

TELEVISION REVIEW

NASCAR Drivers: 360

(Docu series; FX, Fri. May 14, 10:30 p.m.)

Produced by Flame Television and Mess Media in association with FX. Executive producers, Paul Brooks, Terry Krantz, Sarah Nettinga, Scott Messick; co-executive producer, Nina Lederman; director, Tim Warren. **60 MIN.**

With: Kevin Harvick, DeLana Harvick, Rusty Wallace, Patti Wallace, Kenny Wallace, Kim Wallace.

By ANN DONAHUE

There's a joke among the uninitiated about what NASCAR stands for: No Athletic Skill, Centered Around Rednecks. FX's "NASCAR Drivers: 360" seeks to remedy this stereotype and give a behind-the-scenes look at the drivers on the mammoth-ticket Nextel and merely big-ticket Busch racing circuits. Bowing on mucho macho FX right after this week's coverage of the Busch series race from Richmond, Va., docu's focus on family life may convince the wives of NASCAR dads to stay tuned after the race.

Docu series certainly smashes a bit of the good ol' boy presumption — how red can vet driver Rusty Wallace's neck be if he pilots his own private jet? As is typical with docus, the quality of the show is inextricably linked to the comfort of the subject in front of the camera. In the episode provided for review, the Wallace racing dynasty — focusing on brothers Rusty and Kenny — and smartass young'un Kevin Harvick and his take-no-crap wife, DeLana, provide entertaining fodder.

The action in the premiere episode follows the drivers and their families in the days leading up to February's Subway 400 in Rockingham, N.C. Fans expecting gearhead talk about horsepower and tire wear may be disappointed, however — most of the car-related action focuses on cajoling new sponsors and placating existing ones.

As a result, show does veer dangerously close to infomercial territory at times: Yes, Rusty Wallace Inc. Racing's No. 66 Duraflame car looks cool, with its bright yellow-and-orange color scheme, and it merits a closer look — but showing Wallace playing with a model of the car on his jet gets to be a little much. Did we mention the Duraflame car has flames painted on it? Feel like eating Duraflame-toasted barbecue yet?

Showing the business side of NASCAR — which brings in \$2.8 billion in license fees alone from Fox, NBC and TNT — is an interesting leitmotif, but to femme fans, the most compelling interplay will be between the drivers and their families.

Showing the relationships among Kenny Wallace, wife Kim and their children makes the crash he's involved in all the more affecting. The glimpse of Kim staring at the TV screen in horror, interjected with scenes of the pit crew trying and failing to contact Kenny over the radio, shows the stresses of the NASCAR family in a way that would play just as well on Lifetime as on FX.