

## We want to save this

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DAYTONA BEACH Its starting to read like one of those stranger-than-fiction stories.

Robert Marsden is a die-hard NASCAR fan who made a connection with the sport thanks to national broadcasts of stock car events.

The races he truly enjoyed on the family sofa were those NASCAR Cup races from North Wilkesboro (N. C.) Speedway.

He never got the opportunity to watch a race at the short-track oval because it was bought by Bob Bahre and Bruton Smith in 1996 and closed in 1997. Each man bought 50 percent stake in the track from the estate of Enoch Staley.

Bahre took one NASCAR Cup date to New Hampshire International Speedway, while Smith used the other Wilkesboro date to open Texas Motor Speedway in 1997.

As a result North Wilkesboro, one of NASCARs inaugural member tracks from the 1940s, has sat dormant for the last nine years.

Marsden wants to change that.

In April he started a Web site, [www.savethespeedway.net](http://www.savethespeedway.net), with the hopes of generating interest to reopen the 40,000-seat facility.

We wanted to bring attention to the fact the track wasnt being used, Marsden said. We wanted to get somebody interested in buying it, then use it for racing.

Now his save North Wilkesboro program is going a step further.

Marsden hopes to have a corporation (STS Motorsports Inc.) up and running by the end of November and initiate negotiations with Bahre and Smith to purchase the track in the next six months.

Both have told us they would sell their interests of the track to us, Marsden said. Were not going to beat around the bush with this thing.

The facility is assessed at \$7 million, but Marsden said the combined asking price from Bahre and Smith is higher than that figure.

Its considerably more, he said, without revealing numbers.

While the facility needs extensive renovation, Marsden said his goal is have North Wilkesboro up and running by the fall of 2006.

That would be the 10th anniversary of the track closing, he said. Id like to make it our grand opening celebration.

Obviously, the grand opening wont involve a NASCAR series, but Marsden has letters of intent from nearly a dozen sanctioning bodies eager to stage races at the old track.

International Sport Compact Auto Racing Series president Randy Claypoole said ISCARS could run

there multiple times per season.

ISCARS, based in Daytona Beach, was derived from the old NASCAR Dash Series, which held its first race at North Wilkesboro in 1975. A total of 34 Dash races were held there before the track closed.

Weve got a lot of our people in that area, Claypoole said. That track has so much history in racing. Its a shame to see it sitting there going to waste.

Marsden has letters of intent from the Hooters Pro Cup, American Speed Association and various other sanctioning bodies and driving schools, owned by such notables as Richard Petty and Dale Jarrett.

So what, you ask, makes this story weird?

Marsden.

He is a 24-year-old racing enthusiast living in a small town outside of Buffalo, N.Y. He saw North Wilkesboro for the first time in person three years ago while driving back home from the Pepsi 400.

Yeah, I know, that makes it kind of strange, he said.

Marsden has six partners in this venture ranging in age from the 20s to the 40s. All have the same passion for this track.

The biggest reason we are doing this is to save racing history and tradition, he said. We want to save it. I think we are going to make this happen.

Marsdens ultimate goal is to bring NASCAR racing back to North Wilkesboro, once the track has proved itself as a viable racing facility.

I dont know if NASCAR knows what were doing, and if they did, I dont know if they would really care, he said. Once we pull this off, wed like to get a Busch or a truck date.

Claypoole hopes he can schedule an ISCARS date at North Wilkesboro in 2006 and do his part to revive the ancient stock car arena. Theres a tendency in life to forget where we started, where we came from, he said. None of us should want to lose touch with our past.