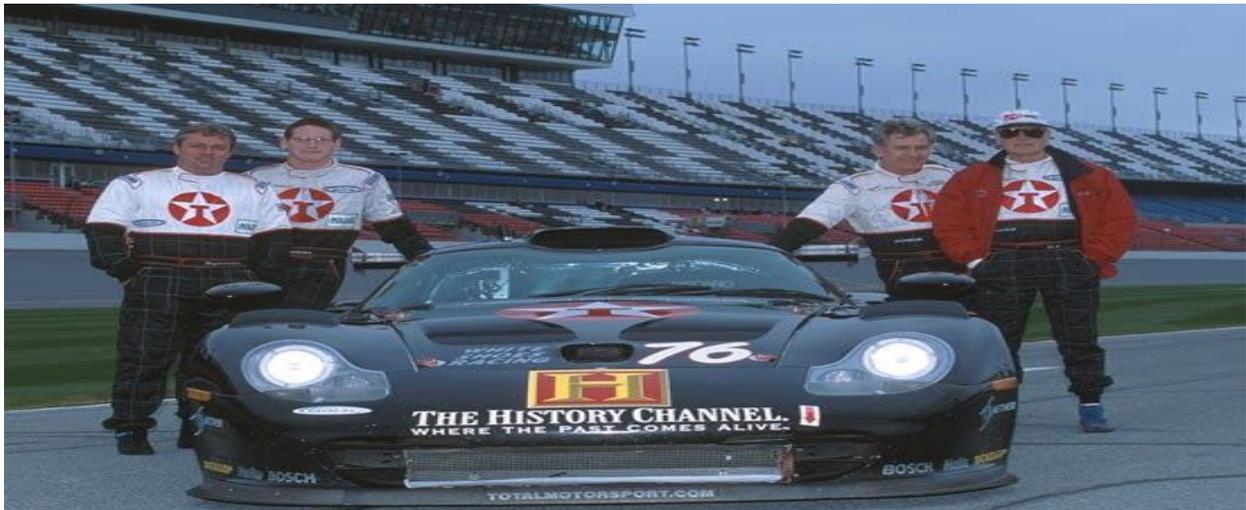


February 5, 2000



24 HOURS AT DAYTONA: TEEN SKIPS CLASS TO RACE WITH PAUL NEWMAN

'I just hope he doesn't make a monkey out of us old guys,' the actor says.

By Joe Capozzi
Palm Beach Post Staff Writer

DAYTONA BEACH -- Like many kids his age, 17-year-old Gunnar Jeannette of Palm Beach Gardens has responsibilities: Shaving twice a week. Picking up his eyeglasses at Costco. Finishing Mrs. Gibson's homework assignment for English Literature.

Starting at 1 p.m. today, the Cardinal Newman High School senior with the 3.7 grade-point average will have one more responsibility: helping actor Paul Newman and two others race a \$200,000 Porsche 996 around Daytona International Speedway at speeds up to 175 mph.

When the green flag flies, the unlikely duo - Butch Cassidy and the car owner's kid - will become the oldest and youngest drivers to compete in the 24 Hours at Daytona, an endurance race that ends at 1 p.m. Sunday.

They'll be driving the shiny black car - No. 75 - the one with the dollar signs and promotional plugs across the body for Newman's latest movie, *Where The Money Is*. Race team owner Kevin Jeannette, the teenager's father and a respected Porsche restorer, has known Newman for five years.

Newman, 75, and a professional driver since 1972, has hinted this might be his last race. For Gunnar - who got his driver's license on his 16th birthday - it will be his fourth race.

"He's smart and he's quick and he's going to be just fine," Newman said during a break Thursday at Daytona. Then he peeked his blue eyes over the rim of his Fast Eddie Felson sunglasses and added, "I just hope he doesn't make a monkey out of us old guys."

Gunnar has been hitching rides with Newman for the past two years, often skipping class at Cardinal Newman to meet him at Moroso Motorsports Park.

Teacher: 'This is incredible.'

Finally, one day last month teacher Sally Gibson, nodding toward an empty seat, asked her English Literature students, "Where is Gunnar?"

"Oh, he's racing cars with Paul Newman," the kids replied.

Said Gibson: "I thought that was highly entertaining."

Then last week Gunnar approached her for some advance homework assignments. "He said, 'Can I have something ahead of time? I'm going to be hanging out with Paul this weekend.' I just looked at him and said, 'Whatever.' "

On Friday, someone at school turned on the television and saw Gunnar yukking it up on CBS' *The Morning Show with Cool Hand Luke*.

"Oh, my gosh," Gibson said. "This is incredible."

Incredible is being in the pits on test day at Daytona and watching an Oscar winner who has played opposite Elizabeth Taylor lose his paparazzi appeal to a shy bookworm who says he has trouble meeting girls.

Walking toward Garage 10 after Thursday's test run, Newman called out to his teammate: "Hey, Gunnar, we have to do something about that back window. It's too dark."

Gunnar: "I know, Paul. We'll have to just look out the side mirrors."

Newman puts an arm on the kid's shoulder and nods. All around, cameras go click, click, whir, whir.

'He's just Paul'

Gunnar was born in 1982 - 28 years after Newman made his film debut in *The Silver Chalice* and 14 years after the actor portrayed an Indy driver in *Winning*, a film that led to his racing debut in 1972 at age 47.

The teenager was named after his father's car restoration shop in Riviera Beach, Gunnar Porsche Racing, started in 1978. (Gunnar's name comes from his dad's childhood friend's father who was in the Navy.)

Butch Cassidy and the kid wouldn't meet until around 1995, when Newman was introduced to Kevin Jeannette by Michael Brockman, a business and racing partner of Newman.

So what's it like hanging out with Paul Newman? "What do you mean?" the teenager replies. "He's just Paul."

Seen any of his movies? "I saw *Butch Cassidy* when I was little . . . and *Cool Hand Luke*. I liked the eggs scene."

Gunnar and Newman will be competing in one of racing's most grueling events. Drivers relieve each other about every 90 minutes, or once a tank of gas is spent. They battle 80 to 90 cars - along with fatigue, shadows and lights, from sunset to sunrise, all the way to the checkered flag.

The team that completes the most 3.5-mile laps wins. Last year's winners took the \$60,000 first prize with 708 laps.

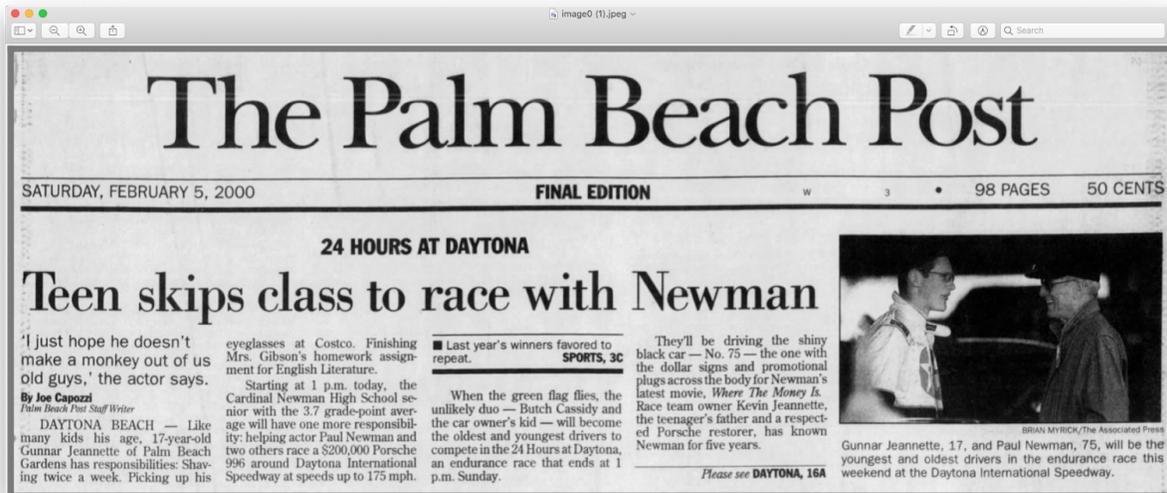
'He shows a lot of maturity'

Newman, who won a 24 Hours at Daytona class in 1990, said Grand American is one of the few sanctioning bodies that will allow someone as young as Gunnar to drive. "But I'll tell you," he said, "he uses his head and he shows a lot of maturity."

Win or lose, if he doesn't zonk out after returning home Sunday night, Gunnar will try to speed through Joseph Conrad's *The Secret Sharer*. He may have better luck Monday when the class begins studying another author, a guy by the name of Swift.

Even if Gunnar doesn't do well with Jonathan Swift, his teacher hinted she won't mind.

Said Mrs. Gibson, who plans to watch this weekend's race: "I guess he'll remember this a lot longer than he'll remember senior English."



The image shows a screenshot of a newspaper article from The Palm Beach Post. The newspaper's masthead is at the top, followed by the date and edition information. The main headline is "Teen skips class to race with Newman". The article text is arranged in columns, with a photo on the right side. The photo shows two men, a young man and an older man, standing together. The caption below the photo identifies them as Gunnar Jeannette and Paul Newman. The article text includes a quote from Mrs. Gibson and a byline for Joe Capozzi.

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■ Last year's winners favored to repeat. **SPORTS, 3C**

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BRIAN MYRICK/The Associated Press

Gunnar Jeannette, 17, and Paul Newman, 75, will be the youngest and oldest drivers in the endurance race this weekend at the Daytona International Speedway.

Please see DAYTONA, 16A