

What would Dale Earnhardt have done

By Gerald Hodges/the Racing Reporter

My first meeting with Dale Earnhardt came in 1996 at the NASCAR Exhibition race in Suzuka, Japan.

Early on Friday morning while I was sitting in the media center, Earnhardt approached and looked at my media badge. After studying it for a while, he pointed his long index finger at me and said, "What in the hell is a fellow from Mobile, Alabama doing way over here."

This question kind of floored me for a minute, but then I replied, "I've come all this way just to watch you race, so you better win."

With that, he broke into one of his big wide grins, and from then on I felt like I had been accepted by him.

But even before that incident, I respected the man, not just because of his racing abilities, but because he seemed to know exactly the right thing to do, at exactly the right time.

He made mistakes. There were times he would get wrecked, but when he did, he usually told it like it was "no excuses" the man hardly ever hit below the belt.

That's what I liked about him, his ability to make quick decisions. I guess that has always been one of my weaknesses, not always knowing when the right thing should be done or said.

During the week of the NASCAR Winston Cup Awards (Dec. 1-5), I found myself in a situation where I needed a date.

I had just left two media press conferences on the 18th floor of the Waldorf Astoria Hotel that featured Richard Childress and Bill Elliott. As I was walking along Fifth Avenue I remembered that the weatherman had said there was going to be a lot of snow and freezing temperatures the next day.

Since I had only brought dress clothes with me I thought it would be a good idea to buy a pair of dungarees or jeans.

As I walked along Fifth Avenue, peering into the shops and watching all the people hurry by, I spotted a jeans shop. It advertised the latest fashion in men's jeans.

I went into this Times Square

store.

A child of maybe sixteen with blue hair came up to me and introduced herself as the salesperson.

"I'm looking for a pair of jeans," I said.

"Like I couldn't figure that out, okay," she responded. "I mean, like this is a jeans store, and I didn't think you would come in here to buy, like a bottle of vodka or something like that."

That really shocked me. I considered calling the manager, but when I looked around I saw there were several other people with different colors of hair. I figured the best thing I could do was find me a pair of jeans and get out.

"I would like a pair of jeans in size 36, please," I said still smiling. "Do you have any of those relaxed fit ones, because sometimes I need a tad, more room?"

"You mean the kind old men wear when they have two bellies?" she asked.

"I guess so," I shot back.

"Sure, we have them. Follow me."

I followed her down several aisles to the back of the store, where she pulled out a big box from under one of the tables.

"Here, this is a size 38."

"But I wear a 36," I said.

"Please, don't waste my time. There's the dressing room over there and don't get your act caught when you try to zip those things up."

By this time I was wondering what I was doing in here, and if I was in the right place.

The thought came to my mind, what would Earnhardt do?

No matter how many laps down I was, I had to have a pair of warmer pants.

After trying on the jeans, which were too tight, I put my regular pants back on, thanked the blue haired girl, and left the store.

A few doors further down, I went into Saks of Fifth Avenue.

I wound up wearing pleated wool trousers with what the salesman, a distinguished gentleman with regular hair, said had, "a little extra give."

The next day it did snow. I mean the white stuff really came down. By

Saturday afternoon, 21-inches had fallen in Central Park.

My flight out of LaGuardia to Atlanta had been cancelled, and the two flights after it also had been scrubbed.

But it wasn't all bad. I was able to get comforted on another flight out of JFK Airport, and as I sat in the terminal waiting for the flight that was seven hours late, I appreciated my wool pants, with a "little extra give."

But I still wonder, what would Earnhardt have done? Would he have taken the air off her spoiler and put her into the wall, or would he have let her ride?

Layers within the earth's atmosphere

Sometimes looking at the sky, especially when storm clouds tower high into the atmosphere, we tend to think that the sky goes forever. But this is not the case. The "sky" that contains our clouds, weather, and even color, is a very small layer indeed - especially when the vastness of space is considered. This envelope of gas surrounding the Earth changes from the ground up. Four distinct layers have been identified using thermal characteristics (temperature changes), chemical composition, movement, and density.

The atmosphere is a cloud of gas and suspended solids extending from the Earth's surface out many thousands of miles, becoming increasingly thinner with distance but always held by the Earth's gravitational pull.

The atmosphere is made up of layers surrounding the earth that holds the air we breathe, protects us from outer space, and holds moisture (clouds), gases, and tiny particles. In short, the atmosphere is the protective bubble we live in.

This protective bubble consists of gases with the top four elements making up 99.998% of all gases. By far, the most common of the atmospheric gases, nitrogen, dilutes oxygen and prevents rapid burning at the earth's surface. Living things need it to make proteins. Oxygen is used by all living things that breathe and is essential for respiration. It is also necessary for combustion or burning. Argon, the third most common gas, is used in light bulbs, among other things. The last gas, carbon dioxide, is used by plants in the photosynthesis process. The by-product of photosynthesis is oxygen. Carbon dioxide also acts as a blanket and prevents the escape of heat into outer space.

The Troposphere:

The Troposphere begins at the Earth's surface and extends up to about 11 miles high. This is where we live, and all air travel takes place. As you climb higher in this layer, the temperature drops from about 62°F to -60°F. Almost all weather occurs in this region, as this is the layer that most of the water vapor is found: The troposphere is normally warmest at ground level and cools higher up where it reaches its upper boundary, called the tropopause.

The Stratosphere:

The Stratosphere extends from the tropopause up to its boundary (the Stratopause), about 31 miles above the Earth's surface. This layer holds 19 percent of the atmosphere's gases and, it contains little water vapor.

Compared to the troposphere, it's calm in this layer with movements of the gases slow.

Within the stratosphere is the ozone layer, a band of ozone gas that absorbs harmful ultraviolet rays of the sun. The higher you get in the atmosphere, the warmer the air gets. The temperature rises from -76°F at the bottom to a maximum of about 5°F at the stratopause due to the absorption of ultraviolet radiation.

The Mesosphere:

The Mesosphere is the next layer above the stratopause and extends to 50 miles above the ground. The gases in the mesosphere are too thin to absorb much of the sun's heat, although the air is still thick enough to slow down meteorites hurtling into the atmosphere, where they burn up, leaving fiery trails in the night sky.

The Thermosphere:

The Thermosphere is the layer above the mesopause. The gases of the thermosphere are even thinner than those in the mesosphere, but they still absorb ultraviolet light from the sun. Because of this, the temperatures rise to 3,600°F at the top of this layer. This is at a height of about 430 miles above the earth's surface. This layer is known as the upper atmosphere.

Within the thermosphere there is a separate layer, the ionosphere. It is made of electrically charged gas particles (ionized). The particles get their electric charge by ultraviolet rays of the sun. The ionosphere has the important quality of bouncing radio signals transmitted from the earth. That's why planes all over the world can be reached via radio.

This is also where the solar storms from the sun trigger the vivid display of the Aurora Borealis, or the Northern Lights. This layer extends from 62 to 190 miles above the earth's surface.

The Exosphere:

The Exosphere is the outermost layer of the atmosphere and extends from 430 miles to 500 miles above the ground. In this layer, gases get thinner and thinner and drift off into space.

For further information on the atmosphere of the solar effect on our weather, use the Internet at <http://www.noaa.gov/solar.html>

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