



Sunday Money: Speed! Lust! Madness! Death! A Hot Lap Around America with Nascar

Jeff MacGregor , Olya Evanitsky

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NASCAR racing, once considered no more than a regional circuit of moonshiners pounding around low-country dirt tracks in a cloud of red dust and cliché, has somehow become the fastest-growing spectator sport in America -- and the buxom, bumpkin darling of Madison Avenue. With 75 million fans and its popularity soaring in every corner of the country, NASCAR is a 200-mile-an-hour traveling tent-and-revival show, a platinum-plated, multibillion-dollar V-8 hero machine -- a sports entertainment empire built at the very crossroads of pop culture, corporate commerce, and American mythology.

Smart, funny, and profane, **Sunday Money** is the kaleidoscopic account of an entire season on the NASCAR circuit. Driving 48,000 miles in a tiny motorhome, writer Jeff MacGregor and his wife, an award-winning photographer, covered 36 races at 23 tracks in 18 states, from Daytona to Darlington, New Hampshire to California, from the Wal-Mart to the Waldorf, profiling the lives of superstar drivers like Dale Earnhardt Jr. and Tony Stewart, their crews, and their fans, across the grinding reach of a 40-week season.

But this is not just a behind-the-scenes chronicle of America's loudest pastime. It is the story of a hundred stories; of red states and blue, of splendid Rebel lizards and golden Yankee hotshoes, of mystic true believers and their holy roll of honored ghosts. In the tradition of *On the Road*, *Travels with Charley*, and *The Electric Kool-Aid Acid Test*, **Sunday Money** is a snapshot of American culture -- of race, religion, class, sex, money, politics, and fame -- taken from the window of a moving car, a brilliantly observed, keenly rendered, and darkly comic portrait of America.

Sunday Money: Speed! Lust! Madness! Death! A Hot Lap Around America with Nascar Details

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Matt says

I was looking for a book with more insight into how NASCAR became the event that it is. This book instead detailed the writer's experience going to various tracks. Sorry but I was not interested in his RV or his wife's adventures.

Sarah says

I've never had any interest in NASCAR (although I did follow CART for a time as a kid), but its rise is an interesting cultural phenomenon. And I'd heard a lot of praise for this book, so it seemed worth reading.

There actually is a fair amount of interesting material in here, and I did learn quite a bit about NASCAR. But the writing style is just teeth-grating. It's written in that post-Hunter S. Thompson style which very few writers can pull off without coming across as complete assholes. I almost gave up in the first chapter because it was so irritating. But I persevered and it was ultimately worth reading, I suppose.

William says

Jeff MacGregor managed to accomplish an amazing feat with Sunday Money. He took an exciting, dangerous, non-stop sport with interesting characters and dedicated, real fans and made it exceedingly dull. One thing to realize before picking up this book is that Mr. MacGregor believes in his heart that he is more significant and better than the average NASCAR fan. He mocks them throughout. Not just their dedication to the sport and the weekly ritual of the race, but their true-blue patriotism, political persuasion and Southern roots.

It is also clear from the writing, that the author is attempting to write the book at a level that he believes is above the average NASCAR fan. His prose is profound and erudite... and pompous and self-congratulatory.

Fortunately, despite what Mr. MacGregor attempts to portray in his book, there is no average NASCAR fan. I am a fan who happens to have been raised in a large city in the Northeast and hold a graduate degree. I say this not to brag, but to point out the fundamental flaw in Mr. MacGregor's depiction of NASCAR fans. I've been to many races, and there are lots of people just like me. Because there are few black people participating or in attendance, the author concludes that the sport is non-diverse. This is a fundamental misunderstanding of diversity. Diversity is more than just race. There is gender, religion, socio-economic status, geography, ethnic background, educational achievement and so on. I can tell you that all of these forms of diversity are widely present at a NASCAR race.

On the positive side, there are some interesting stories about drivers, past and present, which should keep you from closing the book before the end, although I promise that there will be times as you read that you will

consider doing just that.

Props go out to Mr. MacGregor's wife, who was forced to endure over 40,000 miles in an RV in one year with this author. Although she is a key participant in the trip, we learn very little about her and what she's doing during the trip. She must be a saint to not have driven over Mr. MacGregor with the RV.

Rick says

NASCAR is a cultural phenomenon. My two daughters discovered NASCAR on their own when in their mid-teens and became devoted TV-viewing fans for reasons I never discovered. Dale Earnhardt's death on the track was the second great celebrity tragedy of their youth. (Kurt Cobain's suicide being the other.) MacGregor and his photographer-wife buy a motor home and follow the NASCAR circuit for a year to reveal its power and range of appeal. He describes the experience in a loose, potpourri chronicle. Sunday Monday doesn't quite deliver the goods for me. It reads like a bloated magazine serial. To literate NASCAR fans I'm sure it's an unending delight, because MacGregor can write and is no fool. (Other fans will find its mix of hyperbole, ambivalence, and occasional curtain pulling on the Wizard, in order, spot-on, perplexing, and a betrayal.) There is also a Generation X attempt at New Journalism, the Tommy Wolfe hyperventilating, insider view of something school of NJ that leaves the reader tired and at a loss to separate the writer's fevered presentation from what's actually going on. Embedded in that approach too is a lack of respect for the topic: what matters is my whiz-bang take on things, not the thing itself which gets lost in the smoke and mirrors of my imagination and prose. As the Times TV guide used to say in its abbreviated movie reviews, good of its kind but its kind lacks depth and insight. Its surface skimming, riffing on the superficial doesn't add depth or understanding. Just a kind of limited fun. I still don't get NASCAR's appeal beyond what appears to be the case made by Sports Center highlights—there are crashes and occasional bad behavior by drivers and crews in response to them. And, yes, a lot of loudness, loud engines, loud colors, and loud crowds, just like at the Roman circus. And, minus the engines, any major sporting event. I wouldn't be satisfied with a baseball or basketball book that left its sport reduced to dingers or dunks and that, alas, is what Sunday Money does for NASCAR.

Tung says

MacGregor is a frequent contributor to the NY Times, New Yorker, Esquire, and Sports Illustrated. In 2002, he and his wife spent a year traveling across the country in a motor home to follow a full season of NASCAR, documenting the races and the culture that surrounds the sport. The result of that year-long excursion and research is this book. The NY Time Book Review stated that this book is a "triumph . . . the first (and maybe only) book that nonfans or casual fans or just the mildly curious should crack in order to understand NASCAR". Their review actually understates the book's focus, as it not only does a great job of explaining the popularity of NASCAR, but also it ties it into the larger American zeitgeist and explains how NASCAR is the quintessential American phenomenon – a raw convergence of pop culture, corporate marketing, culture war, and American mythology. By the end of the book, the actual racing becomes secondary to the larger NASCAR culture. MacGregor's prose is mostly brilliant – a mixture of Vonnegut and Hunter S. Thompson: an energetic stream of consciousness moving at (appropriately enough) breakneck speed. He balances history (the founding and rise of the NASCAR organization) with hysterical anecdotes (examples of drunken fans); he balances moments of absurdity (the prevalent "Show us your tits!" chanting at races) with moments of poignancy (the discussion of why Dale Earnhardt's death was and still is so

widely mourned, or why NASCAR fans are so moved by 9/11 and support the war in the Middle East). MacGregor also walks the fine line of presenting the ridiculousness of redneck behavior without the arrogance or condescension of typical Northern reporting of Southern culture. A highly entertaining read.

Jodi says

Interesting at first, but enough already! Wanted to like it but got pretty monotonous. Didn't care enough to finish it.

TJ says

The author sells everything and buys a motor home to follow the entire NASCAR season - coast to coast - with his wife. A good look into some of the 'behind the scenes' of the 'sport' that is quickly becoming one of the most popular in the country.

This confirms NASCAR fans are crazy.

Melissa McAllister says

The author, a journalist, and his wife, a photographer, set out in their newly acquired motor home to follow the NASCAR season. The premise being that he, like so many others, did not understand the infatuation with NASCAR. After all, it is just a bunch of cars going around in circles. Oh how I loathe that statement. So he and his wife set off on a trek across America, following NASCAR race after race, week after week, for the 10 month season.

I read a little bit about the book online before acquiring it for myself. The things I had read indicated that the book would be an eye-opening experience for those that were not familiar with NASCAR - providing insight into the drivers, history and fans. Yet it would still be intriguing for fans of the sport already. I was definitely intrigued, and couldn't wait for the book to arrive in the store and snatched it up immediately when it did.

I have never been so disappointed in a book. I found myself being offended about every other page. I am not being dramatic when I say that I had to stop myself from hurling the book across the room. Yet I was still intrigued. I wanted to know what he had to say. It took me forever and a day to finish the book and it was a constant battle to read. It also made me contemplate why the book offended me so.

Was I offended because he portrayed the fan as a hillbilly, redneck, white trash, trailer trash, beer guzzling, Jack Daniels moron? Or was I offended because that is who the fan is and I don't want to be lumped in that group? In all honesty I think it could have been a little bit of both. I don't feel he painted a positive picture of the NASCAR fan,

I felt he was mocking us. I will not deny that a large portion of the fans are what many will call a hillbilly or redneck, heck they will call themselves that and be proud to say it. They are the truest of fans. They didn't jump on the bandwagon when it became popular. They don't go to the races because they think the drivers

are yummilicious, even if they are. They are the people that grew up on racing. They went to dirt tracks, maybe raced themselves. The good ole boys. They are me. I grew up going to races. We spent our Friday nights out at the track watching family members race, whether it was out at the dirt track or the drag strip.

So if this makes me a hillbilly, redneck, white trash, trailer trash moron...so be it. I drive around proud with my Dale Jr. license plate, license plate cover, and sticker in my window. I have no qualms when I make out with one of my Dale Jr. pictures before turning out my Dale Jr. light for the night.

So what did I think about the book, would I recommend it? I thought the book was a waste of trees. If you are a non fan of NASCAR, you may find it "colorful" and enjoy it. He does give you a history of NASCAR which is helpful if you are not familiar. If you are a true fan, I think you will feel the same as I do. I wouldn't waste your money; instead buy a new t-shirt of your favorite driver.

I think I will shake my Dale Jr. snow globe and make a wish that Mr. MacGregor is able to be a more open-minded, less judgmental person, and drives a Zamboni.

Anthony says

After reading the book, I am unsure what the point was. Was it supposed to be a travelogue? A sociological essay? A historical piece? A sport critique? It tried being all of these things and more, but failed at most.

The author claims to be setting off on a grand tour of every race at every track, but skips several and, in fact, has whole chapters devoted to life in a Wal-Mart parking lot while details of a race weekend are reduced to a mere three sentences. No great insights are made into the fans of NASCAR, but rather seem to play up to the stereotypes that all fans are redneck, racist, drunk good ol' boys, despite the actualities of the situation. No realizations are made about the author either, except that he seems to have a contempt for NASCAR fans and frequently mocks them.

As a NASCAR fan, I found myself equally bored and insulted by the book, and it became a chore to slog through it to the end. I would not recommend this book to any fans of NASCAR or anyone hoping to become a fan. Those folks seem to be much better served, and at least better entertained, by spending a weekend at a race and experiencing the sights, sounds, and the people first hand.

J.C. says

this won't win the National Book Award (or any award for that matter) but I still had fun turning the pages.

Suzanne Kittrell says

This one was way off the beaten track for me but the title intrigued me so I started to read this and could not put it down. A SI writer and his girlfriend (the photographer on the trip) buy a RV and follow the NASCAR circuit for one year starting with the Daytona 500. They race all over the country, back and forth between the two coasts, trying to keep up with the hectic schedule these people have and what it takes to be successful in

that market. It was funny and interesting and told me a lot about a group of people I am not around very much.

TheSaint says

Its a good thing that author Jeff MacGregor makes *Sunday Monday* such a fun read. Otherwise I'm not sure I could stick with the subject matter. I mean. NASCAR? Not exactly my cup of tea. But the year MacGregor and his wife spent in a motor home following the races is actually fun to read. He intersperses his wry observations (OK, gossip) about the fans, the drivers, and the whole racing experience, with genuine history and research about the "sport."

Patricia says

I was initially more interested in the travels-and-troubles-with-the-RV parts but I got hooked on the NASCAR story - there's a whole culture there that America only halfway knows about. Besides, it somehow resonated with my inner redneck... some part of me wants to go to a race again (but not the Coca-Cola 600!)

doug says

I am not a NASCAR follower, I am, however, a huge fan of business and white trash. Sunday Money covers them both. The writer and his wife (a photographer) take a year off of their lives, buy an RV and head out on the race circuit. We follow them from campgrounds to race tracks and Wal-Mart parking lots. Jeff MacGregor holds nothing back as he discovers and explains the importance and history of stock car racing and its effects on southern culture. A no holds barred open view of the lives of the drivers and their close relationship with their fans and the identities that they share with their title sponsors. From pit row interviews with crew chiefs to a horrid incident with a septic tank we get to read it all.

I highly recommend this book to anybody who has ever wondered "What's the big deal with a bunch of guys turning left?" Read it.

David Dodd says

The author has to describe, in detail every little thing. It makes the book/chapters wayyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyy too long. Not one of my fave books about racing.
