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# NASCAR No. 88 to Accelerate Careers of 88 Future Sailors

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WASHINGTON, May 6, 2008 – The U.S. Navy is using NASCAR driver Dale Earnhardt Jr.'s star appeal to attract future sailors.

In August, the Navy and Dale Earnhardt Jr. will form the “Dale Jr.” Division, an 88-person boot camp division at Recruit Training Command Great Lakes, Ill. Earnhardt drives the 88 car for Hendrick Motorsports on the NASCAR circuit.

Navy Capt. Jack Hanzlik, spokesman for the chief of naval personnel, told online journalists and “bloggers” in a teleconference yesterday that during a national advertising and marketing campaign, Navy officials will assess the impact that NASCAR and Earnhardt have on young men and women ages 18 to 25, the service’s recurring demographic.”

But while it’s launching the National Dale Jr. Recruiting Program, Hanzlik said, the Navy’s recruiting effort already is on track, meeting its goals year after year.

“We have continued to meet, month after month, our recruiting goals. We are now in month 79 -- over six years straight -- of meeting our recruiting goals, and we have done that without dropping our recruiting standards,” he said.

The call for recruits to join the No. 88 class is expected to kick off during Memorial Day weekend. The 88 recruits will begin boot camp in August and will wear special ball caps during their training to signify they are the Dale Earnhardt Jr. Division. Earnhardt is expected to meet the recruits before and during their eight-week training. He also will attend the recruits’ graduation ceremony, Hanzlik said.

He added that the Navy NASCAR program is not just about recruiting new sailors, but also is a great way to reward sailors who have performed well at a particular event. “We bring young men and women who are sailors out in the fleet, doing great work, and it’s kind of a reward where we choose one of our commands to be honored at each race,” Hanzlik explained. “And a lot of times, it may tie to something unique that happened in the real world also.”

He added that sailors from the USS Lake Erie, one of the recent commands selected to participate in the Fleet Honoree Program by enjoying race day at Talladega Superspeedway in Alabama in late April.

“At Talladega, we brought the folks off of USS Lake Erie, who about a month and a half ago was the cruiser that shot down the spy satellite,” Hanzlik said.

The sailors got an up-close and personal tour on race day.

“We bring them right down to the pits, and they spend the day in the garage at the pit with the team throughout the day, and they get a chance to meet those folks that are really running the programs for the drivers,” he said. “And they get a chance to sort of share their respective experiences and see men and women like themselves that are doing different jobs.”

He said that many sailors who get the chance to meet the pit crew and No. 88 racing team walk away from the experience realizing that they share many similarities.

“You step into high op-tempo, where the car comes into the pit, and you have a team that is trying to change tires, clean a windshield, fuel the car, get the driver a quick drink of water and ask whatever things need to be tweaked in a matter of 15 seconds,” Hanzlik said. “They mastered the communication aspect of doing the work they have to do.”

He compared the NASCAR experience to his days as a naval aviator.

“[During] my time on the flight deck of a carrier, I watched men and women who were very competent in what they did, they had to master their skills to move those aircraft around the flight deck, launch them from the flight deck,” he said. “The teamwork all of that goes into it is the same; I found great similarities in that -- technology, skilled development, competence in the communications aspect of it.”

(Navy Lt. Jennifer Cragg is assigned to the New Media branch of American Forces Information Services.)