



**THE
CRASH
PAGE**

How The Hunters Became The Hunted In The 8-Hour At Daytona:
RACING INTO THE DARKNESS



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ROADRACING WORLD & MOTORCYCLE TECHNOLOGY

December 2009

The New Marietta Motorsports

By David Swarts

Very few people get rich in the motorcycle racing business. So why then do hundreds of people work long hours in the sport for relatively little in the way of monetary or material compensation? The answer is because they love it. And it's that love of being around motorcycles, especially high-performance and road racing motorcycles, that led Craig

"Huey" Stewart away from a successful career in the aerospace industry and onto a mission to revive Marietta Motorsports.

Stewart's introduction to the world of motorcycle's came the traditional way. His father, who always owned and rode bikes, gave him a minibike for a gift when he was a kid. But Stewart says his biggest early influence came from sneaking out on his father's Honda CB900 Custom while he was at work.

"I figured if I got home an hour before he got home that the bike would stop making that TING, TING sound by the time he got home from work," recalled Stewart. "He never figured it out until I ran out of gas on the other side of town one night. He made it home before I did, and that ended that part of my motorcycling career. I was 15."

But more than just motorcycles, Stewart had a hunger for all things mechanical. He loved to take apart mechanical things—whether it was a clock or a lawnmower—and then try to put them back together in working order. That hunger played a role in Stewart joining the Air Force Reserve full-time shortly after completing high school.

"I served as a load master on C-130 (Hercules cargo) planes," said Stewart. "I flew in the back of the plane and did the air drops and screamed 'GO, GO, GO!' and pushed the paratroopers out the door."

It was while he was a new Airman that Stewart, who stands about 6-foot-5, was branded with the call sign/nickname "Baby Huey," and the Huey part of that nickname stuck so firmly that few people call him by his given first name anymore.

After switching from full-time to normal part-time reserve status in the Air Force Reserve, Stewart started studying mechanical engineering at Southern Polytechnic State University (SPSU), where he founded a Society of Automotive Engineers (SAE) chapter and helped with the school's Formula SAE race car program. But school was put on hold when Lockheed, the manufacturer of the C-130 Hercules, offered him a position as Lead Load Master, which involved him training Lockheed's C-130 customers—including the British Royal Air Force and the Italian Air Force—how to operate various functions of the plane.

"My life during that time period was 9:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m. at Lockheed during the week with maybe some trips over to England for training," said Stewart. "Every other weekend or at night during the week I would go on training flights with the Air Force. And if I wasn't doing any of that I was in the garage working on motorcycles."

Stewart just didn't work on his personal BMW K100, his first streetbike, or his Honda VFR800, he also worked on friends' bikes. Most of the jobs at the start were small and payment was usually in the form of beer. But Stewart kept improving his garage workspace and





(Opposite Page) Craig "Huey" Stewart started working on bikes for beer, and wound up resurrecting Marietta Motorsports in Marietta, Georgia. (Above) The new Marietta Motorsports has four work stations and an "open" shop that allows customers to interact with the mechanics as they work. (Below) Marietta Motorsports now has five full-time employees, three part-time employees and, like any quality motorcycle-oriented operation, stocks Roadracing World. Photos by David Swarts.

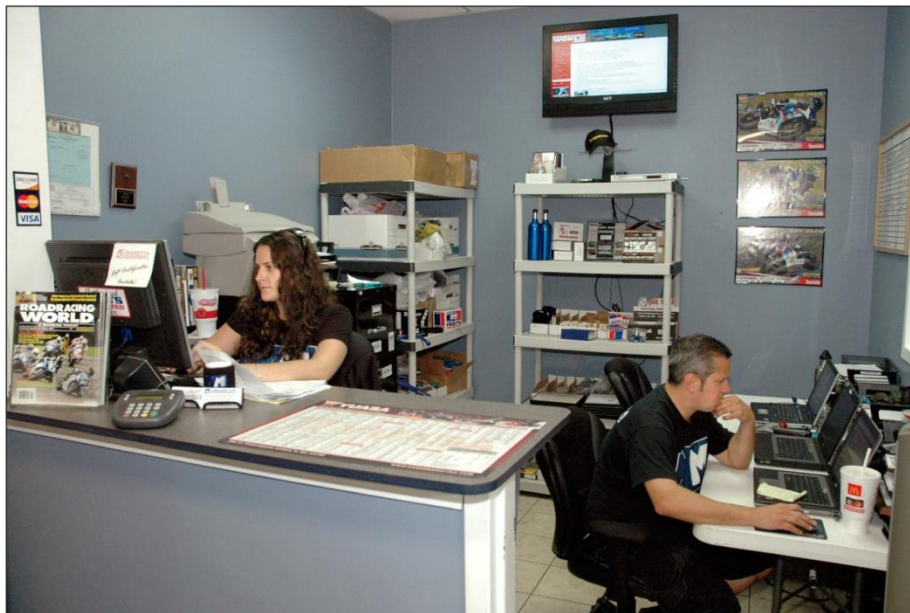
his skills, and friends—and friends of friends—started paying him cash to do bigger and bigger jobs on their bikes. His side business grew to a point where some evenings he made more money working on bikes than he did at his day job.

At one point, one of Huey's friends asked him to race-prepare his Kawasaki EX500 so he could go to road racing school and start competing with WERA. Stewart turned him down, but the friend was persistent and kept asking. Stewart finally agreed to race-prepare the bike and to also serve as a paid mechanic for the friend during his first track outing.

"I went with him and kind of got hooked," said Stewart, who says that he instantly fell in love with working on bikes and then watching his work in action out on the racetrack. Plus, he saw that there was a market with a lot of potential for more secondary income. "Going to the track I found there was a lot of work there and a lot of people there who didn't know how to do things and who were doing things really wrong. I just started working more and more at the track and building a reputation."

After getting involved with racing, Stewart gave his side business a name, BBC Racing. It soon grew to the point where he was able to start sponsoring a few racers, albeit just with free services to start.

Early in the history of BBC Racing, Stewart hooked up with veteran racer Chris "Opie" Caylor for the Suzuki SV650 Cup Finals in 2002. That effort ended with Caylor finishing fourth in the SV650 Final, but the next season Martin Musil raced Stewart's SV650 and they won several WERA races and a pair of WERA Sports-



man Championships. Stewart was also helping a 17-year-old up-and-comer, Matt Lynn, who went on to succeed as an AMA Pro.

Stewart's reputation continued to build and with it came new opportunities. He started helping teams competing in the WERA National Endurance Series, and that led to a job with privateer racer Scott Carpenter at the 2004 Daytona 200. That led to a gig working with C.R. Gittere for the remainder of the 2004 AMA season. Stewart and Caylor then reunited for the

2005 AMA Formula Xtreme Championship, which included Stewart's personal highlight of wrenching for former 500cc World Champion Kevin Schwantz, who filled in for Caylor when Caylor missed a race to attend the birth of his first child.

Stewart and Caylor worked together again in the 2006 AMA Championships on the Safety First Suzuki team, but Stewart left that team mid-season and went to work for Matsushita Suzuki as a mechanic for Blake Young. But lots of other things were happening away from the track for Stewart during this time period.

"Wrenching started taking more and more of my time, plus Lockheed sold off the department I worked in," said Stewart. "Lockheed hired me to work on other jobs, but I hated it. Instead of working on planes and traveling to meet with the customers I was put in a cubicle and working with the numbers. They handed me a 17,000-line spreadsheet for parts that they were going to stop making, and it was up to me to decide how many to purchase to meet the contractual goal that we had.

"I told my wife, 'I'm going to show you where I'm going to die. And it's going to be tomorrow or it's going to be in 20 years, but I'm going to die in this cubicle. I have to get out of here.' And that's when she kind of gave me permission to leave."

When the next round of layoffs came around, Stewart took a voluntary separation/early retire-

ment payout, cashed in his 401K, took out a second mortgage on his house and opened a motorcycle tuning shop with a partner called The Motorcycle Shop. It lasted for six months. The shop was relatively successful, but Stewart and his partner had different opinions on how the business should be run and decided to go their separate ways.

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Shops: Marietta Motorsports

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"I was loading my tools up at that shop," said Stewart, "and my phone rang and it was Paul Wright."

Wright had started Marietta Motorsports many years earlier as a motorcycle race shop, and it earned a name for itself by doing good work for several regional racers. Over the course of time, Wright expanded the company to include a mail order parts business that operated (and still does) under the name 1-888-FAST-LAP. As the mail order business grew, the service department was reduced down to a single mechanic doing basic jobs, like mounting new tires, according to Stewart, who was a long-time customer of the former Marietta Motorsports.

When Wright started to develop a new off-road motorcycle park, Highland Park, in Cedartown, Georgia, he decided to close the Marietta Motorsports location and move 1-888-FAST-LAP operations to Highland Park. Eight months later, Wright gave Stewart that timely phone call.

"This sounds made up, but it's not," said Stewart. "I look down and see that it's Paul Wright. I look up at my wife and say, 'He wants Marietta Motorsports back up.' I didn't know how he knew me and the other guy were splitting up, but people were calling him up all the time wondering where Marietta Motorsports went. So he came up with a deal, kind of a lease-to-own deal to sell me Marietta Motorsports, the name, the intellectual property, and I bought it from him."



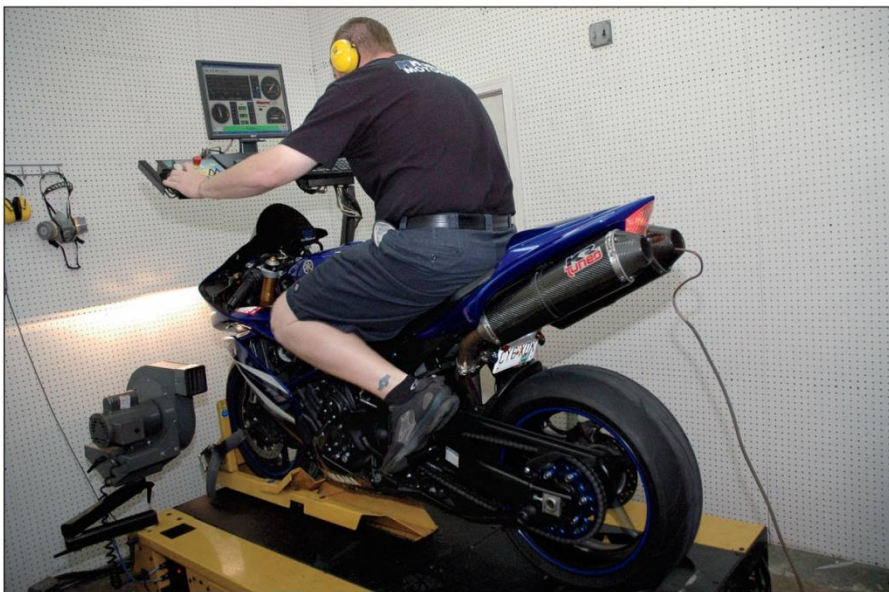
(Above) Parts, apparel, gloves, helmets, accessories and other motorcycling necessities are on display in a consumer-friendly retail area at Marietta Motorsports. (Below) The Dynojet Model 250i Dynamometer is set up with two computer monitors, so customers can read in real-time exactly how much horsepower their bike is making.

Knowing he was leaving The Motorcycle Shop, Stewart had already been looking for space for his next shop, and he found a great location on a busy road not far off I-75, less than three miles from the original Marietta Motorsports location. After three months of working to turn a filthy former spray-in truck bedliner business into a proper motorcycle shop, Marietta Motorsports opened/re-opened for business.

And because Stewart hired several former Marietta Motorsport employees, many former customers returned thinking the business had simply moved. But the new Marietta Motorsports is definitely different than the previous generation. Instead of an order counter with all of the merchandise behind it, sort of like a contractor supply store, the new shop has a visually-appealing retail area where parts, accessories, helmets and apparel are displayed. And instead of a single shop bay, Marietta Motorsports now has four work stations manned by three full-time mechanics (including Pro racers Caylor, who is the Service Manager, and Skip Salenius) and decorated with racebikes, retired race leathers, trophies and other memorabilia. And then there's Stewart's baby, his Dynojet Model 250i dynamometer, which he has set up with two monitors, one for customers who are welcome to explore the "open" shop and interact with the mechanics while they do their work.

All of this is a huge step up from working in his garage or even his former shop. And with this increase in space (now 2800 square feet) and personnel (five full-time employees and three part-timers), Stewart tackles any job from the routine mounting of new tires, chains and sprockets to custom bike builds to racebike prepping and tuning. And the racebikes Marietta Motorsports work on range from outlaw street drag racers to road racers to land speed record chasers.

Marietta Motorsports does not have the





(Above) The awards, signed memorabilia and trophies displayed throughout the shop remind customers that the people who run this place are racers. (Right) Opie Caylor (47) is a full-time mechanic for Marietta Motorsports, and represents the shop on the track. Action photo by Brian J. Nelson.

for an ambulance to get to you. If your friend is the guy on the ground bleeding from a broken femur somebody has to be able to stop the bleeding until the ambulance gets there.”

But most of Stewart’s classes are about bikes, from Motorcycles 101 in which he explains the basics to more technical lessons, like how fuel-injection systems operate. An educated customer is a better customer, according to Stewart, especially when it comes to troubleshooting problems.

As demonstrated by his promotional efforts, Stewart isn’t about to be satisfied with good enough when it comes to Marietta Motorsports. His short-term goals are modest. He wants to move to a location (which he has already picked out) with even more room, and build a new dyno room with better ventilation. And his medium-term goals are to expand, to set up other locations around the bustling Atlanta metro area and maybe one day expand to where Marietta Motorsports is once again a widely-known brand name.

But all of those goals are not aimed at achieving personal wealth or material things. Instead, in the same type of full-circle evolution many



space or the manpower, however, to do machine shop or major fabrication work. That’s outsourced to some of the best specialty shops in the industry—KWS Motorsports for cylinder head work, for instance—but Stewart and his crew put all of the pieces together and tune them into finished products for their customers. In fact, during our visit, Marietta Motorsports was waiting for the rest of the parts to come in before finishing a land speed record bike’s turbo-charged, bored-and-stroked engine that should make around 500 horsepower when it is done.

But as fun as projects like that sound, they don’t keep a shop in business. Selling tires, chains, sprockets and doing basic service and maintenance work is what pays the bills, according to Stewart. And doing those basic service jobs right the first time and treating the customer right are keys to success.

“A chain and sprocket improperly put on can take off a leg,” said Stewart. “That’s something I tell the guys. They might wish they could be doing a turbo or engine swap, but I tell them, ‘You’re putting a chain and sprocket on. I want you to pay attention to that. That right there is the lifeblood of this shop. Don’t ever forget that.’ The guy who comes in to have his masterlink riveted on because he put his own chain on at home, I try to treat that guy the same as the guy who just handed me a \$13,000 check to build him a turbo bike.”

And having well-known racers like Caylor

or Salenius work on a race fan’s motorcycle is definitely a bonus not every shop can offer.

Earning word-of-mouth recommendations through quality work and service is only part of Stewart’s multifaceted yet casual marketing plan, however. Organizing track days and street rides in the mountains and participating in charitable activities (like being an official Toys For Tots collection center) are productive, but Stewart is a big believer in the effect of his weekly bike nights.

“Every shop should have a bike night to meet their customers,” said Stewart, “but my bike night is different in that almost everyone who shows up is usually a customer of mine already. We all have something to eat, and then we will have an industry person come and present a new product, or we’ve had people call in, like Josh Hayes. And we usually have a class. Like, we did a first-aid class, buddy-care first aid. Some of the places where we ride in north Georgia it takes 40 minutes

of us working in the industry go through. Stewart wants to grow his business to the point that he can once again return to where he fell in love—the racetrack.

“Marietta Motorsports grew up at the track,” said Stewart. “I’m sponsoring racers that I can, specifically racers who work here, to keep our name out at the track. I know we work on a lot of different types of bikes, but the shop is still based on a road racing heritage. Everything I do is trying to figure out a way to get back to the track and really go racing again.” **RW**