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Now Courting Nascar Fans: Clean Coal

The fight over American energy consumption is coming to a **Nascar** track near you this summer.

The [American Coalition for Clean Coal Electricity](#), an advocacy group representing coal producers, electric utilities and railroads, announced its sponsorship Tuesday of Nascar driver **Dale Earnhardt Jr.** and his race team, **JR Motorsports**.

As one of the sport's most famous faces, Mr. Earnhardt will serve as a spokesman for the group, and JR Motorsports cars will feature the ACCCE logo, starting this week at a Nationwide series race in Richmond, Va. The sponsorship is part of a \$40 million advocacy push, according to a spokeswoman for the group.

NASCAR fans are a coveted demographic for politicians and advertisers alike. The Earnhardt sponsorship is the latest in a relatively new wave of campaigns and other interest groups teaming up with drivers and their race teams to get the message out.

Other recent sponsorships include: former Pennsylvania Sen. **Rick Santorum**, who sponsored a car at this year's Daytona 500 to draw attention to his long-shot bid to win the Republican presidential nomination, and AARP, which teamed up with driver **Jeff Gordon** to promote its Drive to End Hunger campaign. Ethanol producers also sponsor a car.

Mitt Romney, the likely Republican presidential nominee, made a well-publicized trip to the Daytona 500, but he earned more scorn than street credibility for telling an interviewer who asked him about his favorite driver, "I have some great friends who are Nascarteam owners."

The coal advocates hope their high-profile union with a prominent Nascar team will help promote the coalition in an ongoing fight with environmental groups and federal regulators over the regulation of carbon emissions in the U.S. Coal producers and electric utilities argue that coal-fired power plants help keep energy prices down.



Getty Images

Dale Earnhardt Jr. pits during the Nascar Sprint Cup Series STP 400 at Kansas Speedway on April 22, 2012 in Kansas City, Kan.

“Dale Earnhardt Jr. and his team are one of the elite groups in racing, and we’re proud to be partnership with them to continue to raise awareness of the importance of coal,” said Evan Tracey, the association’s senior vice president for communications.

Kelley Earnhardt-Miller, who helps run the JR Motorsports team, said her brother supports domestic energy production and also favors initiatives to reduce carbon emissions. She said the team agreed to the sponsorship after they were approached by the coalition and agreed it would be a “good fit for our brand.”

“This is something we believe in, and we want to help them tell their story and get their message out,” Mrs. Earnhardt-Miller said.

Cole Whitt, a JR Motorsports driver, will sport the ACCCE logo during a Nationwide series race this weekend at the Richmond International Raceway. The group will also sponsor a logo on Mr. Earnhardt’s car at the Nationwide Series race at Talladega (Ala.) Superspeedway on May 5.

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