

The future looks bright: Jordan Wallace is making history

06/11/2024 The 37-year-old is the first African American driver in the Porsche Carrera Cup North America. Between races, he replenishes his energy levels in Austin. Porsche met him for a stroll around the Texas city.

Jordan Wallace was many things before he made history as the first African American driver in the Porsche Carrera Cup North America. He's been a cook, a mechanic, and a driving coach. He's taught teen driver safety programs, helped people recovering from traumatic car accidents rediscover confidence behind the wheel, and even worked with companies developing autonomous-vehicle technology.

But his path into motorsport was never clear. His dad is a police officer, his mom a teacher – so motorsport was just a distant dream for the now 37-year-old. He was interested in cars from a young age, but says race car drivers seemed to him like aliens. He recalls thinking: “Like, no way. I don't know how to get there." But when Wallace, who grew up in Upper Marlboro, Maryland, was looking for something competitive to do after graduating from high school, he got into drifting.

“Drifting,” he says, “took me to a real racetrack. I saw sports cars on the track, and I was like ‘I wanna do that.’” But those around him initially advised him against it. “My buddies were like, ‘Bro, you’re broke and you crash a lot in your drift car already.’” One of those friends suggested he try karting instead. “But nobody really believed I could make a success of it at the time,” laughs Wallace. “My friends thought I’d be bad at it, spend all my money, and then we could stop talking about it.”

Rookie of the year

But not so. Wallace finished third in points in his first rental karting season and won rookie of the year. He won the championship the next year. Wallace says the racing series was a great opportunity to learn. “When you do rental karts, you don’t get the same kart every time,” he says. “Every kart, there’s something different wrong with it or good about it, so I learned to be very adaptable early on. That’s one of my strong suits now.”

Karting did not lead to racing – but it did lead to instructing. In 2021, he was working at a rallying school outside Austin, Texas. Staffing was affected by Covid. “At one point, I was the mechanic, the track maintenance guy, the lead instructor, and the guy making lunch,” he reminisces. Then something happened that would change his life forever. After one class, a couple of students he knew asked if their son could photograph Wallace in an upcoming grassroots race. He agreed. What he didn’t know at the time was that those acquaintances had significant means.

A week later, Wallace was having lunch with them and they asked: “Jordan, what’s the dream – and how can we help you?” Wallace immediately went for the brake. “We don’t have to have that discussion. You guys are my friends.” He didn’t want to jeopardize that relationship. But the friends persisted, and encouraged him to dream as big as he wanted as they recognized his talent. Also, it hadn’t gone unnoticed by them that he had run a business that shouldn’t be running, especially at the level at which it was running. Three days later, they were ordering a Cayman GT4 Clubsport for him. Wallace remembers: “They said, ‘You’ve got three years. Don’t worry about what it costs. Just do it.’”

After some initial successes in the Porsche Sprint Challenge North America – two wins and four podium positions – Wallace headed to Europe to some of the most competitive series on the planet. “Because I started late, I needed to sharpen quick – even if that meant getting my butt whupped over and over again.” His sponsors, the American stresses, never asked for anything: “They just wanted for me to pursue the best way and do what I thought was necessary to get to the pro level.”

His ticket to Kellymoss

So he gained experience, driving in racing series like the DTM Trophy and the GT4 European Series. And what his sponsors enabled him to do over those three years eventually proved to be his ticket to the most successful North American Porsche team. The team is Kellymoss, which has 37 national championships in the IMSA Porsche GT3 Cup Challenge, the Porsche Carrera Cup North America, and

the Porsche Sprint Challenge.

“Being the first anything in a sport is kind of crazy,” says Wallace, the son of an African American father and a white mother. “But also, when I look back at my career and think about how long it's taken to get to this place, part of the reason is that I didn't see anyone who looked like me, didn't know who to talk to.”

He's had a lot of African Americans thank him and say: “This is something I can finally point to my kids and say, look, we're not just basketball players and football players. We're not just this or that. We're engineers; we're astronauts; we're race car drivers; we're all of these things.” Wallace doesn't just see himself as an African American trailblazer; he also hopes his journey can pave the way for people of humble economic backgrounds to get into racing. The moment seems ripe. Netflix has minted millions of new F1 fans with the series *Formula 1: Drive to Survive* . The streaming audience for the 24 Hours of Daytona more than doubled from 2023 to 2024. As the motorsports audience grows, more companies – and individuals – see the opportunity in sponsorship.

Recognize and nurture untapped potential

One of Wallace's sponsors is the retired NFL player Jordan Reed as well as the service company Davis Infrastructure. Reed is a cofounder of Vision Motorsports, a racing team that also offers training programs for talented drivers. The company aims to use the power of motorsport as a catalyst for positive change – both on and off the track. Wallace's journey is a prime example of how each individual can overcome adversity and achieve great things. Vision Motorsports' goal is to recognize and nurture the untapped potential of emerging talent. Just like Jordan Wallace.

Wallace has been a part of this vision ever since he was asked about his greatest dream over lunch three years ago – and made it onto the Kellymoss racing team thanks to his sponsors' support. From there, he became the first African American race car driver in the Porsche Carrera Cup North America.

His debut season in the Pro-Am class was going brilliantly. For Wallace, the season was the start of the greatest adventure of his life to date.

He believes that, with their passion, people like his sponsors contribute something else to motorsport that's important – fun. He pauses for a moment before emphasizing: “The reality is I could be delivering pizza; I could be sweeping floors, but I'm here. I was lucky enough to be in the right place at the right time. And I want to stand as an example of how everyone can make their dreams come true – no matter where they come from or what their skin color.”

Info

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