

# NASCAR's return to North Wilkesboro not out of the question

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Many [NASCAR](#) fans are still feeling the loss of North Wilkesboro Speedway.

In a story published recently in the Winston-Salem Journal, it was reported that [Robert Marsden](#), who lives near Buffalo, N.Y., had begun an Internet petition to restore NASCAR events at the 0.625-mile track nestled amid the hills of North Carolina's Wilkes County. The site is [www.savethespeedway.net](http://www.savethespeedway.net).



Marsden said he became enthralled with races at North Wilkesboro by watching them on TV. A few years ago, he visited the track.

Marsden is like many other fans who bemoan the loss of NASCAR tradition and have no use for races now held on the "cookie-cutter" tracks that are now part of the [Nextel](#) Cup schedule.

North Wilkesboro was a part of NASCAR almost from the day the sanctioning body was formed. For years, it remained unchanged, with its wood fences, concrete grandstands and one straightaway that went downhill and another that went uphill.

For many fans, it was the prime example of how racing used to be in NASCAR - good ol' bump-and-grind, short-track competition. Fans could just walk up and buy a ticket after attending church.

When it became obvious some tracks were going to have to expand and improve their facilities and amenities to remain a part of NASCAR, North Wilkesboro added seats and improved its garage area and media and fan amenities.

But it wasn't enough. The track held its last Winston Cup race in 1996.

By that time, the owners of the track were [Bob Bahre](#), who owns [New Hampshire International Speedway](#), and [Bruton Smith of Speedway Motorsports Inc.](#) Each held a half-interest in the speedway and closed it to get second dates elsewhere.

Any real attempt to restore racing at North Wilkesboro would have to begin with them. Bahre, whose once-acrimonious relationship with Smith has passed with time, has said he would follow Smith's lead. But it's not likely Smith will make a move.

Certainly both men realize Nextel Cup racing will never return to North Wilkesboro. It is economically unfeasible. The speedway seats only about 40,000 and is located in a miniscule market that offers no financial enticement for corporate sponsors.

However, many argue that the Busch Series, the Craftsman Truck Series or any one of NASCAR's other circuits could succeed at North Wilkesboro.

Frankly, that's a distinct possibility. If North Wilkesboro was repaired and restored, it would rival many other tracks at which NASCAR presently sanctions events other than Nextel Cup. But a sizable financial commitment would be required.

Nevertheless, that would go a long way toward satisfying the traditionalists and Wilkes County officials, who have been trying to find the means to restore racing at the speedway - and regain some of the lost revenue - for years.

But the odds of it happening are long.

That doesn't appear to stop those who want NASCAR to return to North Wilkesboro. Marsden's petition isn't the first, and it's safe to say Wilkes County leaders aren't about to abandon their efforts. Rumors of behind-the-scenes maneuvering being made by notable people have long existed and persist.

What ultimately has to occur for any type of NASCAR racing to return to North Wilkesboro is for Bahre and Smith to agree to make it so, or sell the track to someone who will. Then money must be invested to restore the track. For that to happen there would have to be some assurance from NASCAR that it would sanction races.

There's a lot more to all of this and the odds are long.

But as long as people like Marsden are out there people who are ardent in their efforts for North Wilkesboro and do much more than just talk, and as long as the county leaders pursue their goals, there's a good chance those odds could get shorter.

Who knows? Perhaps the roar of engines will be heard again at North Wilkesboro.

Yes, it's not likely. But let it be said it's not impossible. In NASCAR, stranger things have happened.