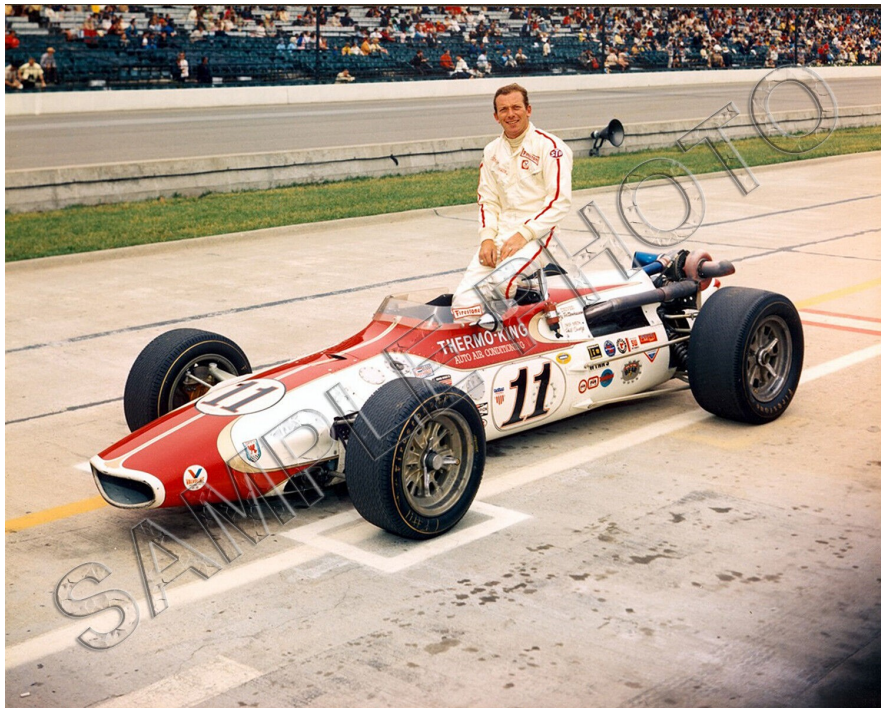


The Need for Speed *(Chapter 1)*

I have always followed car races. First it was Indy. Later NASCAR. I use to listen to the races on the radio with my Dad out in our patio before televised events. The names I remember in the late 50's and early 60's were Roger Ward, Jim Rathmann, Parnelli Jones, A.J. Foyt, Bobby Unser, Mario Andretti, and Rick Mears. In fact, I won a pool because I drew Rich Mears name. He started from 6th position and kept advancing throughout the race until he won. 42 drivers have died in Indy racing history, along with some mechanics and some motorcycle riders. I only remember three names.

Bill Vukovich driving a Offenhauser in 1955
The most famous one though was Dale Earnhardt.
Tony Bontenhausen in 1961 also driving a Offenhauser.

Here is a picture of his brother Gary in his Offenhauser.



I really liked the old style Indy cars. Now they all look similar. Like airplanes on wheels. Aerodynamics is the name of the game.



I really didn't watch early NASCAR races. I started to get interested after watching Tom Cruise's movie "Days of Thunder". I knew NASCAR was more of an Eastern and Southern watched sport. Hillbillies and Rednecks.

Here are some names I am familiar with, in not any particular order.

Dale Earnhardt

Richard Petty

Bill Elliot

Dale Earnhardt Jr.

Jeff Gordon

Darrell Waltrip

Rusty Wallace

Cale Yarborough

If you think racing is an easy sport, you would be wrong. Just step on the gas and sit back and enjoy the drive. Not so. It requires stamina, split second reaction times, courage, and a touch of stupidity. It is a very dangerous sport.

So I had the stupidity part covered. The rest I had to develop.

Here is my racing story:

The Need for Speed
(Chapter 2)

My name was Ripley Thinmister

Apparently, one of my ancestors was some kind of fashion designer.

My mother is Asian. A Japanese American. She was born in Japan and came to the states at the age of 14. She married my father and I am their only son. I was not a robust child and had to endure lots of teasing due to my name. Hey, Thin mister. Were you named that because you are so skinny. What kind of name is Ripley anyway? Sounds kind of gay. I was always getting into fights. When I turned 18, I had my name legally changed to Rip Thorn. This name suited me much better than my given one. I was an unruly child. I was always getting into trouble. One of my habits was street racing. I didn't have the fastest car around, so I had to make up for that with some creative driving. This turned for the worse when during one of my races, a crash injured the son of a prominent business man. I was accused of causing the accident because I cut him off near the finish line. He was just angry because I beat him with my junked out car and he had the fastest car on wheels.

My father had had enough. They told me that I needed a change of scenery. My mother has an aunt in Japan that was willing to board me for the next year. So I was shipped off to Osaka. My mother had spoken Japanese to me since I was a baby and continued all through my teenage years. So language was not a problem for me in Japan. It didn't take me long to mix in with the other juvenile delinquents around the area. Street racing was in my blood. They had a different form of racing from what I was used to. It was called side sliding. It typically took place in some underground multi-level parking garage. Two opponents would line up at the top and race down around the curves and bends to the bottom floor. Besides the single race, there was a prize for the fastest time overall. It wasn't hard to know who was the top racer. Hirato had the cutest girlfriend and the coolest looking car. He saw my interest in the racing and asked. Hey new kid, you a racer? I said I am of

sorts, but I never did this kind. It doesn't look that hard. This got his dander up. You think you can do better. Well, if you give me a trial run, I might get the hang of it. One of the other guys lent me his car. I said, just let me try by myself, I don't want to crash this car or any other. I started out a little slow and then increased my speed. It was trickier than it seemed, sliding back and forth, but by the time I got to the bottom I had acquired the knack. Back on top, I said that I think I've got it. You want to race for real? Sure, why not. I am out of your league, but Itsuki, my second will race you. The same guy let me use his car again. So the race began. The old adrenaline came rushing back into my blood. Around the first turn, I was trailing. By the middle level I was dead even. When we got to the bottom, I had beaten him by 5 feet. Back on the top level, his gang looked a little stunned. Akemi was Hirato's girlfriend. She gave me a look and clapped her hands. Hirato didn't look to pleased with that either. My time was not the best, but considering it was only my second try and not my car, it was impressive. He said, if you want to make some money, come back next week for the real deal. I could see where this was going. He needed to show his dominance. Not much chance of our meeting again, I had no car like they did.

A couple of days later, Katsuki met me outside my Aunt's house. He was the guy that lent me his car. I guess he was not in favor with Hirato's gang. He said, if you think you can beat Hirato, I can lend you my car. The only thing is my car is well below the level of his. I said, maybe we can do something about that. My whole life had been fixing and working on cars. I have a few tricks to amp up an engine and even add some body improvements.

We went to work on his car. He had resources to buy parts. I told him what we needed to soup up his ride. I made some alterations to his carburetor, changed the spark plugs to higher fire power, and changed his suspension to prevent body tilt. I added some chemicals to his fuel. The higher spark will be needed to get extra horsepower. Finally, I found what I was looking for in tires. The garage pavement was extremely slippery. The tires I found gave extra grip on the turns.

Two weeks later I was back in the parking garage. Hirato looked happy to see me. I could guess why. Since I was using Katsuki's car again, he was

sure his was faster. I said, I am ready to race. Not so fast. There is no free rides. The cost of entry is \$500. I said, sorry I don't have that kind of money. Katsuki said, I do. I will front you. Now I felt pressure. I could take a loss, but losing someone else's money would be bad. Katsuki said, don't worry, I have plenty.

So the race was on. Hirato's car really did look awesome. I also expected him to be an accomplished driver. When the flag came down we were head to head around the first corner. On the straights he edged ahead. On the corners I caught up. My tires were doing their job. It was time to even out the horsepower. I pulled a lever and the chemical I added to the gas gave me a turbo boost. In the next straight away I edged ahead. I imagine Hirato was not used to being behind. He tried to squeeze by me, but I cut him off and he hit the side rail and spun out. I passed the finish line unopposed. My time was near the record. I stepped out of the car and Hirato came at me swinging. I mentioned before that I always got into fights, so this was nothing new for me. Except now I wasn't skinny Rodney Thinmister, I was Rip Thorn and I wasn't skinny. Hirato had the humiliation of losing the race and was about to lose the fight too when the rest of the group came down to the bottom floor to see the end. They intervened and pulled us apart. I said, Hirato are you a sore loser? He said you cheated. You cut me off and drove me into the rail. I said, you never told me there were any rules. By this time, he had cooled down. He surprised me by handing me \$500 and said, you won fair and square. What did you do to Katsuki's car to give it that extra power and traction? I knew that I would not remain in Japan indefinitely, so I was willing to share my knowledge.

So instead of making enemies during my year in Japan, I actually made some friends. By the time my parents summoned me back to the states, I had given my fellow Japanese racers some of my expertise and tricks.

Back home again.

The Need for Speed (Chapter 3)

Back in the states I had calmed down some. No more getting into trouble. I

got a job working in a custom shop helping to build race cars. This was low end stuff. Mostly the cars were used in dirt track racing. I came up with some innovations that improved the dirt track performance and control. I got to test the cars out. One time while doing that, some sponsor saw me do an impressive lap around the circuit. He approached me and asked if I wanted to try out racing. How could I refuse? For one thing, the year I spent in Japan driving the slip and slide races provided me with a skill few here in the states possessed. Dirt track racing was just more slip and slide to me.

Three months later, I was one of the top drivers on the leader board. I was starting to make a name for myself. There is nothing like real racing to improve your skills. I learned to control my speed. At first, I would just go all out and would be leading 80% of the time, then toward the end, my car started to lose performance. I was driving it into the ground. I also learned how to go high against the wall, then quickly slip down and cut the corner to pass. I kept winning and was also raking in some decent cash. My parents even started to come to my races and became my biggest fans. I think they were just glad that I was not causing trouble anymore. I did this for $\frac{3}{4}$ of a year, then my fortune changed for the better again. My sponsor introduced me to a friend of his who was a race promoter. He asked if I was ready to get out of the dirt. Of course he was referring to moving up to asphalt ovals. I told him I was ready. The cars I was now driving were NASCAR quality, but much faster than any I had driven before. That was right down my alley. Fast was what I was and leaned toward. My initial success was underwhelming. Just like before, I sprinted to the lead, but on the final laps my car engine would blow up. My promoter manager was not happy. Can't you at least finish a race without destroying my car? Can't you build me a car that doesn't blow up all the time? We were not getting along well. I decided to insert myself into the design team. I asked, why is my engine always failing? They said, you drive it so hard that the oil degenerates and the piston casings heat up and melt. OK lets find some chemical engineer and a metals expert and see if we can pick their brains.

Some of the team members knew of just such guys. I had a sit down session with both of them and they did indeed give us some ideas. The chemical engineer told us about a synthetic oil that had a higher breakdown level. The

metallurgical engineer told us about some titanium materials that could be made into the cylinder casting. I also suggested some suspension improvements for better cornering stability. One of our team members threw in his idea for a better aerodynamic rear spoiler that would cause the air to push down on the rear and give better traction. We made all these adjustments and low and behold, I drove the hell out of that car in the next race and finished in first place 20 feet ahead. And the car was still running like new. I was back in business.

With moderate success comes side benefits. Girls who hang around the track hoping to hook up with an up and coming drivers. Rodeo groupies also do the same thing. They call them "Buckle Bunnies". Race track groupies have a less favorable nickname. They call them "Pit Lizards". Well, in spite of my grade school bullies calling me gay, I was anything but. So I did partake in the booty associated with my moderate success. No pun intended. I was too young to be tied down to any one girl, but I wasn't a total jerk about it. I respected them and if it didn't turn out, we went our separate ways kind of still friends.

I was building my reputation one win at a time, but you don't get the big call without earning your spot. It would be a few years before that happened. Meanwhile, I was enjoying the success I had. After my last win, I was invited to a dinner at the promoter's home. I figured this was just a way of us getting to know each other outside the track. I was fine with that. I showed up with no more expectation than hopefully a good meal. Upon entry to his home, I was introduced to his daughter Loraine. She went by the nickname of Rainey. Now I will say that I had seen her at the track a few times and she was a real beauty. She was not a pit lizard by any means. During the short time while I was there at the dinner, I was totally smitten. She seemed to not notice me at all. I imagined she had all the suitors she could handle. She surprised me when I was taking my leave by saying hope to see you again.

Well she did see me again and again. I couldn't pass up this opportunity. She was not like anyone I had been with before. She was knowledgeable in all aspects of racing from who were the front runners to which were the best pit crews and car sponsors. Not sure how she felt, but to me it was a match

made in heaven.

I continued my winning ways and it eventually paid off. No, I did not get called up to be a NASCAR driver. I did get called up to be a back up driver though. The plus for me in all this was I got to test out the #1 car prior to the race. I gained lots of track experience without having to crash in a real race. I was not needed to make any modifications to the ride. These guys already had the best experts in the field.

Our car number was 17. I wonder if that was a bad omen. We seemed to always be positioned way back in the pack.

Michigan International Speedway

Our team #1 driver crashed in the previous race and received minor injuries. He was unable to drive in the next race. Backup driver have to substitute. That was me. The car owner asks, "Are you ready for this? I have been ready my whole life. OK, you are it.

I started in #18 position. My instinct is to go fast. These cars can take it up to a point. Anyway, as the race progressed, I kept moving up. Now I am in 6th position. There are 30 laps to go. I hear on my headphones, put the pedal to the metal. This is an old truckers adage. The 16 wheelers had metal floor boards. It literally means, step on it. No one has to tell me twice. This is what I lived for. In this race, two of the favorites are the twin Shaw brothers. They were currently running 1, 2. With only 10 laps to go, I was gaining on them. I was now in 3rd place. I followed them for the next 5 laps, then I was going to make my move. I had dreamed about this and even practiced it in some of the other races. I should even call this my signature move. It had never failed me before. As I approached the second place car, he moved out of the way. I wasn't sure what he was doing, but it seemed to play right into my plans. I was ready for it. What I didn't see was him running off the apron onto the grass. His car spun 45 degrees. He accelerated and T-boned me right into the rail. Both of our cars were shattered, but his brother went on to win.

Fortunately, I was not injured in the crash, but the car was totaled. I told the owner, sorry for the mishap. He said, are you crazy? That is the closest we have ever come to winning. I have other cars. You are up for the next race too.

I was told the Shaw brothers were notorious for playing dirty. I can attest to that fact first hand. I won't fall for that trick a second time.

Avondale, AZ Phoenix Raceway

Once again we were starting toward the back of the pack. I was fast when I needed to be, but I was also patient when I needed to be. Lots can happen in a long race like this one. Driving one of these NASCARs takes endurance, precision, split second timing, did I say endurance. It can seem monotonous driving around in a big oval, the scream of the engines, the vibrations, flying by the stands. The comments over the headphones from the team leader were a welcome break. You have to be alert for that moment when your life is suddenly at stake. That moment came for me on the 150th lap. Someone up ahead crashed and spun out. Suddenly there was nothing but smoke. I hit the brakes, but still could not see. As luck would have it I escaped crashing and came out of the smoke in 3rd place. Oh deja vu! There running 1,2 in front of me again were the Shaw brothers. We all had one more required pit stop to make and no better time than to take it under the yellow flag. I had asked the owner to purchase a special set of tires. These had extra traction. They weren't the fastest type, but they had good braking power and good grip on the pavement. Our pit crew did a good job and I came out of the pit in the same place behind the Shaw brothers. Here we go! One of the Shaw brothers started to make the same move as before. He let me pass. I bet he didn't know who was behind him. This time I saw him perform the apron/grass move again. Fool me once, shame on you. Fool me twice shame on me! As he came at me to T-bone, I slammed on the brakes. He flew by me just inches from my front bumper and smashed into the wall. I escaped unscathed. I hit the gas and my tires dig into the pavement. I accelerated right behind the other brother. This time I did perform my signature move and it worked. I went high toward the wall, then ducked down onto the apron

and slid right by as the checkered flag dropped down. I found out later, that the brother who was in front, was the same one who T-boned me in the last race. That just made my victory that much more sweeter. We had the party of all parties that night. I had just given the owner his first NASCAR win. Rainey was there to celebrate with me. She was an avid NASCAR fan, and my fan too. I was now the #1 driver permanently.

The Need for Speed
(Chapter 4)
Talladega Superspeedway

If any track was designed for me, it would be this one. Lap speeds are sometimes in excess of 200 mph. We qualified at 185 mph. Instead of the typical 17th position, we started out at 8th. It is the most banked NASCAR track at somewhere around 33 degrees. Its like you can go all out the entire lap. Of course your car would not hold up for 188 laps at 2.6 miles each. The Talladega 500 is slightly over 500 miles. Bill Elliot clocked a record 212 mph qualifying lap in 1967. That is still the record today.

I was nervous for the first time in my career. Nervous and amped up at the same time. This is the first race after my win last month. I didn't want to let my sponsors down or myself.

The first half of the race was routine. If you could call screaming around an oval at nearly 200 mph routine. At lap 80, the yellow flag came out. We all slowed to 90 mph and most took a pit stop. I had slipped to 10th place, but with the crash, I now found myself in 5th. There was a constant chatter between me and the pit boss. How's she running. Like a Singer sewing machine. My left wheel has a slight wobble. See if you can do something about that in our next pit. How are you holding up? I need a cool drink, it is hot in here. Inside a NASCAR the temperature can be anywhere from 100 to 120. I asked for air conditioning, but was denied. Ha! I am good to go. Just tell me when you want me to move up. Wait until the final 30 laps. Just hang in there and keep her steady. Sounds good to me.

[NASCAR: Sounds of Speed - YouTube - - Video Search Results \(yahoo.com\)](#)

Put this link into your browser to hear real NASCAR racing sounds.

I had worked my way up to 3rd place. I was about to make another pass when I got bumped from behind. WTF? My crew boss said, that was nothing. Just a little love kiss. This is typical NASCAR antics on the final laps. Just hold your concentration and try another pass when you get the chance. I did as he said. With 5 laps to go, I made a pass and was now in 2nd place. Let's see what is left in the tank. I accelerated and was about to make another pass when the leader pulled away. His car had a little more left in the tank than mine. I got the white flag on the next lap and cruised in for second place on the final lap.

I felt a little let down then took stock of my situation. I had just finished second at Talladega. That was nothing to sneeze at.

The owner didn't look disappointed at all. Great driving Rip as, he shook my hand.

I was at the top of my game. Future looking bright. I was a hot shot NASCAR driver and had my share of proposals from the pit lizards. I was not interested. I already had the best girlfriend a guy could ask for until she said those words no guy wants to hear. "We need to talk!"

Rainey told me her dad said that she needed to stay away from me. Why I asked? He said that now that I were gaining fame and fortune, that it was just a matter of time before I moved on from her. He didn't want to see his daughter with a broken heart. I said I never thought of other girls. Still, she was not persuaded to change her mind. OK, if you want some space I am willing to wait. Truth be told, I am not interested in any of those pit girls. You are the only one I want. In reality this was a punch in the gut.

I tried to just let it take its course. She would come back to me in time. I really did need to concentrate on my driving. Race car driving is not like other sports. Football, basketball, baseball, soccer professionals, all had to practice to keep their bodies at a high performance level. Race car drives are different. We do need to stay physically in shape, eat proper, and all that. No

fat drivers win NASCAR races. It is a sport that takes its toll on your body and mind.

For the next series of races my mind was not in it. I slipped from one of the top contenders down the list to lucky to finish. My car owner noticed my declining performance and asked what was wrong. I told him not to worry I would get my head back into racing.

I made some adequate finishes in the next several race. I thought I was on the rebound. Daytona was coming up soon. This was my dream race.

I needed some breathing space to sort things out.

I called Rainey. Look, I need to know where I stand with you. Everybody is telling me that you are a distraction. The thing is, you are the kind of distraction I need away from racing. If you really want to split with me, I understand and will leave you alone. But if you think we have a future, meet me at the Fort Lauderdale marina. I have chartered a boat to just get away from everything, including racing. Except you are the only one I don't want to get away from.

To my surprise and relief she showed up at the dock with her suitcase and a bikini. We took a chartered cruise to the Bahamas. We spent an amazing week snorkeling, fishing, and relaxing. I told her that I want to spend the rest of my life with her. She said, there is usually a way to do that. Do I have to spell it out? Men are so dense when it comes to what woman want. I asked her to marry me. She said yes. We solidified our relationship and my mind was clear on what I needed to do. We were engaged and that should satisfy her father until the wedding date is set.

Daytona, here I come!

The Need for Speed
(Chapter 5)
Daytona 500

The race actually occurred Sunday, February 19, 2023 for real.



The Announcer:

Joey Logano, Ross Chastain and Christopher Bell are among the top drivers in today's Daytona 500. Another name that has been mentioned as possible rookie of the year, is Rip Thorn. He has had some impressive victories and finished 2nd at Talladega. Racing begins shortly.

I was past being nervous. I have been waiting for this moment my entire life.

Whatever happens, I know that I will give it my all. Now that Rainey and I are back together my mind was totally focused on racing. It has to be with the best drivers in today's lineup. Any of the 33 drivers are capable of winning. My pit crew really put in a full effort to get my car up to top performance. I am hoping that if I end up in the same situation as I was at Talladega, my car will not be the reason I lose. Can't think about that. There are 32 other reasons for me to lose.

“Gentlemen Start Your Engines”. We followed the pace car around the

circuit. I felt chills up and down my spine. Everyone is doing the weave back and forth to heat up their tires. As the pace car accelerates across the starting line the green flag drops. The race is on.



Ross Chastain sprints to the front. I am positioned back in #12 spot. Not to worry I have 500 miles to catch up.

The race had just gotten started when I see smoke and the yellow flag comes out. Looks like a big crash.



Maybe starting in the middle was a good thing. Six cars are out of the race. No one is playing it safe. It is all out or go home.

The next hundred laps pass by in a flash, then another yellow flag. At least my car is not getting worn out by going all out.



This one happened behind me. A big pile up. Good thing there are steel wires between the track and the fans. Hope no one got hurt.

I wasn't completely left out of the action. Several laps later Kyle Busch nips my back bumper and spins into the wall. He is out of the race. I fishtailed for 20 yards, then straighten it out. A close call.



I found myself in 5th place with only 50 laps to go. My car is handling like a dream. I just got new rubber and fuel on the last pit stop. I start to catch up to the leaders.

5th place, 4th place, 3rd place, I am in a good position.

During the final 5 laps each of us were swapping the lead back and forth. It was anyone's game. There were just inches between our bumpers. This is where they separate the men from the boys.

Its me, Christopher Bell, and Bubba Wallace. What's that old man doing up here on the front lines. I am only 21, he is over 30. This high speed racing is only for the young. Tell that to Richard Petty and Dale Earnhardt. Petty was 55 when he retired. Earnhardt was 49 when he was killed in a race.

I was in third when we got the white flag. It would be difficult to find a place to pass two cars on the final lap. Bubba Wallace was going high up on the wall and was inching past Bell. I tucked right in behind Wallace and by drafting him was pulled past Bell. On the final turn I thought of performing my signature move. Some instinct told me this would not work against Bubba. Perhaps someone had done some research and knew my tricks. I faked my move high, then faked my move low. Bubba tried to cut me off. I surprised him when I went high again and sped by him. My car did not falter.



I took the checkered flag near the wall by a half a foot.

Rainey joined me to celebrate in Victory Lane. So did the owner and my pit crew.



My dream had come true!

The End