

COMMENT

STAFF COLUMN CHARLES BRADLEY – NEWS EDITOR



THE TIMES *They Are A-Changin'* was written by Bob Dylan in the '60s, but four decades later you could sing the same lyrics about US stock car racing. For there I was, watching an ARCA test session at Daytona International Speedway, and a driver from

Pakistan was lapping the hallowed cauldron of speed.

Now, Nur Ali might not have set the world on fire in his racing career, but here he was lapping one the greatest symbols of Americana in a Dodge Charger. Unsurprisingly, he was towards the bottom of the lap times, but that didn't really matter. It was the fact he was there at all which counts.

NASCAR's cultural boundaries, whether erected by the sanctioning body itself or merely the perception of the outside world, are tumbling. If you include ARCA, there'll be three drivers in the stock car ranks that were racing in Formula 1 until recently: Juan Pablo Montoya, Jacques Villeneuve and Scott Speed. Dario Franchitti will become

the first European to mount a full-time campaign in the Sprint (formerly Nextel) Cup. Two-time Australian V8 Supercar champion Marcos Ambrose will graduate part-time to its top rank too. It seems NASCAR racers can hail from Birmingham in the West Midlands as much as Birmingham, Alabama.

Autosport can lay a small claim to aiding this cultural exchange. Thanks to our friends at Team Red Bull, we put British racer Ben Collins in a Sprint Cup Toyota Camry for the first-ever, top-line stock car

track test in this magazine's history. You can read about it in our build-up to the Daytona 500 in February, but suffice to say it went well enough to add fuel to Ben's fire to return to the US racing scene.

Getting an 'in' is still a problem, however. One rebuttal from a top team's driver development programme suggested it would have helped if he was "black and female" such is its appetite for 'diversity'. Yet perhaps this globalisation of drivers in NASCAR is only the beginning, and it's already broadening its horizons in

Mexico and Canada. Imagine the potential if it looked further afield to hold races.

But before I leave you thinking the 'Old School' ways of racing in the southern states has gone forever, here's a comforting anecdote: When we arrived at the Lakeland oval in Florida there was no one on the gate, so we decided to let ourselves in. When the track manager caught up with me a few minutes later, his response to my initiative was, "If you do that again, son, I'll shoot you."

In case you were wondering, yes, he lives in a trailer.

"PERHAPS THIS GLOBALISATION IN NASCAR IS ONLY THE BEGINNING"