

# DRINK



# WEN

## BY AMBITION



BY JOSH DEAN  
PHOTOGRAPHS  
BY ANDREW  
MACPHERSON

Who better to represent our annual salute to the automobile than Jeff Gordon, arguably America's greatest living race-car driver? Like any other lead-footed, red-blooded American male, Gordon loves to go fast. (The big difference, of course, is that he gets to do it for a living.) Even when he's away from the track, Gordon's vehicle of choice is the Z06 Corvette, a 505-horsepower monster that, unlike his NASCAR ride (pictured here), you can actually buy for yourself. Which models made our list for the best new cars of 2008? You'll find a wide array on the following pages—from a limited-edition \$265,000 Aston Martin DBS that first appeared in *Casino Royale* to the comparatively bargain-basement Subaru Impreza WRX STI, probably the most fun you can have for \$35,000. The only frustration about buying one of these machines is that there's almost nowhere to drive them as fast as they want to go. Which is why we searched the country for places where there's no such thing as a speed limit. Buckle up and turn the page.

**WINNER'S CIRCLE** Jeff Gordon, photographed in New York City, October 2007

CLOTHING BY Z ZEGNA

WHERE TO BUY? SEE PAGE 122

You'd have to say that 2007 was a pretty good year for Jeff Gordon, by any measure probably the best year of an already remarkable life. He rebounded from a subpar 2006 to dominate the NASCAR regular season, only to be edged out in the final days of the series' 10-race playoff by teammate Jimmie Johnson (whose car Gordon just so happens to co-own). But the real highlight came in June, when he and his beautiful Belgian wife, model Ingrid Vandebosch, had their first child, Ella Sofia. "I have a whole new appreciation on life," he said last October, during a rare day off from the punishing 36-race NASCAR schedule. "The highlight for me was to be able to win a spectacular race at Talladega this [past] year—a last lap pass for the win—and to pull into victory lane and there were my wife and little girl. That will never be topped for me."

Gordon could easily kill the ignition at any time and drift into retirement as one of the greatest

racers in the history of his sport. The 36-year-old California-born, Indiana-reared race-car driver has more than 80 victories (and counting—good for sixth all-time), \$85 million in race earnings (first all-time), and four series championships (third all-time) in 15 seasons of competition. Since laying down his first NASCAR Cup series rubber in 1992, at the age of 21, Gordon has finished in the top 10 in more than 60 percent of his starts, in the process achieving fame not only in the stock-car-loving red states, but even in those notoriously snobby centers of "main-stream" celebrity: New York and Los Angeles. He has sat in for Regis on *Live With Regis and Kelly* 10 times, and is the only NASCAR driver ever to host *Saturday Night Live*—a performance that Gordon says was "more of an adrenaline rush than driving a race car. I thought my heart was gonna beat out of my chest."

Things only become more interesting at this month's Daytona 500, when Gordon's race team, Hendrick Motorsports, welcomes Dale Earnhardt Jr. to the family, creating a superteam featuring the three biggest and most famous drivers in America. Imagine Magic, MJ, and Larry Bird all playing for the Lakers, and you'll have some idea of the magnitude of this conglomeration of talent.

Darrell Waltrip, a three-time NASCAR champion and now a Fox race commentator, marvels at the team's potential, but says that he expects the arrival of Earnhardt (probably the only driver more popular than Gordon) to have little or no impact on Gordon, who, he says, "has the ability to break a lot of records and set records that might never be topped. It's up to him. If he can stay interested, he's got another 10 good years ahead of him."

We chatted with Gordon about fatherhood, faith, and his own feelings about life after racing...whenever that may be.

### *How has fatherhood changed things for you?*

There are sleepless nights and frustrating moments. Ella might be crying and wanting something and can't communicate and you don't know what it is. But every time I look at her, it's the most amazing feeling in the world. It makes me more passionate about what I do and being the best dad I can be, to see her grow up with the best opportunities.

### *But does it change the way you drive?*

I don't think it has changed me. Once I get to the track, I focus on racing. It's what I do. It's a job. But when you're not at the track, you want to take your mind off that. That's the thing I've found so much more enjoyable. I can't wait to get home and be with my family. I guess you could say what drives me has changed. As a young kid, it was just the thrill of driving a race car. Then I got to NASCAR, and you look at it as a business as well as what you love to do. But I had no idea of the real true purpose of everything I do until I became a father.

### *Does your wife ever get on your case about driving?*

I'm not a reckless race-car driver on the street. I think she feels safe. Of course, when the baby is onboard, I'm watching everything. I'm easy on the accelerator and easy on the brakes, and if I lose sight of that, my wife is going to remind me in a hurry.

### *Do you have a favorite car chase from the movies?*

I'm a bad critic. I know what it's like to crash a car. I know what it's like to see cars flip and slam into things. I know they don't explode on impact. They don't just flip for no reason. It's actually taken a lot of the fun out of action movies for me, because I know how set up a lot of that stuff is.

### *What about your faith? You speak about it quite openly on your Web site.*

I don't really do a lot of public acknowledgement of that. I think everybody recognizes that there's

## THE BEST NEW CARS OF 2008

A look at the strongest new car models since, well, ever



### BEGINNER LUXURY CAR

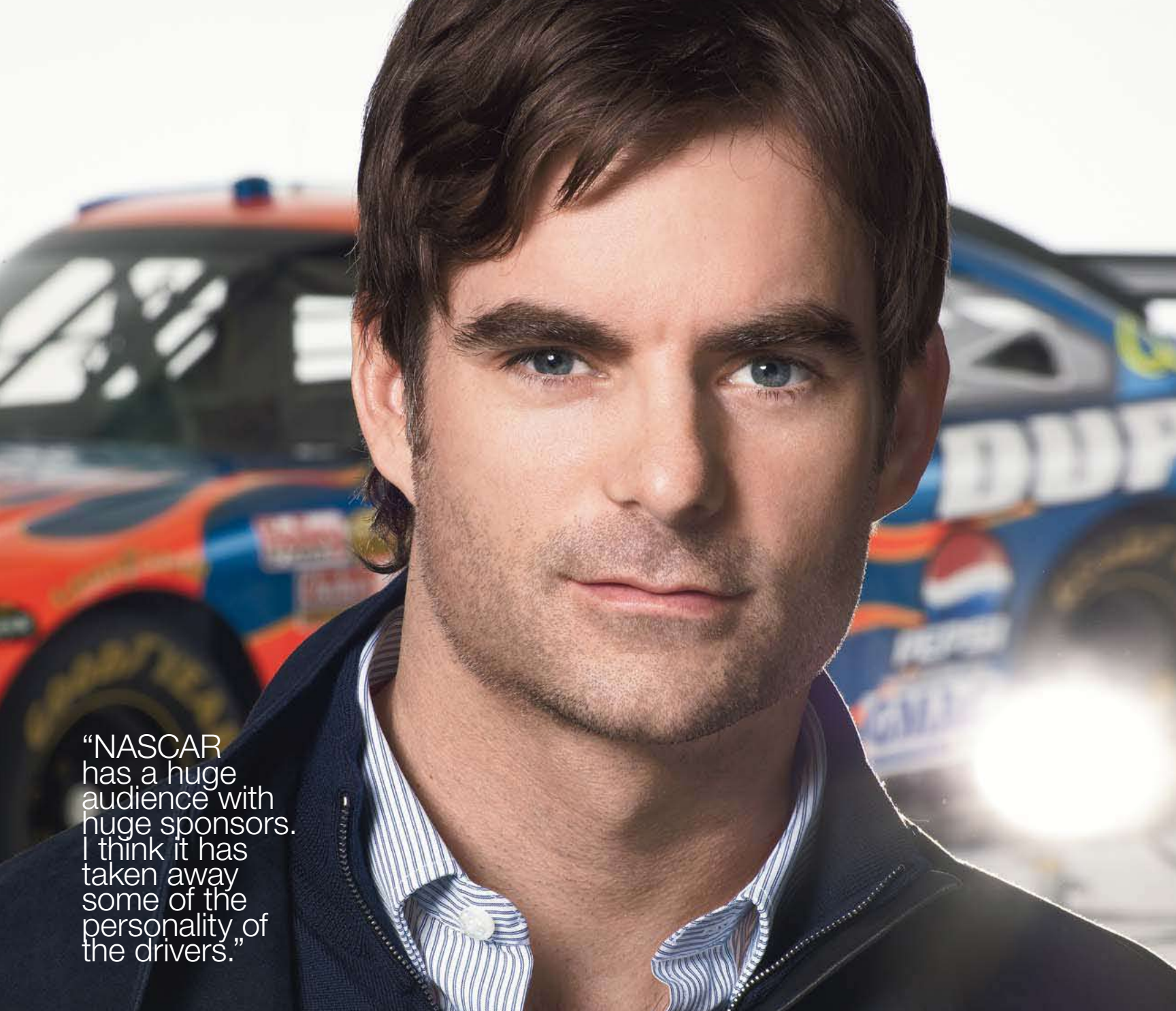
**Mercedes-Benz C-class** The old C-class used to look a little cheap, like a run-of-the-mill sedan dressed up for prom. Not so with the fully redesigned entry-level Benz. The new C-class comes in three versions, the best of which is the C350 Sport, with a 268-horsepower V-6 and a seven-speed transmission. From \$37,275



### RACE CAR

**Porsche 911 GT2** The most powerful 911 of all time. Need we say more? If you insist: How about 530 horses and a top speed of 205 miles per hour? With those kinds of numbers, does cost even matter? A minor warning: The GT2 is one angry machine. It's the one 911 that could cause fits in inexperienced drivers. \$191,700





“NASCAR has a huge audience with huge sponsors. I think it has taken away some of the personality of the drivers.”



REBORN STEALTH SPORTS CAR

**BMW M3** It has been an agonizingly long time since the last wholly new M3, but the wait was well worth it. The all-new M3 is bigger, faster, and—most surprising of all—less angry. It's more refined than ever, feeling every bit as accessible as a regular old 3-series. It may have a carbon-fiber roof, but it's also perfectly suitable for commuting to work. \$60,000 (est.)



NEW STEALTH SPORTS CAR

**Lexus IS F** This is the first Lexus to wear the F badge, the Japanese brand's new in-house tuning arm that takes ordinary Lexuses and makes them sportier by amping up the power, tightening the suspension, and fattening the tires. Think of it as more or less the Japanese M3, powered by a 5.0-liter V-8 that churns out 416 horses. \$63,000 (est.)



BARGAIN SPORTS CAR

**Subaru Impreza WRX STI** Under this nondescript Japanese body lie the inner workings of a race car. This is the turbo-charged version of the already quick WRX, with a bigger 2.5-liter engine, variable valve timing, and an SI-drive with three preset modes that tweak the throttle response. It's nearly as fast on snow or dirt as it is on the street. \$34,995



"I've achieved all and more than I ever expected in racing. Careerwise, a lot of things will be answers for 2010 and beyond."

a higher power, a strength out there that drives all of us. I encourage everyone out there to challenge themselves with that. I believe in karma. I believe if you look at the Bible, it's a message of really just knowing the difference between right and wrong, of treating people the way you want to be treated, of living life the best way you can.

**How do you rate yourself as a driver? Your success on road courses—which, unlike the typical oval tracks, actually require both left and right turns—would seem to suggest you're one of the best. Do you think so?**

The top guys, like Tony Stewart, Jimmie Johnson, and Dale Earnhardt Jr., are good at so many different places. I've been doing it for so long. If you raced as much as I did and you weren't good at it, then something's wrong. I pride myself that I'm passionate about it and I'm confident in my abilities. I just have to fine-tune.

**Dale Earnhardt Jr. is joining Hendrick Motorsports for next year. How do you feel about having him on the team with you and Jimmie?**

I'm looking forward to having him as a teammate. He could have gone anywhere. He's a talented driver, and I don't know that he has been able to showcase his talents as much as he possibly can where he is. We'll offer him top-notch equipment and a top-notch team. You can't deny the marketability and what he brings from a financial standpoint.

**He'll certainly steal some of the attention from you guys though. Will it have any effect on your egos?** Not for me. I've been in the sport for 15 years. I've built my fan base winning four championships. I admire the way he handles himself with his popularity. What I admire more is that he's leaving DEI [Dale Earnhardt Incorporated] for Hendrick to show he's much more than just the name.

**Do you miss the rivalry you had with his father?** Dale Earnhardt was a fierce competitor, and we

had our ups and downs on the track. I was fortunate to be able to learn from him on and off the racetrack. He brought a lot to the sport. His driving and personality were great for the sport, and I miss racing him. I wish Dale Senior were still out there.

**He was the intimidator. Did he ever scare you out there?**

Scare me? He didn't mind roughing guys up from time to time, and I got the blunt end of it, but it didn't scare me.

**Do you have any bad blood with any other drivers? You've had words with Matt Kenseth, right?**

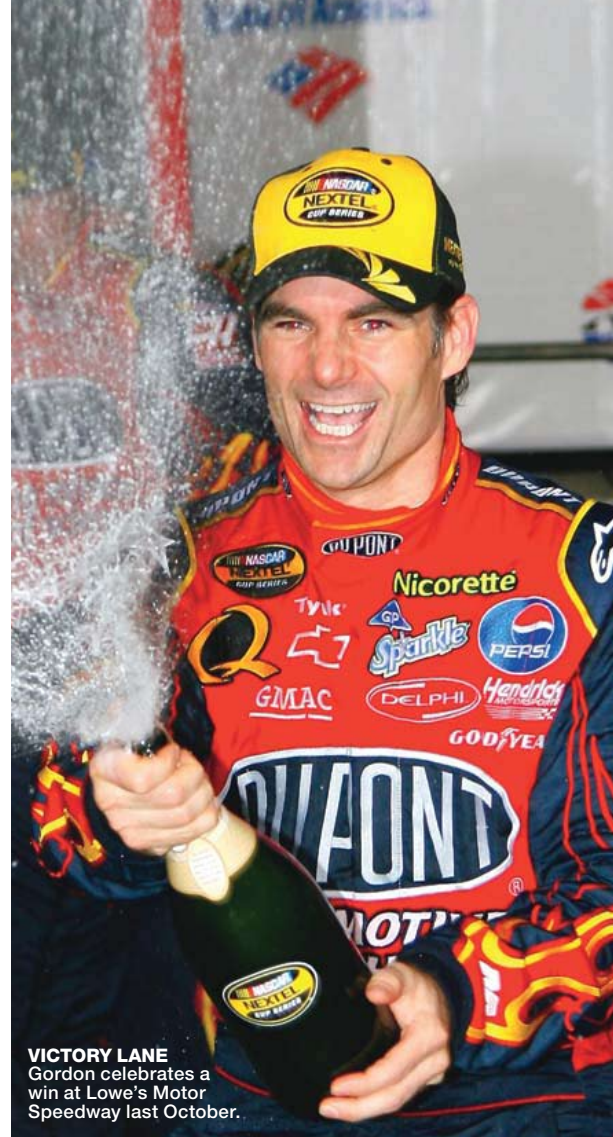
You have run-ins from time to time. You're always trying to stay out of trouble, but you make contact with someone or he makes contact with you and tempers flare. You have to be very conscious of that. I don't have any issues with Matt. He's a great driver. The only issue we have is that one time he was frustrated and spun me out. I spun him out for a win one month later.

**What happened to the good old days of trading paint? It seems like that sort of thing used to be encouraged. Fans loved it.**

I think what's happened is that we're on television. It's a huge audience with huge sponsors, Fortune 500 companies. You have to be respectful of that, and it has taken away some of the edge the sport had as far as being able to bump and bang and fight. It's a professional sport, and you have to act accordingly. I think it has taken away some of the personality of the drivers.

**Some drivers have been critical of rookie of the year and former Formula One star Juan Pablo Montoya's aggressive driving. Has it bothered you?**

I've had no issues with Juan. I think at times he races a little too hard early in the race. You gotta make sure you get to the end. So I think he's



**VICTORY LANE**  
Gordon celebrates a win at Lowe's Motor Speedway last October.

gotta back off a little and make some friends and make it to the end of the race. But he's one of the most talented drivers to come into our sport in a long time.

**And now Dario Franchitti and Jacques Villeneuve are following him over. They are both big stars from rival racing circuits.**

It's a huge honor for our sport. Drivers want to be at the top level, and right now the cup series is the top in America.

## THE BEST NEW CARS OF 2008



### NEW AMERICAN CLASSIC

**Cadillac CTS** Presenting the first American car with an interior to match those rarefied walnut-and-leather cabins of Europe: Real wood replaces faux wood, the leather is soft and supple, and there are no unsightly gaps between dash parts. It looks, in fact, far more expensive than it is, and it's the first in a whole series of overhauled Caddies. \$33,000



### INTERGALACTIC SPORTS CAR

**Audi R8** Like something from space, the R8 landed in America last fall as the best new sports car since...well, it's hard to remember. It's the only car to challenge the Porsche 911 in its combination of performance and ride quality. It has 420 horses, all-wheel drive, and a cabin so comfortable you could drive the R8 cross-country. \$109,000



### MOGUL MOBILE

**Bentley Continental GT Speed** It's difficult to imagine that anyone considered the twin-turbo 552-horsepower Continental GT to be too slow. But for those nutty few who did, the British luxury brand rolls out the most powerful Bentley ever, with 600 horses and a top speed of more than 200 miles per hour. \$199,990

# SPEED MACHINE?

## *You have your own wine, right? Is that your retirement plan?*

It's just something fun. I do small quantities of high-quality wine with August Briggs, of Briggs & Sons Winemaking Company, in Napa Valley: Jeff Gordon wines. We do about 200 cases of cabernet and merlot, and this is our second vintage of the chardonnay. I can't be as involved as I want to be because of racing, but I might want to see it become a big winery and take off once I have time.

## *Other athletes have succeeded at it. Like Greg Norman.*

Mario Andretti has done it. And Greg. I look up to him in what he has been able to create businesswise. While he was golfing, he golfed, but he looked at opportunities for other businesses. I want to emulate that—clothing lines, wine, and real estate.

## *How much longer can you race?*

That's hard to say. This makes 15 years, and I have contracts through 2010. I've had seasons where I say, "Man, I can't imagine doing this next year!" and then there's this year, when I think I can do this for a long time. Parenting is gonna be a top priority, but I gotta make a living. Racing will always be a part of that. On the management side, I'm a part owner. Beyond that, I haven't really thought about it too much.

## *What goals can you possibly have left?*

I've achieved all and more than I ever expected in racing. It's just about trying to continue that success. Now that I have a little girl, I'm going to be very focused on family and education for her. Careerwise, a lot of things will be answers for 2010 and beyond. I'll have to answer those questions: Do I continue racing? Do I do a limited schedule? I guess when you're a race-car driver, that's the way you have to think.

There are dangers involved. You can't look too far ahead.

## This month at the Daytona 500, drivers debut the controversial ride known as the Car of Tomorrow

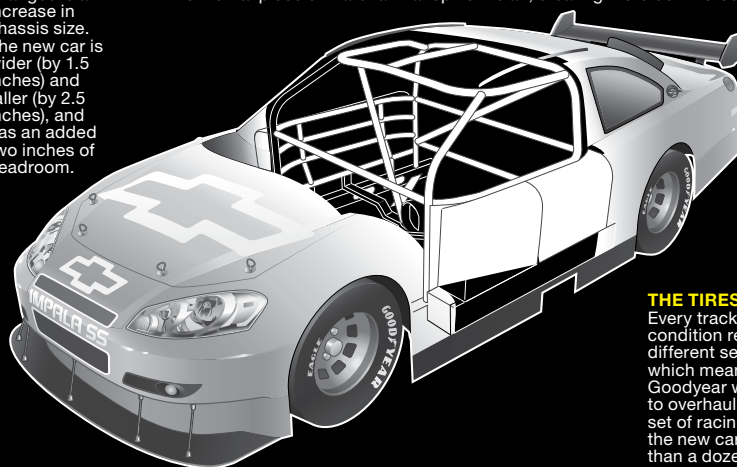
Like everyone in his sport, Jeff Gordon must now sit behind the wheel of what NASCAR has been touting as the Car of Tomorrow, a next-generation stock car that will be used in every race. The changes, which affect all drivers' cars, have been at issue. The motivating idea was to make a safer car, but safer means bigger and heavier. In 16 races, drivers found the new cars to be sluggish, bulky, and difficult to handle. Driving legend and Fox TV commentator Darrell Waltrip says driving the new car "is like getting out of a car and into an SUV. It's just not a very fun car to drive right now." Nevertheless, safety prevails and teams must adapt. Here's a look at how crew chief Steve Letarte and his team remade the race car.

### THE CHASSIS

One of two primary changes is an increase in chassis size. The new car is wider (by 1.5 inches) and taller (by 2.5 inches), and has an added two inches of headroom.

### THE AERODYNAMICS

Instead of a spoiler, there is now a rear wing to increase downforce and traction. Also, instead of the smooth front fascia, the new car has a splitter, which is a horizontal piece of material that splits the air, creating more downforce.



### THE ENGINE

As of 2007, Chevrolet also engineered an engine change. Out went the SV2 and in came one known as the R07, "the first small-block Chevrolet engine that is purpose-built for racing," says Letarte, meaning that it's not just a modified production car engine. The R07 puts out 850 horsepower and produces 550 pound-feet of torque.

### THE TIRES

Every track and condition requires a different set of tires, which means that Goodyear won't have to overhaul just one set of racing tires for the new car, but more than a dozen. "The center of gravity being higher and the car being heavier means it's going to abuse the tires in a different way," explains Letarte.



### TOURING COUPE

**Aston Martin DBS** That car that Daniel Craig (as James Bond) rolled in *Casino Royale*? That was an early preview of this baby, the DBS, and it was sad to see even one of these beautiful 510-horsepower V-12 sport coupes (which will take its place beside the top-of-the-line Vanquish in Aston's stable) ruined. \$265,000



### BEST MODEL-LINE REINVENTION

**Jaguar XF** Under Ford's leadership, Jaguar cleaned up its reputation but also dumbed down some of its designs. The XF isn't quite as beautiful as the last wholly new Jaguar, the XK, but it is still much sleeker and sexier than the Jag sedans of old. The 420-horsepower version of this five-seater makes a nice rival for the Audi S6. \$49,975



### CONVERTIBLE

**Ford Mustang Shelby GT Convertible** With those bold racing stripes and a growling V-8 under the hood, it's the same Shelby GT you loved last year...but now it goes topless with the push of a button. Only 2,300 will be made. \$44,605



# JEFF GORDON'S GREATEST HITS

The kid from California has had more than a few brushes with death behind the wheel of the number 24 car. Here, we present the worst of the worst. BY STEPHEN THOMAS



**CRASH COURSE** (from left to right) Jeff Gordon was the Nextel Cup's series points leader when he wrecked hard last May at the Coca-Cola 600; Gordon prepares for a race earlier in his career; Gordon's crew surveys the damage to his car after the May crash.

1

**Lowe's Motor Speedway, Coca-Cola 600, May 2007**

Arguably as close as Gordon has come to his own highlight-reel-worthy, barrel-roll wreck, this Lap 61 smashup on the front stretch looked worse than it was, apparently. Driven into the outside wall and then rear-ended by Tony Raines, Gordon went airborne for a few hundred feet before coming to rest. "It wasn't that hard," he said. "The car just got up in the air really good, I knew that."

2

**Pocono Raceway, Pocono 500, June 2006**

Gordon was barreling down the front stretch at Pocono at about 180 miles per hour when his car lost its brakes. His Chevrolet shot into the grass, back onto the track, and into the outside wall, on the driver's side. "One of the worst things you can have in a race car is for the brakes to go out in Turn 1 at Pocono," he told reporters afterward. "That was one of the hardest hits I've ever taken."

3

**Lowe's Motor Speedway, The Winston, May 2001**

At the start of the All-Star race and just three months after the death of Dale Earnhardt Sr., Gordon crashed into the outside wall—hard—in Turn 1. While the accident was eerily similar to the one that killed Earnhardt, Gordon was wearing a head and neck restraint system, or a HANS device. "I hit at about the worst possible angle," he said. "My neck stretched really bad—it stretched out there. The HANS device did its job."

4

**Texas Motorspeedway, PrimeStar 500, March 1999**

Gordon's unfortunate meeting with the concrete wall in Turn 4 left him with bruised ribs and a career-worst 43rd-place finish. It was, he said at the time, the hardest hit of his career. "You hear in the garage area, 'He's young, he hasn't hit anything yet. That's why he's so brave,'" said Gordon. "There's a little of that...and when you hit walls, it can almost make you a little more patient...."

5

**Talladega Superspeedway, Winston Select 500, April 1996**

"It's the first time I've been in a wreck quite like that," Gordon said about landing in the middle of one of Talladega's infamous "big ones" on the backstretch on Lap 78. "It's one of the scariest feelings you can imagine. You're sitting in there, sliding along at 180, 190 miles per hour, and you're just holding tight. Every time I opened my eyes, I got hit. I just closed my eyes. I was sliding along there, thinking it's going to stop and then—boom—someone else would hit me."

(FROM LEFT) GEORGE TIEDEMANN/GET IMAGES/CORBIS (2); CHUCK BURTON/ASSOCIATED PRESS; ASHLEY FLEMING/ASSOCIATED PRESS

## THE BEST NEW CARS OF 2008



### ECONOMY-ISH CAR

**Honda Accord Coupe** At last, Honda realized that just because you have one of the world's most popular sedans doesn't mean you shouldn't have to expend some effort on making it look cool. The Accord coupe has slits for lights, a chunky front end, and an aggressive back-to-front crouch like the Infiniti G37. From \$22,000 to \$30,000



### SUV

**Volkswagen Tiguan** Like many automakers, VW realized that bigger isn't always better, even when you're talking SUVs. This baby brother to the Touareg has an equally weird name and is built on the Rabbit frame with a peppy engine yanked out of the GTI. \$22,490



### HYBRID

**Chevy Tahoe/GMC Yukon SUV** It's admittedly a little laughable to try to use the word green in relation to a full-size SUV unless you're talking paint color, but at least GM's twin wide-body V-8s are trying. They can run on electricity at low speeds and, when necessary, even shut down some cylinders to save fuel. \$50,000





"I know what it's like to see cars flip and slam into things. They don't explode on impact like in the movies."

**CHEATING DEATH** When driver Ricky Craven (inside car 41) flipped into the catch fence 12 years ago at Talladega Superspeedway, Jeff Gordon was (as always) at the right spot at the right time. His car (number 24) is visible at the right side of this photograph, and was one of five to narrowly slip beneath Craven's while it was airborne.



#### WAGON

**Volvo V70** Still roomy, still reliable, still safe. The Swedish company, owned by Ford, knows how to court soccer moms, and the new V70 doesn't fall down on the job with this new and slightly sleeker full-size wagon, now featuring six cylinders instead of five. \$33,210



#### CAR FOR URBANITES

**Volvo C30** The smallest Volvo ever made doesn't feel so small inside, thanks largely to its gigantic rear windshield, which is so big you could practically call it a bay window. The C30 is also surprisingly quick and has a seemingly infinite list of options for personalization, including 17 paint colors. \$23,445



#### DAD-MOBILE

**Chrysler Town & Country** There's no way around it: A minivan is never going to look cool, except maybe to your kids, who care far more about personal DVD players (in this case, one for each of the two backseat captain's chairs) and a fold-out table for board games (the first of its kind in a minivan) than a spoiler or mag wheels. \$23,190





# AMERICA AT 100 MILES PER HOUR

Your new car does zero to 60 in five seconds and has a top speed of 165 miles per hour. Unfortunately, the speed limit is 65—unless you're at one of these top driving schools.

## FACTORY SCHOOLS

Buy a fancy import and you'll get top-shelf engineering—a machine capable of delivering so much performance that you'll need to refine your skills. Learn to drive your car the way its designers intended here.

### 1 Audi Sportscar Experience

**Where:** Infineon Raceway, Sonoma, California

**What:** The new R8 made one thing clear: Audi is every bit the performance carmaker as its more lauded German rivals. (In reality, models such as the S6 and the RS 4 were already race cars, albeit in dressed-down sedan form.) Newly launched for fall is the Audi Experience, now permanently based in Sonoma, but also touring

selected tracks around the country.

**Price:** From \$1,295 for a one-day RS 4 program (\$1,895 for the R8), [audidrivingschool.com](http://audidrivingschool.com)

### 2 Saab Aero Academy

**Where:** Road Atlanta, Braselton, Georgia

**What:** Saab's quirky cars (with their backseat ski portals and ignition slots under the emergency brake) don't exactly

scream "Race me!" but under GM's stewardship, the reformed eggmobiles have only become faster. Learn performance driving, handling, and accident avoidance.

**Price:** Free with purchase of a Saab (\$1,495 for nonowners), [saabacademy.com](http://saabacademy.com)

### 3 BMW Performance Driving School

**Where:** BMW Performance Center,

Greer, South Carolina

**What:** South Carolina seems like a strange place for a German carmaker to set up a driving school, but BMW builds the X5 down the road from this facility, which includes a track, a skid pad, and an off-road course. There's also an advanced M racing program at Virginia International Raceway and touring classes that visit California and Chicago.

**Price:** \$1,295 for the one-day M School, [bmwusa.com/bmwexperience/PerformanceCenter](http://bmwusa.com/bmwexperience/PerformanceCenter)

(FROM LEFT) COURTESY OF SKIP BARBER DRIVING SCHOOL; COURTESY OF PORSCHE SPORT DRIVING SCHOOL





## RACING SCHOOL

### Skip Barber Racing School

**Where:** Five permanent locations (Laguna Seca, California; Road Atlanta, in Georgia; Sebring, Florida; Road America, in Wisconsin; and Lime Rock, Connecticut), plus smaller events at up to 20 additional sites  
**What:** Barber is probably the one school operator to rival Bondurant in notoriety, but whereas Bondurant works out of a single location, the Connecticut-based Barber has branched out with his driving and racing programs, most recently taking over the Panoz school at Road Atlanta.  
**Price:** From \$995 for a one-day program, [skipbarber.com](http://skipbarber.com)

tracks, as well as a skid oval and a kart school. Students practice on Corvettes (including Z06s) and Cadillacs, plus open-wheel Formula Bondurant cars.  
**Price:** From \$1,375 for a one-day introduction to racing, [bondurant.com](http://bondurant.com)

### 2 Jim Russell Racing Schools

**Where:** Infineon Raceway, Sonoma, California. (Also at Mont Tremblant, Quebec, in the spring, summer, and fall.)  
**What:** In business since 1957, Jim Russell schools have taught professional drivers such as Emerson Fittipaldi and Tony Stewart, as well as thousands of regular guys like us.  
**Price:** From \$995 for a one-day course, [jimrussellusa.com](http://jimrussellusa.com)

### 3 Andretti-Gordon Racing School

**Where:** Fifteen locations, some offering only Jeff Gordon's stock-car school, some with Mario Andretti's Indy racing school, and some with both  
**What:** Open-wheel racing legend Andretti's schools offer Indy-style cars, as well as BMW Z3s for more real-world-relevant high-performance driving courses. Gordon's school uses retired stock cars from his own NASCAR fleet. Both also offer "hot lap" ride-alongs if you'd rather just sit shotgun as a professional scares you shitless.

**Price:** Ride-alongs start at \$75 for eight laps at Gordon's schools. To drive a stock car, you'll pay at least \$399 for eight laps. The true wannabe-cup-driver program is 70 laps over five sessions for \$2,999. The equivalent for Andretti is 66 laps and also costs \$2,999. [andrettiracing.com](http://andrettiracing.com)

### 4 Richard Petty Driving Experience

**Where:** Twenty-five tracks, including Talladega, in Florida, and Indianapolis  
**What:** NASCAR's winningest driver is now almost as famous for his ubiquitous schools, which offer shotgun ride-alongs and driving sessions in actual stock cars.  
**Price:** From \$99 for a ride to \$2,500 for the Racing Experience, which consists of 80 laps over a day and a half, [1800bepetty.com](http://1800bepetty.com)

### 5 Dale Jarrett Racing School

**Where:** Nine tracks, including Talladega  
**What:** Another former legend offering up rides and drives in retired stock cars  
**Price:** From \$395 for six- and 10-lap minisessions, to \$3,495 for 60 laps of the 2.7-mile Talladega Superspeedway, including at least one 20-lap session, [racingadventure.com](http://racingadventure.com)

## DRIVE FAST...ON A CLOSED HIGHWAY!

**Yep, you read correctly: No cops, no speed limit.**

### 1 Silver State Classic

Twice a year, the state of Nevada closes Highway 318 and registered drivers can drive as fast as they want in various classes—including some cars that top 200 miles per hour—on a public highway with straightaways of seven to 14 miles in length. The world record for the average top speed in a road race was set here: 207.78 miles per hour. In 2008, it will run in May and September. [silverstateclassic.com](http://silverstateclassic.com)

### 2 Virginia City Hill Climb

Since 1972, Nevada has also closed a 5.2-mile section of Route 342 for the hill climb from Silver City to Virginia City, which comprises 21 turns and 1,200 feet in elevation gain. Only 70 entrants are allowed.

**BEST LIFE ONLINE**

Visit [BestLifeOnline.com/driving](http://BestLifeOnline.com/driving) for more.

### 4 Mercedes-Benz AMG Challenge

**Where:** Locations vary each year  
**What:** All AMG owners are invited to visit these day sessions, held four times throughout the year at four locations around the country. If you don't own an AMG Benz, you're out of luck. Unlike other manufacturer schools, the Challenge days are not open to non-AMG owners, even ones with thick wallets.  
**Price:** Up to \$2,000, [mbusa.com/amgchallenge](http://mbusa.com/amgchallenge)

### 2 Ivor Wigham European Rally & Performance Driving School

**Where:** Starke, Florida  
**What:** Disney World for car nuts. British rally driver Ivor Wigham's rally racing outfit has both asphalt and gravel forest tracks, plus SUV, ATV, karting, and security driving schools.  
**Price:** One- to four-day courses, from \$625 to \$5,850, [gorally.com](http://gorally.com)

## RALLY SCHOOLS

Who needs concrete? Rally schools teach the art of high-speed driving on dirt, gravel, snow, and ice. Going sideways is not only allowed but also encouraged.

### 1 Team O'Neil Rally Racing School

**Where:** Dalton, New Hampshire  
**What:** This is America's top rally school, and the place where motocross superstar Travis Pastrana came to learn before turning pro as a rally racer—and where he still goes four or five times a year. It features 6.5 miles of closed dirt roads in the White Mountains.  
**Price:** \$1,650 to \$4,150 for two- to four-day courses, [team-oneil.com](http://team-oneil.com)

## RACING SCHOOLS

Given the opportunity, what man wouldn't want to be a race-car driver? At one of dozens of locations around America, you can be one, if only for a day. Here are the best places to indulge your inner Jeff Gordon.

### 1 Bob Bondurant School of High-Performance Driving

**Where:** Phoenix  
**What:** The former Formula One racer paved a big patch of Arizona desert and opened his school, which has not one but two

## FACTORY SCHOOLS

### Porsche Sport Driving School

**Where:** Barber Motorsports Park, Birmingham, Alabama  
**What:** One- to three-day classes in the 911, Boxster, and Cayman, plus on- and off-road work in the Cayenne S. For winter, there's a snow and ice driving school in Colorado, illustrating the inclement-weather prowess of not only the Cayenne but also the all-wheel-drive 911, which is probably not the first car you'd choose when faced with a snowstorm.  
**Price:** From \$1,795 for one day, [porschedriving.com](http://porschedriving.com)

