an editor at the *Times* who has coordinated a series of books written by reporters that are intended for young adult readers. Alex selects reporters because they are experts on the subjects. I'd covered auto racing since 1990 and for the *Times* since 2000, and I'm honored to say Alex considered me an expert on NASCAR. It's a far more popular sport than it was in 1990, and I think I would have written a book on stock car racing, anyway. It has a rich and colorful history, and it seems to appeal to a wide audience.

How did you become a journalist, and what interested you in the profession?

I was a newspaper carrier when I was a teenager growing up outside Lancaster, Pennsylvania. Most mornings, I'd get up early to read the newspaper, especially the sports section, before I'd deliver the papers. I was fascinated with how reporters found out things and converted the information into the stories that made up the newspaper. Back in those days, the newspaper cost a dime, and I considered it a tremendous bargain. I attended Temple University in Philadelphia and got enough experience to land a job with the *Lancaster New Era* in my hometown. The price of the newspaper I write for now has gone up to a dollar, but I still consider it to be a tremendous bargain.

What do you want young readers to learn from this book?

There is much more to stock car racing than cars whirling around a track. The sport has an amazing and colorful history. Even though the aim of a race is relatively simple — beat everyone else to the finish line — the sport is extremely complex and expensive. The fans are loyal to their favorite drivers and to the companies that sponsor those drivers. There is also a carnival atmosphere at the races that is unlike that of most sporting events. Most important, I'd like those who don't know much about the sport to understand that its appeal is much more widespread than it used to be. People all over the country like to go to races or watch them on television.

You were at the race when Dale Earnhardt died. How did you feel as you covered the event? How were you able to maintain your professionalism in the face of such an unexpected tragedy?

I'd written about the untimely deaths of other professional athletes, but I'd never been on site for the death of a driver, let alone the most popular and respected driver in the sport. Like many other journalists, I was stunned by the news of Earnhardt's death. I'd talked to Earnhardt only two days before. As I wrote my stories for the next day's newspaper, I had a hard time coming to grips with exactly what had happened. But a newspaper reporter is taught to push aside the emotions of the event and do his or her job as professionally as possible. The atmosphere in the press room at the track was somber, but reporters worked furiously to meet their deadlines. It wasn't until I returned to my hotel room, near midnight, that I turned on the television and let exactly what had happened sink in.

What was the most surprising thing you learned while writing this book?

I was a boy when I first heard about stock car racing, and I rooted for Richard Petty in the races I watched. What I didn't realize until I wrote the book is how little national television exposure NASCAR got until about twenty years ago. Earnhardt's death came in the first race of a new television contract that gave the series some national clout — and that race was only five years ago. Although the sport has a solid foundation in its lengthy heritage, it is still relatively new to most of the country. When I first started covering NASCAR in 1990, it was pretty much a southern thing. Now people from all over the world are curious about the sport.

Why do you think NASCAR has enjoyed such widespread popularity as of late?

It's a very easy sport to follow. Tickets are not as inexpensive as they used to be, but they are affordable, especially to families. The drivers are celebrities in their own right, so it is fun for fans to cheer for, or against, a particular driver. Moreover, the drivers are still relatively accessible to the fans at the racetrack or at promotional appearances. With in-car and trackside cameras, television does an outstanding job covering a race. During the dull moments in a race, the networks often air features about drivers or the technical aspects of racing that are interesting and informational. NASCAR has done a brilliant job helping its fans understand that they don't need to know every part of an engine to enjoy the sport.

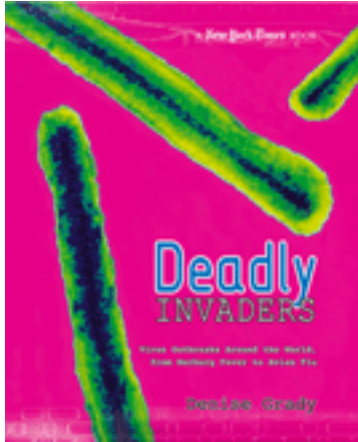
Do you think that NASCAR will continue to grow in popularity? Why or why not?

This is an interesting time for stock car racing. On one hand, NASCAR can seem to do no wrong. It has found a formula for success, and it is very well marketed to the American public. On the other hand, the sport has faced stiffer challenges than other sports have faced. For example, NASCAR fans have been known to drive long distances to races, but the cost of gasoline has gone up, discouraging some fans from going to races. Owning a race team is very expensive, and money from corporate sponsors does not go as far as it used to, which means. Also, starting next year cars in the main division of NASCAR won't be made exclusively by American companies, and the cars will bear less and less resemblance to the cars driven on the street. NASCAR is changing. There will be periods of adjustment, maybe even a couple of setbacks. But I also think the people who run NASCAR have a plan to grow in the future. They haven't made too many bad moves in the last ten years.

About the Series

Kingfisher Publications' *New York Times* Books

Through a special partnership with *The New York Times*, Kingfisher is pleased to present a line of books that puts a whole new spin on nonfiction. These full-color, graphically appealing books combine current affairs with gripping first-person accounts told by the journalists who brought those stories to light. This is science and technology, history, current events, and popular culture reported from the front lines, bringing a unique and informed perspective on the world to middle grade and teen readers.



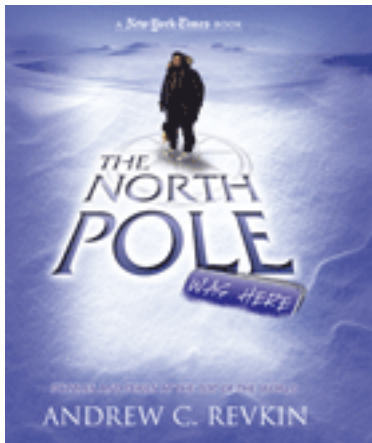
[Deadly Invaders](#)
by [Denise Grady](#)

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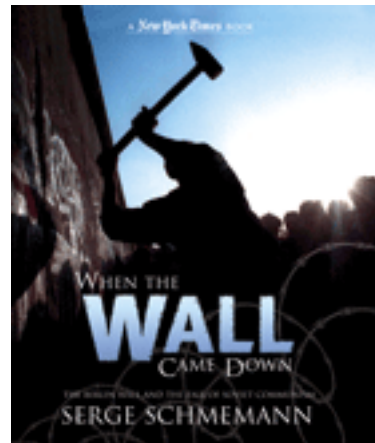


[Speed Show](#)
by [Dave Caldwell](#)

September 2006



[The North Pole Was Here](#)
by [Andrew C. Revkin](#)



[When the Wall Came Down](#)
by [Serge Schmemmann](#)

"What an exhilarating book!" — Bill McKibben, author of *The End of Nature*

"The story line is engaging, often funny, sometimes profound . . . thoroughly compelling reading!" — Lynne Cherry, author of *The Great Kapok Tree*

"Serge Schmemmann's reporting . . . makes for exciting reading and solid history." — Walter Cronkite

"This standout debut should captivate readers' interest." — *Publishers Weekly*, starred review