

This is Dan Pierce talking to Mr. Richard Petty in his office at Level Cross, N.C.

Richard Petty (RP): I feel like Clinton...where's the TV

Dan Pierce (DP): (laughing)

RP: Sorry 'bout that guys, had to throw that in.

DP: No, that's fine, that's fine. I wanna try to ask you some questions that haven't answered five hundred times. Some of them you may have, but the focus of what I'm talking about is; what's Southern and what's not about . I wanted to ask you first if you could comment on the importance to you, in your racing and personal life, of family, which seems to be an especially big issue with you and with in general. Starting really back, I guess at the beginning, with your dad and you're early involvement with racing.

RP: When my Dad first started running, he ran the very first race at Charlotte. He won the Grand National, which is Winston Cup now, in 1949. At that time it was my mother, my daddy, my brother and myself and that was our family. They started in the racing business and Mother kept all the books and kept all the money straight and Daddy done all the work around the race course. And as my brother and myself grew up, naturally we started working around the race course. We started changing oils and washing the thing and then it just got bigger and bigger and bigger. As we went along it got big enough that they could afford to hire somebody to help. And we were going to school at the same time, high school. As things got bigger we had to hire one person and next thing you knew we had to hire two. It just grew and grew and grew but it was still a family oriented business. I guess this is what you want here, some history.

DP: Yeah.

RP: So, I'll just tell you how we come along. I started driving in 1958 and I got married. 1961 my father had an accident at Daytona and stayed in the hospital down there for like four months. Mother stayed with him so my brother and I came back, we had two race cars and we tore both of them up down there, so we came back and started the business again or what we had left. We kept the books, we paid all the bills, we built the cars, we went to the race track and I drove. So, at 23 years old, it was sorta threw back on me and my brother to make it a living for my family. And then when Mother and Daddy came back, I think Mother took the books from me so I didn't have to worry about that but my Father never really got 100% back into racing. He sorta looked after things and tried to help and stuff but then he sorta stayed out of it. Then as it got bigger then we had to hire people to take Mother's job so that part of the family went away, but my brother and myself still run the business. We done all the work. He done all the engines, I done all the chassies. And then that continued. We had a couple of cousins that worked for us.

DP: Dale Emmons, is your cousin?

RP: Dale Emmons, he worked for us all those years. He was my right hand man and kept me straight. From that standpoint, it's been a family tradition, a family business. I think as we grew up we done all this stuff together. I think that all of the things I do and the way I think came from my Mother and my Father and came from a close knit family. As I grew up and I had a family and stuff, I tried to instill the same thing in them. Whether it's right or wrong that's the way I was brought up, so to me it's right. Might be wrong for somebody else but anyhow that's how we got the Petty Enterprise to where it's at today.

DP: Did you envision that Kyle would become a driver one day or, were you pleased with that decision or was that...

RP: You know I guess we never really thought about it until he come in one day and said that he was really interested. To begin with, he wasn't really that big up on racing. He thought everybody's Daddy had a racecar in the back yard. Even though he got to travel and do all that stuff, he never really got that into it. He was playing football and baseball and basketball in high school. He was a pretty good football player and then he got hurt one night and I think he realized, like hey man, if I can hurt playing football where I am playing for nothing... Anyhow, I think that really changed his whole attitude on looking at how maybe race car driving would be the way to go. Then when he got to be, oh maybe 14 or something, he started coming in and helping us, going to the races with us. He got to be on the pit crew, so he got more interested in racing. Then, when he got to be 17, 18, he decided he wanted to do driving so we put him in a car and turned him loose. Again, that's part of the family deal now, that we're bringing Kyle back next year back into Petty Enterprise deals, to get him more oriented to this so maybe I can start stepping aside and bringing him in. We've also got Adam coming along and hopefully he can continue to carry on the tradition. We'll bring him back into Petty Enterprises and be back in family business even though it's so much bigger it's not just family anymore.

DP: Did any of your daughters ever express an interest in driving or would you...

RP: No, my daughters, they're just race fans. Actually, I don't know that they're race fans, I think they're Richard Petty fans and Kyle Petty fans and Adam Petty fans. As far as being interested in racing, one of my daughters married a boy that used to drive a race car, but he decided he'd be better to go out and go to work for a living. But as far as them

really, well if a Petty wasn't driving in a race they wouldn't go to that race. They're not that, well they're Petty fans I guess.

DP: Why do you think family is such a big issue in , so much more than any other sport that I know of?

RP: It's a kind of a sport that lends itself to a group more than any other. Football you got the player and he's out with a bunch of other players or baseball or you know things like that, team sports. Even though we are a team sport 'cause it takes everything to make it work. It's a kinda the deal, we travel together, we play together, work together and we can take our family to our job with us and have a family oriented situation as far as, we have always had an area for the drivers and their wives and their families and stuff to keep them away from the general public. Kyle grew up with the Pearson, the Allison boys, with Jarrett boys. They played football and fought and down everything in the infield while the Dads was out beating each other on the race track. It's a family deal and it wasn't just the Petty family, it was the Petty family, the Pearson family, the Allison family that got together and stayed together too. That just sorta lent itself to the whole deal and then when comes along, which is the organization we race for, and you had the Frances, you got the France sons, you got the France daughters, they run in that particular business. So it's a family business for them even though it's a multi-million dollar business it's still family oriented. It's just been probably one of the big deals is that it started as a Southern sport and I think that the south eastern part of the United States is pretty much family oriented from way way back, probably more so than any other parts of the country. So it was just natural for the race deal to be family oriented.

DP: In the early days of Grand National Racing there was a racing scene that kinda had a rough image. You had these people who had backgrounds in moonshining, like Junior Johnson and the list goes on and on, and you had your guys with a wild reputation like Curtis Turner and Joe Leatherly and you had fights at races. I've even seen one account from your brother where he said that at one point he said that your Dad and Tiny Blind were in a fight and your Mother was beating Tiny Blind over the head with a pocket knife. How did you feel about that at the time? And how do you feel about those early, kinda rough and tumble days, given...

RP: Well, you know I guess everybody's gotta have a history. Again, Rome wasn't built in a day. It was kinda dirty getting this stuff done. I don't know about football and baseball ... was probably the same thing when you get right down to it. So the racing deal, that was the history of the racing deal. When racing started you had two or three families but then you had the real wild crowd out there and that's the way it really started. I think that the sport, over a period of time has cleaned itself up tremendously inside and as it cleaned itself up from inside then it grew a better class of say fans. Then it's sort of a round robin sort of deal. The newspapers got interested in it 'cause it was a family sport, or it was a cleaning itself up and the more press you get the more people you get to come and so everybody helps everybody. But, again you know when my father first started doing this it was, he did it for a living, he enjoyed doing it, but he needed to do something to make a living. He could use the family to help the business, so that's the way we got involved. Sure, it might not have been the cleanest thing that could have been done but we didn't look at it as being as bad as what everybody else looked at it. Once the people

got involved in it, they seen that it wasn't as bad as what they'd heard it was. So again, it just sorta cleaned itself up over a period of time.

DP: Did you feel that that was kind part of your mission? To kinda show people that, you know, we're not these kinda rough characters that...

RP: I don't guess I ever thought that was my assignment, to go out and do the deal as far as cleaning up this or cleaning up that or making a different image. I just come along and did my thing and I think I came along at the right time for Richard Petty and hopefully it was the right time for the racing. The whole circumstances, you know I'm a big believer in destiny and stuff like this and I was just thrown in the right place at the right time, with the right people to do what I could do for myself and for other people around me and I guess that's just what happened.

DP: Did you ever imagine back in those days that you would be something in the order of Medal Freedom winner, having an honorary doctorate, run for secretary of state?

RP: No, you know I mean, that was not even in the cards as far as I was concerned. It was in the cards but I didn't know anything about it. I never looked at trying to get somewhere beyond racing. I never looked at racing getting near as big as what it is now. We were doing something that we could make a living at, something we really enjoyed doing and what else was it? We wasn't looking that far down the road and we wasn't trying to build anything except we was just trying to make a living. We was trying to build Petty Enterprises a little bit bigger so we could make a better living, have a better racecar or whatever it was. But as far as taking it to the front pages of the newspaper and taking it to TV and stuff like this, you never even visualize that. I didn't.

DP: One thing that has, over the years I guess, kinda developed, has been kinda of a close relation between religion and . Could you talk a little bit about your relationship with Brother Bill Frazier?

RP: Well, Bill came from Gaston, I think, Alabama. We went to Talladega one day and Bill had a little rigamaroo out there in the infield and he done decided he's gonna save everybody. And just right out of the blue, here he comes and him and my brother hit it off real good. First thing you know, he had two or three people at his first service he had at the race track and then he had five or six people and then he had eight or ten and it just grew a little. People said you know we're away from home all these weekends and never get to go to church and never think about what we should be thinking about and this give a lot of people an opportunity to do that. So again, he started it off and it went up and went down and then over a period of time he lapsed in it. He got mad or somebody got mad at him or whatever so then somebody else came along and sorta took off where he'd left off. He laid the groundwork and then it got a little bit bigger and a little bit bigger. Then this guy went away and then somebody else came along and so it's got to be a pretty big operation now. So I think it was probably one of the deals that being how we're Southern-oriented operations that the people went ahead and accepted it and then once they seen what was going on then you got more and more people involved in it. I think in other sports or in other parts of the country they probably wouldn't have let them get in the gate to begin with.

DP: Who is in charge of that, of the chapel service, I guess that's what they call...

RP: Yeah, they've got a regular organization now that operates out of Charlotte. I don't even know the boy's name. But he come on about five years or ten years ago. He

came in and really started doing more and more things. The groundwork was laid by Bill and then people said ok, he didn't do anything bad, it's kinda helped. Then the next guy does a little bit better and everybody sorta builds on and you know we have. They go to all the race tracks, to all the shops, like once a month and have a prayer meeting and dinner, you know what I mean. So stuff like that and plus there is always somebody. They have a whole bunch of different boys that come around that help. If anybody goes to the hospital, quick as there's a wreck there's somebody at the infirmary right there that the people go to and have to take them to the hospital. Then they've got one of the people that go with them and go with the family. So it's really made it a closer knit situation. I think it's really been a big plus for and it's been a big plus for the people that participate.

DP: And as I understand most of the drivers will go to the chapel service?

RP: Yeah, most all of them from time to time. They might not go every week, there's a few that goes every week and then there's others that if it's convenient they go or if they haven't got something else to do. I doubt if there's any that's not been some.

DP: I guess related to that, a couple of years ago Bobby Hamilton, your driver, won a poll to qualify for the Bush Clash, but you made the decision not to, I guess allow him to run or...

RP: Well see, the Bush Clash deal in order to run and win the Bush Clash deal you win the polls but you gotta have a decal on the side of the car that says "Bush Beer" or whatever. I think it's Budweiser now. Again I get back to my upbringing with my mother and you know we grew up with the revenueurs and all the bad things in and it's just a principal. You know I don't condone it one way or another. I don't think, well you know, if people do things in moderation I think no matter what they do is fine. The deal is when



they get carried away with it. But anyhow, I just never had it in the house, I never condoned it with my kids and I wasn't from my mother's standpoint or my father's standpoint either one, neither one of them indulged in any of it. Again, it was my upbringing and right, wrong or different that's the way I felt about it. You know it wasn't a deal that I'm trying to carry across and say don't do this or don't do that. It was just a personal decision.

DP: Did it bother you when Kyle drove a Coors car?

RP: Yeah, it bothered Kyle too but the deal there was he was trying to make a living and that was about the only way at that particular time that he could do it. It bothered me. Probably bothered my mother a lot more. She had tried to instill that in my brother and myself and then she got mad at me 'cause I didn't instill it in my son. It wasn't a deal where he went out and looked for it, it just had to be. So he knew, and if you notice now he does the same thing, he stays away from it. At that particular time in his life that's what had to be done.

DP: So he'd be much better placed with Hot Wheels than with the big car...

RP: No, he fits so much better in with the motorcycle crowd and the Hot Wheels crowd you know and ...

DP: In 1961, which is about your third, fourth year of racing, Curtis Turner and Tim (unintelligible), Fire Ball Roberts tried to organize drivers under the Federation of Professional Athletes connected with the Teamsters Union. I've never seen anything about what connections you and your dad may have or may not have had with the...

RP: In that particular situation, this was a Curtis trying to get money to build his race track at Charlotte. The Union said if you unionize the drivers we'll give you the money.

We were never big in that situation. I never really got involved. I don't even know, I guess they had some meetings but I don't know if I ever even went to the meetings. They were trying to get the drivers and tell them what they could do for them or whatever it was gonna cost them or whatever. I was 22, 23 years old. I wasn't interested in nothing like that. I was busy doing my thing. I was out on the racetrack trying to beat all them guys that was in there talking about something else.

DP: Were you in the meeting at the Grace Stadium (hard to understand the name of the stadium) where Bill France...

RP: You know, I don't know. I probably was but I don't remember any of it. I remember some of the stuff I've read but I don't really remember that part of it. So I guess it wasn't too important to me cause I would have remembered it if it had been.

DP: In 1969, it got important to you though, didn't it?

RP: Yep, but this was a situation where we got into the PDA, Professional Drivers Association. But that was more from the standpoint of, see all of a sudden the cars started running 190, 195 mile an hour and on some of these race tracks it wasn't safe to be in a pace car (not sure of what type of car he says). And also the guys was getting concerned over how there is more people coming but the purses ain't going up. So they said ok we'll do something with this deal. So it wasn't a deal where they was trying to dictate anything to anybody. The big deal was the safety. Even though we was wanting more money, the deal that finally come to a head at Talladega I guess was the tires. If you run wide open tires they stay on the cars three, maybe four laps and then they start coming apart. So it just came to a head down there. The PDA sorta went away after the Talladega deal because then came back and sorta changed their situation, not on the safety deal but on

the money deal. They come up with what's called a winners' circle deal where they paid some people to come to the races and you know make sure they stayed and all this kind of stuff. It changed their attitude some. Basically that's what the drivers were wanting to get was get 's attention and say hey guys this ain't a one sided deal, we wanna be involved in some stuff. Course they still don't let you be involved in any of it, they still run the show.

DP: Do you think today, they are they still... I look in the paper at Purses (misspelled, misunderstood?) and things like that and it kind of amazes me, you know you can kind of compare them to the Senior Golf Tour or the LPGA or something like that and you think of all these events and things and from an owner's standpoint...

RP: Yeah, but from the driver's standpoint, it's fine cause they already get enough salary plus a percentage. So they make a million bucks or two million bucks a year or whatever it is, you know they're happy as junebugs. Makes it tough on the car owners because they're not getting all the purse anyway. They have to split it with the drivers and the crews and all this kind of stuff. So really it winds up making it tough on you're sponsors cause you've gotta get the money from somewhere. I don't know what would be fair, what percentages would be, of what the operation is, what needs to come from the racetrack, what needs to come from the sponsor what needs to, you know, how much the drivers can earn. I do know for myself having the experience of being out there and stuff, no matter how much you pay the drivers, they're under paid. Because they have to produce, it's not like a football player, baseball player, something. We're more like the golfers deal, if you don't perform that day, you don't get paid. I'm a big fan of the Riplin (misspelled, misunderstood?), but he just sat out the other night and it didn't cost him

nothing. I mean it cost him a record but he finally said, you know I got the record, I'm so far ahead of everybody, you know why do I need to keep the pressure of everybody asking me what I'm gonna do and all that, he says ok, I'm gonna sit out. And that's behind him now, he can just go on. He goes on and plays the game and seeing how he got what, two for four the next night out, I mean that's what he want to do is go win ball games. He don't wanna be specialized, he don't wanna be set out there by hisself.

DP: Speaking of this whole Talladega incident, do you recall your conversations at all with Bill France...

RP: No, I just know there was a bunch of arguing going on. As far as the specific words I don't know but the gist was, hey we wanna run your race track, we wanna help you with , we wanna do everything we can, but we got our own safety here. If we go out there and run, somebody's gonna get hurt and it could be us. It could be me, you know what I mean. He comes back and says, just slow down, don't run fast. And I says wait a minute, we're race car drivers, you're paying us to go out there and beat each other, you know what I mean. So anyhow it just come to down, we says we're not gonna run the race and he says well you have to and we says well just for our own safety we're not running. So everybody went off. And they run the race and they didn't have any problems but they'd run what ever fifteen to twenty laps and they'd have caution flags and they'd let everybody come in and get and then none of those guys really run that fast. I mean they run and they run as fast as maybe they could but there wasn't but four or five Winston Cup cars out there. The rest of them was little bitty whatever pony car deals at that time. So they were lucky that nobody did get hurt. Worst thing it could have done is

if one of them had got hurt after we done what we had done it could have torn up. So everybody was lucky that they come out as good as they did.

DP: Then the next time you went there the tires were ok.

RP: Well, no, they still had trouble with them. They had trouble with them for four or five years. But, they were at least safe enough to go out and run 10 or 15 or 20 laps on. And they got better and better and better and then they finally overcame.

DP: In relation to this, you won seven Winston Cup Grand National Championships, two hundred races, the best known figure in history, but it seems like that you and the Frances have kinda had like rocky relationship, even going back to the first Daytona and then the (unintelligible) and then the Talladega. Could you talk about you're relationship with the Frances?

RP: It's, yeah, maybe it's been on shaky grounds. More in the past probably than it is now because we're not that in the forefront with the Winston Cup deal. But, they did what they had to do and we did what we had to do, or what we thought was right and they did what they thought was right. And it wasn't that we didn't like each other, it was just maybe whatever the circumstances were at that time that they had a different thought then we had or we had a different thought then they did. But over all we probably challenged each other enough that both sides stepped up to the plate the next time that much better. We learned off of what we did and what our arguments were and so now I don't know that we've got any particular problems with them except that every time I go to a race they try to tell me that my car ain't right here or my car ain't right there, but that's ...

DP: (laughing) Some things never change, do they?

RP: That's right, some things never change. But the overall deal is, I think again, like I said, I think we've helped each other. I think we've helped and I know has helped us. In the long run, it's a wash out.

DP: Can you talk a little bit about the relationship... when I was talking to Jared I was kinda surprised at the seemingly kind of ways that Bill France worked behind the scenes, especially in the '60s when there were supposedly no factory rides to hook people up with factories. Was there anything like that with you and Chrysler? Was Bill France involved in that anyway or ...

RP: No, that was probably one of the things that probably didn't endear us to was we always did our own thing, we never called down there and said "We need help with this, we need help with that, we need a brake here." We was as independent in our little field as they was in their big field. So we never asked for any favors, we never asked for help in any given thing. At the time that you're talking about, Big Bill, at that time it was a struggling operation until the last fifteen years I guess. has always struggled just to make sure that they had what they was going and all that stuff. So Bill, he looked at it like I've got to do everything I can to keep this together and make it bigger and better. So if he had to do some stuff under the table he'd do it just to make the whole deal. So like I said, I questioned some of that stuff at that time, but in the long run, and even at that time he's gotta do it. He's gotta do it to make the life blood really flow. Like I said, some of it was not the way I would have done it but it worked. Maybe it wasn't the way he wanted it done, but that's the way he had to do it. So, all of us have been in that situation.

DP: So you would say, overall, that the France family has been positive in terms of ...

RP: Oh yeah, it wouldn't have happened without them. Not saying that someone else couldn't have done the same thing, but being they started the thing and it got going and they done one heck of a job to make it work.

DP: Other than your Winston Championships, one of the things that has been most legendary about you has been the way that you've treated fans and reporters and people in general, I guess you would say. Can you comment on why you've never turned away a fans request for an autograph or ...

RP: I don't know, personality I guess, you know what I mean? It just happened. It wasn't anything I planned. It wasn't anything I sat down and thought, if I do this then I can do that or whatever, it just happened. Really, I guess the first guy that asked me for an autograph it just thrilled me to death I guess, you know what I mean? Hey somebody wants my autograph, you know what I mean? And what happened was when I done it, it made me feel good but when I did it for somebody they'd look at it and you'd see them light up too, so you know you got satisfaction both ways. You said man I made somebody happy or pleased somebody. So I think it was as much gratitude for me for somebody to ask me as it was for me to sign it for somebody, so it was a two way street. Makes you feel good if somebody recognizes you or wants your autograph. So I guess I sorta took it up and didn't let it go and didn't cultivate it or maybe did cultivate it but just said ok guys you know this is great. Course you get in some places and you're like why can't these people leave me alone, I've gotta go to the bathroom or whatever it is. But after doing that and getting it started and stuff then as time progressed I got more and more into the situation of saying these is the guys who are *paying* you. These are the guys that are buying the tickets, they're buying the ESTP, they're buying the Pontiacs or

whatever it is you're trying to sell. But the main deal is they're buying those tickets to the race. They're the ones that, I mean Charlotte never paid me a penny, it always came from the fans. ESTP never paid me a penny, it came from the fans. So why should I butter up to them people. I ought to butter up to the people the money is coming from. So I think that's one thing that's really helped in a way, in a long way. When outside people look at it, it is so fan oriented, fan- friendly oriented. But once somebody brings that out and tells these new guys that's coming in, tells them that these is the guys that are making it work over here. I mean Hendrix ain't paying you just cause he likes you, he's paying you cause them people. He's making money off of them, selling them cars or whatever it is. So then the people sat down and said you're right, that's the way that it is. So then they start catering to the people that really pay the bills.

DP: Do you talk to your drivers about that kind of thing?

RP: No, they know that, you know what I mean, if they've been here very long. Even the Bush people and a lot of the other racing organizations see how it's done. I mean, this (unintelligible) came on what three, four years ago and stuff. And they've got to deal now they've seen that right off. They said ok we've gotta. Because Indy Car (misspelled, misunderstood?) is not the most popular people in the world. So when they started their deal, they have a deal now, race day or qualify, they let the fans come down and set the drivers up. Just like an autograph session and let the people come through to talk to the drivers and stuff. But they seen that they had to get their names out there. I mean, nobody knew Buck Jones or Sam Johnson, so they gotta get these people in there to know them. They said we've got to get this fan friendly deal started right quick. I think all the racing people, no matter whether it's ASA or whatever, ASA does the same thing, right before



the race they let people come down and get autographs from the drivers. Course, they don't have but 4 or 5,000 people at a race and all of them are not gonna come down, so they can do that for an hour or whatever. Again, I think that's all stimulated from what the Winston Cup boys did, 20 years ago, 40 years ago. What Daddy done before we started, you know what I mean. I don't know if anybody ever got a Curtis Turner autograph.

DP: (laughing)

RP: You know what I mean, I never thought about that. I know they got Junior's autograph anyway, so.

DP: Well, one of your biggest fans is a former student of mine. First time I taught school, I taught eighth grade. I had a kinda chubby little, well he wasn't exactly little, student named Brad Dougherty. I know he's turned into one of your biggest fans over the years.

RP: Yep, he's still got him a pick-up race car. He went in the bush there for a while and then got out of that and then when the trucks cranked up, him and a couple of boys got together and they got them a deal. He always wore that 43 number though.

DP: And Brad seems to be one that's concerned with trying to bring more African Americans into the sport. Could you talk a little bit about the past, particularly about Wendell Scott? I'm just kinda interested what your relationship if any...

RP: Oh, you know we got along good. Wendell did a very credible job in representing his people in the sense that he didn't come in and say "Hey guys, I'm black, you're supposed to do this or you're supposed to do that, or I'm something special or I want this." He come and said "I'm here, take me for what I am." And then he was accepted.

Brad's the same way, coming in as a car owner, he didn't come in here and say "I'm a basketball player, I'm a different color than ya'll are and I want something special." He come in here and said "I'm Brad Dougherty, how're ya'll doin'?" You know what I mean? So then everybody accepted him and said "Hey, this guy's ok. He's not trying to be anything different than just being a human being." And as long as the people realize that and as long as the people come in and project that, then you've got no problems. It's the deal when they come in and said "Hey, I'm a minority" or "I'm something special" and then we'd say "Wait a minute, we don't need this kind of people here. Let them go do something else." So as far as having different races coming in to the Winston Cup, different societies and stuff, I don't know that Hispanic or what is Spanish or the Black people or whatever have the circumstances to draw them. Draw special people into whatever it is, you know. We have very few blacks that go to races, but we have all kinds of them keeping up with racing. They watch it on TV. I don't go anywhere that somebody doesn't come up with a cab driver or whether they're running a bulldozer or whether they own their own business that don't know something about racing. They know Richard Petty, they know Dale Earnhardt, they keep up with it but they don't really, but again, it's very expensive to go to races. Everybody's not got the monies and stuff to put out 100 or 150 dollars a weekend to be able to park the car, get you something to eat and buy you a ticket, buy you a t-shirt or whatever. So, I don't know that that doesn't keep that from happening, it keeps the other races from coming in and really going and being race fans. I think they are race fans. I really think they are race fans, but not that they can participate in really coming and going. As far as being the drivers and stuff, I don't know again that the monies and the society that they're not in that society,

they're not in the car business. They're not into the Saturday night racing deal. They're not into these kinds of stuff. And if you want to come in it takes monies, somebody's got to put the monies up to get the driver attention to get him in the deal. So it's just right now is not the right time. Some of these days it will happen. And same way with say women coming into it. You see one now and then that goes around the fringes and tries a little bit but, course, I still don't think it's a woman's sport. But that's no sign that it won't be someday.

DP: Related to that, you were stating about the cost of tickets and I know from going to Bristol that you pay more than 60 dollars and then you have to pay to park. Is it in danger of pricing out their...

RP: No. There's enough people out there that come up with the money. I guess there is a price limit, ok, and when we used to sell tickets for 10 dollars people complained about it. It went up to 15, people complained, went up to 20, people complained. And no matter where it goes, people are gonna complain, but, yeah, there is limit on it. But they're not gonna put the limit on it today. In other words, as society changes, as money gets to be worth less, it's liable to be 300 dollars a ticket but at that time it's gonna be no more than what a hundred dollars is now so who cares? I drove 15 years and won about everything there was to win before I won a million dollars. Now win a million in one race. So the monetary deal that's another side line from the racing part. Now you get a lot of people come into racing just because the money is there, not because that's what they love to do and stuff. All of a sudden they say "Well, I'm a mechanic and I can go over here and make 50, 000 or I can work over here at the dealership and make 30,000." They get into racing not because they love it but because the money is there. And the same way

with some of the drivers. Some of them guys is out there knowing they ain't never gonna win a race. They ain't interested in winning races, they just interested in making money. So that changes everything.

DP: About the expense of teams, is that a concern of yours?

RP: The what now?

DP: The expense of running a team?

RP: Oh yeah, everything's relative. Racing now is very very expensive. But it's no more expensive, again, then it was ten years ago or twenty years ago or thirty years ago, against everything else that's in the society. 1950, or 1949, Daddy bought a '49 Plymouth for 900 bucks and went racing, he had a race car. Everything else was cheap cheap cheap but he didn't have 900 bucks. He had to go to the bank and borrow the money. And the same thing now, the thing costs you 100,000 dollars, so you gotta go to the bank and borrow 100,000 dollars. Everything's relative, sure it's expensive, but it was expensive then too, according to what everything around it.

DP: You've been around Winston Cup and Grand National Racing for fifty years or so, either watching it driving in it most of those years. What's changed during that time that you would consider to be changes for the good?

RP: Well, I don't know any particular one or two things. The deal is that in 1949 they planted a seed and it's a tree, you know what I mean. So it was wee little bitty and this was it and every year it grows and it grows another limb. So now we've got a pretty good sized tree. Now how big the tree is we don't know, we won't ever know till it dies out, ok? But right now it's growing, it's getting bigger, you know what I mean. That's how I explain it, so there's not any one given thing, just every year it got a little bit better. And

every year it gets a little bit better and every year it gets a little bit better. So far we've not got any dead limbs. I can't say any one thing that made it work. There's been different segments along the way that's really brought it up. I mean the factories got into it and kept it from being a backyard sport deal, you know what I mean. That helped it. R.J. Reynolds come in with their tobacco money. They took it to another level cause they took it from running 50 races a year on half mile track to running 30 races on big tracks that are 250 or 300 miles and they had room for the people. Then the next step that came along was that TV got it. So that just took it and it went and it's just going out like this. It's not a Southern sport anymore. It's a national sport, because we go all over the country to run. We might run more races in the South but we still run in the North, we run in the West, we run everywhere else, you know. Again, it's just that times took care of it and it's just grown from there. And there's no one person or one thing or one incident that made it work. It took everybody to make it work.

DP: Looking back over those years what do you see, things that you think, I kinda wish it was still that way or what was good about those ...

RP: Good old days. (side A ends here)

Side B

DP: Regrets over things like closing the North Wilksborough ...

RP: No. That's progress man. You know what I mean. You say, oh I hate that happened, good, we're going somewhere. So, you look at that...

DP: You don't wish you still had a dirt track race...

RP: Yeah, every once in a while I say, "Man, I'd like to see these guys on dirt. I'd love to see them on dirt." But, you've outgrown that, you know what I mean. It's sorta

like when you're growing up and stuff, you outgrew your bicycle so you got a motorcycle, you outgrew the motorcycle so you got a car, you outgrew the car you got an airplane. That's life.

DP: I guess speaking of looking back, do you ever go, like when you go down for Petty driving experience, do you ever get in the car and drive around or take one of your cars...

RP: No, not as a deal. I've driven some people around political wise and money wise and stuff like that. But I got out of the car in '92 at Atlanta and have not been back in one professionally, not been back in one to see how fast I can run or anything like that. I've run around some racetracks but strictly celebrity deal, you know what I mean, nothing to go out there and say lemme see if I can do this again.

DP: So you don't think, you never say "Hey, I wonder..."

RP: Oh yeah, you always have that deal but you've got sense enough to know that you better not go out and do it. So I haven't challenged myself any.

DP: Well, um, what do you still see... You said, made a comment that is national now, and it is in scope especially with the new tracks in the different parts of the country, are there things that are still Southern about Winston Cup Racing?

RP: I think that the concept of the good old boy concept is still there. We might be working our way away from that but even to the general public we are still a Southern sport, even though we go all over and are a national sport. We're national covered, people look at it nationally but when they get right down to the nitty gritty they know it's a Southern sport. They know where it came from. They know it's got some history and they don't look down on it like they did twenty years ago or forty years ago they look

down on it now as hey guys, that's something unique and I think that's a plus for the racing right now.

DP: What about, I guess related to that, Jarrett made this comment about the handshake. You have an agreement with Johnny Gray; now that you'll have a contract as I understand it.

RP: Yeah, had one with Bobby for three years.

DP: A handshake?

RP: A handshake with Bobby for three years. And about this time a long year before last Bobby come and said "You know we ain't really doing that good so we might just need to go do something else." I said "Fine." My hand shake was with him as long as I feel good about and as long as you feel good about it, we're gonna make it work. But, if you have any questions about hey, I might could do better somewhere else, best thing for you to do is go do something better because you can't do a good job for me and you're not gonna do a good job for yourself. Only thing a contract is for is to bring the lawyers in but they're gonna make money off of you to say hey see ya and that's what you was gonna do anyways if you got a handshake. A contract is no better than the people that sign it. The deal is now that you got the lawyers, you got the all the stuff that people don't believe in people anymore no matter how truthful they are, so they've gotta have a piece of paper to show that they are truthful. Again it's no better then being truthful. But anyhow, I'm coming from an old school that's the way we used to work and that's the way we still work. I'm having to get out of that on a lot of things.

DP: In terms of your other employees or ...

RP: Well, just for the business standpoint when you come to working with a sponsor. They say “You’ve got a driver signed up?”, “No, we ain’t got a driver signed up?” They say, “What do you mean you ain’t got a drivers signed up? We wanna see the drivers name on this dotted line before we put some millions of dollars in this business.” So, you get into some of that stuff. We worked for Chrysler Corporation for about five or six years on a handshake and then one day they got some new lawyers right out of school and said “Man, ya’ll can’t do this.” I says “What do you mean we can’t do this? We’ve been doing it for all this time.” It was a big operation. They says you’ve got to have a piece of paper signed. First contract we had was one page, you know what I mean? It said this is what Petty Enterprises will do and this is what Chrysler Corporation will do and that was that. But then every year it got to be another page and now the damn things a foot high, but that’s lawyers for you. You a lawyer?

DP: No, no.

RP: I’m like Shakespeare said “Best thing to do is shoot every damn lawyer you see.” I think as you see things progressing in Washington and stuff more and more and more you say, he wasn’t far from wrong.

DP: Does anyone else have the same type of deal with their drivers where they just...

RP: I doubt it very seriously. Some of them probably do when they say “Hey come and drive my car this week cause I need a driver.” No contract there but when anytime you get in a service deal then both sides feel like that they need contracts. And then you see everyday where they’re breaking the contracts. Some guys done left or the owners told them to get the heck out of there or whatever it is. And then they’ve got to go through the court procedures and somebody’s gotta pay money to get the thing cancelled,



even if they agree they've got to get it cancelled and it costs money. Anyhow, it won't always be that way with me either, you know what I mean, but right now it is. And I just feel freer with it and I think if so far the drivers we've had, they've felt freer with it. If they're out talking to somebody then I don't think, "Hey, he's over there trying to break his contract, he's trying to get a ride with ...". If he wants to go that way, then I was just used as a stop point to go somewhere else, that's fine.

DP: Seems like you've been awfully successful.

RP: Well it's just, you know, it's live and let live deal. I always look at it that if I was in that situation, if I was over on that side of the table, how would I feel about what you're doing. I mean I'm over here and I've got my little deal, now if I was over there would I look at it the same way? If you'll always look at both sides of whatever the problem is then there is always, well 90% of the time, there's a middle ground there that the situation can be worked out. But some people just get so engrossed in what they do and what they think that they can't see the forest for the trees, you know what I mean. They just get too narrow minded, too narrow sighted. Anyhow, that's philosophy.

DP: Good philosophy. I want to ask you about a word that is an important part of your vocabulary and is an important part when I seen interviews and everything. Every driver and crew chief uses this word. And I want to ask; did you invent this word or the use of this word?

RP: I ain't never invented nothing.

DP: Do you have any idea what word I'm talking about?

RP: Deal.

DP: Deal. Did you start that?

RP: You know, I don't know whether it was just an unconscious thing. Whether I started it or whether I picked it up from somebody, but the deal is the press and other people picked up that that's what I always said. I'm always talking to a cat about a deal, that's Richard Petty, you know what I mean? And I didn't come up with the word cat. I didn't come up with the word deal. But, again I was at the forefront at some time where the press started picking it up and they just started using it and then the other people read it or see it and they pick it up. It's just a natural deal. And the racing fraternity uses it a lot because there is a lot of deals. I mean I'm talking about deal deals. The deal is that STP's signing up a Richard Petty for (unintelligible), these are all deals, what else would you call them? They're not contracts, you know what I mean, they're not something else, it's a deal. This is a situation, instead of calling it a deal. You could use situation a lot of times, this is a situation, instead of it they just say this is a deal.

DP: Well I have a theory on it that...

RP: So like I say I don't know, definitely I didn't come up with it, I just started using it and probably used it so much it got to be a common deal that the other people picked up off of it also.

DP: I have a theory that it's kind of a secret tribute to Richard Petty every time that they use that.

RP: Well it could be. I never thought about it.

DP: Let me ask you a question. Right now, one of the biggest things, of course, is Jeff Gordon's success and, of course, you've been there. Why do you think that so many fans boo Jeff Gordon?

RP: I don't know. I guess you'd have to ask them. The way I look at it is the time that we're in, society. You've got the new crowd against the old crowd, in the sense that five, six years ago nobody never heard tell of no Jeff Gordon. He didn't run Saturday night racing around here, nobody'd ever heard tell of him. The deal is that you've got the Earnhardt fans that don't want nobody beating Earnhardt. You've got the Rusty fans that nobody wants, you know what I mean. So you wind up with the deal where you've got basically two camps. You've got the ones that's already there and then you've got this new kid coming in. The new fans can go this way; the old fans are not gonna cross the fence to get over there. So you've got two lines of people and the way they think. These guys are trying, or these fans here are trying to protect all of their people. They might not even be an Earnhardt fan, they might be a Rusty fan, might be a Kyle Petty fan but they don't like the new guy coming on cause he's beating their people. So he's outta here. Now these guys come in with Jeff and they don't even know these guys over here and they could care less. So they say ok here's a good looking guy doing what he needs to do, he's winning races, we're gonna pull fans. And I don't know, I just think that it's that just as much as anything. It's not a deal as much against Jeff as it is Jeff's invading their territory, and I don't know that I'm just...

DP: Do you foresee, now I've never been to a race outside the South, so do you foresee that these he's booed more in the South than outside the South?

RP: No.

DP: Equally...

RP: He's pretty equal. I'll tell you, we used to run with Fred Lorenzen back in '62, '63 and stuff, he won a bunch of races and stuff. He was a Ford man. They get up and they'd

boo him. And man it just tore him all to pieces. I said “Look Freddy, don’t worry about it. At least they know you’re here. Look at some of these guys who get up and nobody even yells or nothing. They don’t even know them. At least they know you, and you know what I mean. And they respect you enough not to like you. So anyhow, you’re a winner either way.” But anyhow, it really bothered him. And I know it bothers Jeff, because he does everything he thinks that he needs to do in order to be what he thinks he wants to be, you know what I mean. And it just don’t work. And everybody can’t like you. You gotta just say ok, I’ll take care of the ones that do like me and I ain’t gonna worry about the rest of them.

DP: Did you ever have that experience of being booed?

RP: Not really. I was forty...

DP: I think I read about it, some beer bottles or something being thrown in the track...

RP: Ahh, they threw beer bottles at everybody. But, no I never, you check with (unintelligible) or any of them guys, we never really had... It was kind of a deal that when they introduced Ned then the Ned fans would holler for him or people would holler for him but nobody booed him. And it didn’t make no difference who they was. I think probably Darrell probably started that as much as anybody. They just didn’t like Darrell cause he was a loud mouth show off deal, you know what I mean. The people just didn’t like him period. It wasn’t that he was coming in and getting their deal. They just didn’t like him. I don’t remember when we was coming through and stuff that they really booed people, they just, some got louder ovations than others but they didn’t get the in between boo deals, you know what I mean. Now they start out and they booed Earnhardt, they booed Rusty, you know what I mean. You didn’t have those boo birds at that particular

time. The guys you didn't like you just didn't say nothing. Again society has changed a lot of that kind of stuff.

DP: I don't wanna take too much of your time, one more question. What for you has been the best part of this career?

RP: Overall picture. There's been very few people that the good Lord put on this earth in circumstances that they could do what they wanted to do, enjoy what they wanted to do and call most of their shots. And I've been one of the chosen few and I realize that. So that's an over all view of it. It's just again, my destiny to be here at this time to do the things that I've done and be able to accomplish some of the stuff I have. It was meant to be and I was the one they chose instead of you or you or Joe Blow, you know what I mean. It was just written and I'm a strong believer in that and in destiny.

DP: You sound like a Presbyterian.

RP: Say what?

DP: You sound like a Presbyterian.

RP: Oh well, I'm a Methodist, ok.

DP: The funny thing is Ned Jeff's response was almost identical to that, when I talk to him.

RP: Yeah, the gist of it was, we might have said it different but, he looks at it I think the same way. He's a good guy. He's a good people, good morals, you know what I mean. And can't say that about everybody that's in racing, but there was a few good people that got into racing and he's one of them.

DP: Well, thank you very much.

RP: Alright guys, hope you got what you need.

