

Roush Yates Engines Powering Ford Cars to Glory

By JENNA FRYER
AP Auto Racing Writer

LAS VEGAS (AP) — When Richard Petty Motorsports courted Marcos Ambrose last season, the Australian saw an opportunity to further his NASCAR development and partner with manufacturer Ford.

It wasn't an easy decision, and Ambrose certainly had second thoughts when financial issues nearly shut down RPM right about the time he began to string together some decent results with JTG Daugherty Racing. He kept his word, though, and was in RPM's No. 9 Ford at Daytona.

"I took a chance and I really stuck my neck out to see if I had what it took," Ambrose said of his move to RPM.

But the launch with his new team hardly produced the results he had hoped for through the first two weeks: Ambrose was 37th at Daytona, 16th at Phoenix and came to Las Vegas Motor Speedway ranked 27th in the Sprint Cup Series standings.

It put the pressure on Ambrose to step up and turn things around, which he did by qualifying second for Sunday's race. He briefly held the

pole until he was bumped by Matt Kenseth, who set a track record with the fifth pole of his 12-year career.

In all, Fords swept the first four qualifying spots, as Carl Edwards and Greg Biffle qualified third and fourth.

All four cars are powered by Roush Yates Engines, which is off to an incredible start to the season. The top three finishers at the Daytona 500 were powered by Roush Yates, and Edwards won the pole last week at Phoenix.

"We've had such a great start to the 2011 season," said chief engine builder Doug Yates. "We've worked really hard in the offseason to see gains on the race track, and I think there are even more great things to come."

Everybody in the blue oval group is anticipating a great year after a mediocre 2010.

Ford didn't win its first Sprint Cup Series race until Biffle drove to Victory Lane at Pocono in August, and he and Edwards combined to give the manufacturer just four victories all season. But Edwards' two wins came in the final two events of the season, proving that both Roush Fenway and Ford's new FR9 engine had turned the corner.

Then 20-year-old Trevor Bayne drove a Wood Brothers Ford to victory at the Daytona 500, and Edwards had the car to beat last week at Phoenix until he was wrecked by Kyle Busch. As the NASCAR schedule hits the first intermediate track of the season on Sunday, the Ford group is looking at Las Vegas as a measure of where their equipment stacks up against the competition.

"The real test is how we run here and at Bristol," Edwards said. "If our cars are that good, then this is going to be a great year."

That's what Ambrose was hoping for when he left JTG after two seasons.

Ambrose figured he could have more success with RPM and its alliance with Roush, and it got him into a partnership with Ford, which has supported Ambrose in Australia and helped him come to NASCAR. The decision wasn't easy because of the gratitude Ambrose felt toward JTG for giving him a shot, but the opportunity to align himself with Roush and Ford was too good.

He never said he regretted the decision, but when financial issues put RPM on a day-to-day operating budget, Am-

brose was certainly wondering if he'd made the wrong choice. RPM made it to the end of the season, then signed on new investors that have strengthened the organization.

Any hopes of a strong start to the season were dashed when Ambrose was collected in an early 14-car accident at Daytona. Then he was off at Phoenix, where he fell a lap off the pace and struggled through a long afternoon.

So knowing how strong the Fords were had him nervous about the start of the Las Vegas weekend, especially since RPM teammate AJ Allmendinger is off to a fast start that has him tied for third in the Cup standings.

"I am just happy for Richard Petty Motorsports, who went through a lot at the end of last year," Ambrose said. "To be strong this early with AJ running top three in points, it is just a good feeling over there looking forward to hopefully keeping this run going."

Roush Yates engines received high praise in Dearborn last week, when Ford NASCAR driver Trevor Bayne appeared at the Henry Ford Museum to talk shop.

Ford's Gioia Is Keynoter At CAR Event on May 3-4

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and ultimately deployment of other sustainable mobility technologies such as hydrogen internal combustion engines and hydrogen fuel cell vehicles.

Earlier in her career with Ford, Gioia was director of Current Model Vehicle Quality for North America where she was responsible for overall current model quality performance.

Gioia has held several key management and executive positions within Ford Product Development, including valuable experience in electronics architecture design and integration in vehicles.

She also was chief engineer for the Ford Aeromax class-8 truck line and the 2002 Ford Thunderbird program. She went on to direct engineering for all Ford, Lincoln and Mercury passenger cars in North America before taking on her current assignment.

Gioia joined Ford Motor Company in 1982 as a graduate trainee in the Electronics division. From 1983 to 1986, she held various positions in the division's Powertrain Business unit. In June 1986, she became manufacturing and quality engineer at the Engine Control Electronics facility in Lansdale, Pa. Her manufacturing experience continued in management positions in the organization, including the launch of Ford's



Nancy Gioia

new facility in Cadiz, Spain in 1989.

Meanwhile, other industry speakers at the CAR conference include Tom Shoupe, Senior Vice President at Honda of America Manufacturing and a member of the Honda of America Operations Committee, the senior management team with responsibility for planning and establishing strategies; Kevin Pavlov, Executive Vice President of Magna E-Car Systems, a joint venture between Magna International and the Stronach Trust, as well as a member of the E-Car Systems executive board; and Dr. Christopher Borroni-Bird, Director of Advanced Technology Vehicle Concepts, General Motors.



PHOTO: GERALD SCOTT

Ford NASCAR driver Trevor Bayne, left, together with the Wood Brothers racing team owners that he drives for. They gathered at the Henry Ford Museum to "talk shop" with eager race fans.

Race Fans Meet Bayne

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Cup Series start.

It was actually the first career victory in any NASCAR series for the Knoxville, Tenn., native.

The Wood Brothers are tied with Jack Roush as the all-time winningest owners at MIS with 11 career victories. The Wood Brothers, who were honored by MIS in August 2010 for their 60 years in racing, won many races at the Irish Hills speedway with the No. 21 car and driver David Pearson.

"The Daytona 500 victory and everything that has followed since then has been tremendous for our organization," Eddie Wood said.

Saab Names National Sales Chief

ROYAL OAK — Saab Cars North America last week announced the introduction of its new executive national sales director, James Sweeting. The announcement comes as Saab embarks on its biggest-ever product offensive with four all-new products since 2010.

Effective March 15, Sweeting will lead sales efforts in Saab's largest market, North America. He will report directly to Saab Automobile AB executive Director, Global Sales and Aftersales and interim COO, Matthias Seidl. Over the course of the next few months, Saab Cars North

America intends to announce a permanent COO.

Meanwhile, Sweeting joins Saab Cars with 27 years of automobile industry experience in the U.S. Beginning his automotive career with the former Chrysler Corp., he has spent the past 24 years with American Honda Motor Co., Inc., in a variety of sales and marketing roles.

Most recently he held the Zone Sales Manager position in Honda's South Central Zone, where he was responsible for all sales and market representation activities in Texas and Louisiana.

FIRST Robotics Event Comes to Wayne State

DETROIT — Robotics teams from 39 Southeast Michigan high schools will experience engineering and science come alive at the FIRST Robotics 2011 Detroit District Competition. The event will be held at the Matthaei Physical Education Center at Wayne State University in Detroit on Friday, March 18 and Saturday, March 19.

FIRST (For Inspiration and Recognition of Science and Technology) is an international phenomenon that evokes passion and fortitude in students exploring careers in science, engineering, math, medical technology and related fields.

"The experience of FIRST Robotics competitions can make the difference for a high school student thinking about a career in science and engineering, not to mention the camaraderie and collaboration they learn as a member of a robotics team," said Darin Ellis, associate dean of academic affairs at the Wayne State University College of Engineering.

FIRST in Michigan is hosting nine district competitions in March and April. The top 64 teams from the district events will move on the compete in the FIRST Robotics Michigan State Championship April 7-9.

From there, 18 teams will then be eligible to advance to the international FIRST championship in St. Louis, April 27-30. Previously held in Atlanta, the international FIRST championship has the St. Louis area buoyed because it will now host the event for three consecutive years, 2011 to 2013.

The FIRST Championship games for all three years will take place at the America's Center Convention Complex in St. Louis, with a total of 502,000 contiguous square feet of exhibit space in six halls, 83 meeting rooms, the 1,411 fixed-seat Ferrara Theatre, the St. Louis Executive Conference Center and The Edward Jones Dome. A total

of 21 area hotels will provide rooms for the participants.

St. Louis was one of three finalist cities being considered for the 2011-2013 competitions. The St. Louis Convention and Visitors Commission led the charge that helped win St. Louis the bid.

"Young scientists and engineers of tomorrow will utilize the America's Center convention complex, the Edward Jones Dome, and many other locations throughout the region. With each competition in St. Louis, FIRST is expected to generate millions of dollars for the local economy," said a city of St. Louis spokesman.

"As a destination we are honored to host this event, supporting the bright, young minds that are the future of science and technology. This will give the global scientific community a chance to see what St. Louis has to offer."

The public is invited to attend the regional FIRST competition at Wayne State.

Meanwhile, the FIRST Robotics Competition is most prominent in the United States, where FIRST was originally founded, while teams from Canada have been successful.

FIRST urges teams and sponsors to expand the reach of FRC by helping start new FIRST teams. International expansion has been most successful in North America where there are over 1,200 teams in the United States and over 70 in Canada (mostly in Ontario and Quebec, although teams from British Columbia and Alberta competed in the past).

FIRST Robotics has recently reached Mexico, where 12 teams have been founded since 2007. There is a significant contingent of FIRST teams in Brazil and Israel. Both countries have hosted regional competitions in the past; Israel continues to host one yearly, guaranteeing at least three Israeli or European teams in the Championship.

Inventor Dean Kamen originally founded FIRST Robotics.

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