

Stitch in time: Daytona 500 to home décor, interwoven

Robinson part of new exhibit celebrating women in racing

By Raygan Swan, NASCAR.COM
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Every year around this time Shawna Robinson admits she's not the best company to keep.

"Never fails," she said. "When January and February come around I get moody. Five years have passed now, but I still get down."

Down because once upon a time Robinson would be preparing herself to go racing for the season. Now she watches the action from her home in North Carolina.

When you're the first woman to start in the Daytona 500 (2002) since Janet Guthrie in 1980, NASCAR's greatest race is not something you just get over.

In 2010, Robinson is going back to Daytona. Not to race, she's moved on and the 45-year-old mother of two has re-written her NASCAR story. Chapter one starts in February when she returns to Daytona in order to bring some much-deserved attention to racing's female heritage.

Through a traveling museum exhibit spearhead by Lyn St. James called, "Women in the Winner's Circle," Robinson, among other past female racers, will be on hand to promote the history, the ongoing accomplishments and the future of women in racing.



Now open at NASCAR's Daytona 500 Experience, "Women in the Winner's Circle" will be on display through March and features informational panels, photographs, three race cars and personal artifacts dating as far as 1903.

At the venue, Robinson is bringing her present to her past, which opens chapter two of her NASCAR story. And through it she has remained woven into the fabric of the sport -- literally.

Robinson found a new niche through interior design and has been hired to decorate a number of drivers' homes and race shops since her stock-car career ended. From Kasey Kahne's race shop in Mooresville, N.C., to Martin Truex Jr.'s motorhome, Robinson has cornered the market for Cup Series furnishings.

Taking her creativity and talents a step further, Robinson recently designed her own line of "Happy Chairs."

"It's furniture with personality, basically, a one-of-a-kind piece with funky style. I create a chair that screams, 'You,'" said Robinson, whose chairs have become a hit in the Carolinas. "And when you're in a bad mood, you can go sit in your 'happy chair' and relax."

It works for Robinson, especially this time of year when she is longing to be behind the wheel of a stock car again.

Originally, Robinson's decorating jobs were born from necessity after she chose to sideline her racing endeavors to have children. During that time, she painted murals for friends as well as decorated the homes of Michael Waltrip and Ernie Irvin.

"I started back when I was pregnant and eventually word spread," she said.

St. James has asked her to design one of her special chairs to be showcased and possibly auctioned in Daytona during the "Women in the Winner's Circle" exhibit's debut.

"I'm trying to get some fabric to print a series of quotes on from women drivers past and present. A vintage look, maybe, with a sepia tone," Robinson said.

The invitation to join the women in racing exhibit, along with the chair, has certainly brightened what typically would be a bad mood for the former racer looking to write the next chapter of her NASCAR story.

The opinions expressed are solely those of the writer.