

NASCAR Media Conference

Press Conference

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An Interview with:

Ross Chastain

THE MODERATOR: We're joined by Ross Chastain.

We'll go straight to questions for Ross.

Q. You're starting 25th, so how concerned are you?

ROSS CHASTAIN: That's why I was late. I was trying to finish my qualifying lap (laughter). Still finishing turn four.

I mean, yeah, look, I'd much rather be up front. If anything we've shown all year and continue to show is our Trackhouse cars can pass. I can't wait to pass these guys. It's going to make for a great story.

Q. Obviously looks like you're getting quite the reception around here wherever you go. How is that not a distraction to what you're trying to accomplish?

ROSS CHASTAIN: It's normal to me. Video, caught me out there (laughter).

No, yeah, there's more people, but I always pop out in the stands and watch the races. It's nothing new. I'm not changing me, right? Yeah, if I can't get there or something, then we'll set up a different way to get in and out.

Right now it takes me a couple extra minutes. Big deal. I got nothing else going on but watching the Truck race and cheering for my buddy Zane.

Q. Are you surprised by that reaction?

ROSS CHASTAIN: I am. Especially as bad as my peers make me feel for doing it, they're all upset about it. Everybody else in the whole dang world seems like it's good, right? Definitely the fans, they love it.

So I'm surprised on both sides, though. I'm surprised it was that positive, and I'm also surprised by the negativity. It's kind of one or the other. You're either one way or the other.

Q. Have you heard from your peers directly? Do you hear what they say to us?



ROSS CHASTAIN: Not that much directly. It's funny how that works. See 'em during the week, everything is fine. See them around the track, everything is fine. Spend the whole day with 'em Media Day, get somewhere else, they got a lot of thoughts.

Q. One more on the fan reaction, the positivity. Given this is such an important week for you, can you even appreciate it? Are you going to have to reflect on this reception that you're getting, this warm welcome?

ROSS CHASTAIN: I feel like I can because I just live in the moment of, like, one box open at a time. Right now it's this weekend. When I'm not actively with my crew or in the car, yeah, I think about stuff. But I'm totally immersed in whatever I'm doing.

Yeah, talking out both sides of my mouth. Yes, I will be able to appreciate this more in 10 years. But right now it's everything that I thought it would be. It's scary as heck. It's awesome. And I'm living through it. My group is letting me experience it in my own way. They're giving me space to let me do it. Coaching me along the way, for sure. I got everybody here.

Yes and no. Like yes and yes. Now and later.

Q. Why is it scary?

ROSS CHASTAIN: Driving a Cup car in the Cup Series, it's always scary. It has been since the first race with Jay Robinson, hasn't changed since. It's been scary every race day. So I don't expect that to change.

Q. Roughly 24 hours before the green flag, do you feel nervous? Excited? What are you feeling?

ROSS CHASTAIN: I mean, look, there is some dejection about qualifying, right? We put a lot into it, and I couldn't put a lap together. Was too loose.

But it's going to be so cool when we start passing people, just one after the other, the next and the next. Like, I get to feel all this about driving a race car. I get to feel happy, I get to feel sad, I get to feel scared, I get to feel nervous. It's so cool. It doesn't feel cool in the moment, but it is so cool.



Q. What are you doing tonight?

ROSS CHASTAIN: Seeing everybody that came out here. Trackhouse is going to have a little get-together. Everyone involved with the Trackhouse brand, see them, hang out with them for a while. That way tomorrow is a little bit more all business.

Q. You mentioned having everybody out here. Among those is your brother who has been helping out on the Trackhouse side, also been doing day to day at the farm. What is it like to have him on this whole journey?

ROSS CHASTAIN: Look, he's my best friend. It's me and him against the world. No matter what, we'll always have each other's backs.

As I go through things in life, as he goes through things in life, we include each other. We're incredibly fortunate that our family dynamic has -- sometimes it doesn't seem perfect that it's us as our family against the world. That was taught to us from my granddad, and my dad says it was from his granddad, and it keep going back.

It's just the most natural thing, to have family around us. For me and Chad, we're similar enough in age. We're six years apart, but I'm probably a little young-acting for my age, he's a little wise for his age, and it puts us in a spot where business and in life we can do a lot of stuff together.

I want him involved and helping me. I feel like having him close to me makes me better.

Q. Listening to you, has it been more difficult now that people have expectations and attention on you? When you started, you didn't have that. Anywhere you were going was up. Now there are a lot of expectations. You got more fans, people who think they want you to win a championship. Is it harder because all of that is on you now than before you had it?

ROSS CHASTAIN: Not this week because it's been a week of firsts, right? First time we're coming out here in the Final 4, first time there's this many fans looking at us, even, even acknowledging the 1 car and our group.

Yeah, I don't think it's sunk in on the competition side yet other than just the fact that we're in the Final 4 is wild and it's awesome.

Q. Your debrief that you just had, I know you can't give details of it, but what was that like? Your crew chief is pretty calm, too. What was that like?

ROSS CHASTAIN: Just looking through information, learning everything we can. We're going to be back here in the spring to race again, so we want to qualify better, we want to see what we can execute practice better with.

It was just the same thing we always do. We just went through step by step what all happened, what we can do better, so...

Q. With having so many people around this weekend, I'm sure you've been swapping stories, are there any that hit a little different now that you made it to the Championship 4?

ROSS CHASTAIN: Well, not any one. It's seeing faces of people, Xfinity, Truck Series garage. Seeing crew members, team owners, people I've worked with over the years, seeing their smile when they see me, how they're excited for me, right?

Yeah, I'd say at track that's been the coolest part. All the techs from people back home that can't make it out have been really cool, too. But those in-person moments have been really, like, just made me smile and make me feel good.

I keep going back to, how cool that I can feel this way about racing. How cool is it that someone else feels so strongly and so happy for somebody else that they might have worked with seven years ago or 10 years ago or seven months ago?

It's cool to see just human interaction. To have that connection with somebody, they can just walk up and smile, we can hug, we don't even have to say anything. We know how happy they are. They're happy for me.

Q. I was talking with Johnny Davis earlier this week. He was telling me the story about how you got your first start at Dover. He helped put you in Jay's car. The way he was telling the story was he said when he was telling you about it, you're like, I don't know if I'm ready to be in a Cup car.

He's like, Boy, you're ready to get in a Cup car.

What do you recall about that experience?

ROSS CHASTAIN: Yeah, absolutely. The sponsorship was on our car, and they got approached by TriStar, Mark Smith's group, to do the 72 car as well. They just added on to my program. They asked us what we thought because we'd been partners with them for a little while.

Tony and Johnny said, We can put Ross in an equal car to



that. Put that money, we'll put that straight into his car. So they did.

I told them no. Like, they didn't even blink. We're not asking you if you want to, we're telling you you're going to do it.

I just never thought I was ready for Cup. I'm glad that they were stern with it. Because if they would have given me my choice, I wouldn't have done it. Wouldn't have gone to Dover for my first Cup race. No way.

Q. Coming up the way you did, to have that opportunity, anybody would jump at it regardless. Looking back, are you even kind of confused why you'd say no? It seems like it would be the natural reaction. Here is a Cup ride, your opportunity to make your Cup debut, not at the best track for you, but most guys would jump into it. For you to say no immediately...

ROSS CHASTAIN: It's scary. It is. It's Cup racing. It's hard. You see the guys that do it. Put them on the highest pedestal that I have in my wheel barrel to put them on.

I just and don't view myself as ready for that. That's me. I don't know. I don't really know how to answer your question other than that was my thoughts and I still don't believe that I was ready until I actually got in the race. Practice and qualifying, I wasn't ready. I got in the race, it all clicked, and we're fine.

Q. So much of this presser today has been about the fear and the scary part of being in this Championship 4. The fear that you've had, you said racing Cup is scary, how do you balance that against the moments that you need to have the aggression, to make the move that nobody else will make?

ROSS CHASTAIN: Yeah, I've been sitting here as I've said all this, and I thought about what all of y'all are going to write about, how it's going to be about Ross is scared. I'm like, Oh, man, that's probably the opposite of what these other guys are saying (laughter).

I just want to speak the truth. I do have those feelings, and they ebb and flow, they go up and down.

I'm willing to do whatever it takes. Once I get in the car, that's gone. All that fear is gone. Once I got in that first Cup race, the only thing that was different in that race and this race, in that race I was looking around at track, that's Dale Earnhardt Jr., Jimmie lapping me, but still I was amazed I was racing against those guys.

Yeah, once I get out there... When I'm preparing, when we're prepping for these races and these weekends, there's no fear. There's a way we're going to prepare. We're going to learn what we can, and we're going to put that into action when we get to the track.

I can only control what I can control. I'll do whatever it takes to be prepared and put that into action in the car. The old saying about, like, we change when we put our helmets on, I know that I do. I can block all of this out. It's not even that I can, it's just that it happens. Everything's gone. There's no thoughts. Then the conversation I had right before the race, that's not racing related, if someone asks me with my group on the business side, if we talk about something 30 minutes before the race, they come back to me 30 minutes after, they pick up the conversation like nothing's changed. I'm like, Start over, what did we talk about? I've blocked it all out, it's gone. It was all about the competition.

As long as I never lose that, I think that's what makes me stronger in the car. Doesn't always help me out of the car. Doesn't help me up here talking about how scared I am. Once I get in the car, it's all good.

Q. Have you allowed yourself through all of that to enjoy this process and enjoy the weekend? I know Thursday you were talking about how cool it was to be on the stage talking to the media. Have you allowed yourself to enjoy the moment?

ROSS CHASTAIN: I have. Not right after qualifying. It's not even been long enough right now to enjoy it. I didn't enjoy anything from the time I was coming to the green to now, there's not enjoyment in the last hour.

Yeah, just in the hauler this morning, seeing some of the guys, one of the guys was noticeably nervous. We started cutting up. Everything loosened up. Everything was fine.

I think he probably just had too much coffee. That's the problem. Little jitters.

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