

## Blaze destroys site of vacant Troutman Shirt Co. factory

By JONATHAN WEAVER

An afternoon fire destroyed the former Troutman Shirt Company building on Perry Road in Troutman Wednesday.

Firefighters were dispatched to the vacant, 5,000-square-foot building at 3 p.m. after a neighbor spotted the fire.

Ann Gilleland was walking a visitor to her front door when she noticed flames lapping out of the back left side of the building. A man standing nearby told her to call 911.

When firefighters got to the scene, flames had engulfed the entire building, said Iredell County Fire Marshal Chuck Gallyon.

Work crews had been tear-

ing down the old building to put up a new metal warehouse. The interior was still up along with a tar and gravel roof. The building was partly owned by Earl Spencer.

Those work crews had gone to lunch and found the fire when they got back to work.

Volunteer fire fighters from Shepherds, West Iredell and Monticello responded to assist the Troutman Fire Department with the blaze.

It took crews about an hour and a half to get the fire under control, said Troutman Chief Mark Hinson.

The Iredell County Fire Marshal's Office ruled that the fire was accidental. Investigators are still unsure of how it started.

## Sheriff's deputies catch 4 teen robbery suspects

By JONATHAN WEAVER

Iredell sheriff's deputies say four teens pedaled more than 10 miles on stolen bicycles to cart off an estimated \$10,000-worth of merchandise — everything from VCRs to candy bars — from homes and a business over a period of three days.

According to Sheriff Phil Redmond, the case progressed this way:

On Tuesday, around 1 p.m., Deputy Doyle Summers spotted a teen riding a bike around Triplett Road and Oswalt Amity Road. Summers stopped Christopher Fish, 16, of Statesville, to see why he wasn't in school.

At that same time, Deputy Tim Vanderburg was taking a report of a stolen bicycle on Cumberland Road. Authorities later learned that Fish lives near Cumberland Road, and the description of the stolen bike matched the one Fish was riding.

When confronted, Fish told officers he got the bike from a 15-year-old who lived near him. Fish was then taken to his residence. Deputies located the 15-year-old and found gold jewelry on him. He couldn't tell them where he got it.

Detective Sgt. C.A. Poteat then learned that the 15-year-old had stolen the bike that Fish was driving. Deputies began asking more questions, and soon learned that the 15-year-old, Fish and Darnell Wood, 18, of Statesville, had broken into a home on Triplett Road early Tuesday and taken the jewelry.

More investigators arrived, and the youths directed them to a stash of property in a wooded area near the home they reportedly burglarized.

A short time later, Poteat and Lt. Stanley Watkins were traveling on Amity Hill Road when they located Wood walking along the side of the road.

Wood took the detectives to even more property he had stashed on Hemlock Road.

After deputies sorted out the situation, they learned that on Saturday, Daniel Rumble, 16, of Statesville, and the 15-year-old had bro-

ken into Speight Auto Sales on Shelton Avenue.

After checking out what was inside, they left. They returned later with Wood to take merchandise from the store.

Later Saturday, Rumble, Wood and the 15-year-old then reportedly broke into Wayne Tudor's home.

During all the robberies, deputies believe the suspects fled the scenes on bicycles with their loot in tow. "The put a lot of the smaller stuff into backpacks," Redmond said.

Stolen property found in two residences and a wooded area included: a vacuum cleaner, about 50 Playstation games, jewelry, DVD players, a satellite dish, video security system, and various other small items.

A small amount of the items taken had already been sold. No charges have been filed against the buyers. An estimated 90 to 95 percent of the items stolen were recovered, said Lt. Stanley Watkins.

Deputies charged: Rumble with misdemeanor breaking and entering, two counts of felony breaking and entering and two counts of larceny after breaking and entering. Wood with three counts of felony breaking and entering, two counts of larceny after breaking and entering and misdemeanor possession of stolen property.

Fish with felony breaking and entering, larceny after breaking and entering, felony possession of stolen goods and misdemeanor possession of stolen goods. The 15-year-old with misdemeanor breaking and entering, three counts of felony breaking and entering, three counts of larceny after breaking and entering and two counts of misdemeanor larceny.

Fish, Rumble and Wood were all placed into Iredell County Jail under an \$8,000 secured bond. Juvenile petitions are being sought for the 15-year-old, Poteat said.

Anyone with further information on these crimes or suspects is asked to call the Iredell County Sheriff's Office at 704-878-3180 or Poteat at 704-924-4042.

## Obituary

Ronnie Dingler

Ronald "Ronnie" Lynn Dingler, 48, of Davidson died Tuesday, Aug. 21, 2001 at Carolinas Medical Center. Born July 3, 1953 in Mecklenburg County, he was the son of Bill and Lorraine McGrady Dingler. Mr. Dingler had been a self-employed carpenter for 20 years.

In addition to his parents, he is survived by a twin brother, Donnie Dingler of York, S.C. and one sister, Paula Starnes of Charlotte.

Funeral services were conducted Aug. 23 at the Cavin-Cook Funeral Home Chapel. Burial will follow at Willow Valley Cemetery.

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## Wreck probe inconclusive

### NASCAR plans no major changes after Earnhardt inquiry offers few answers

By MIKE MULHERN  
Media General News Service

ATLANTA — Anyone looking for a nice neat wrap-up to the long-running investigation of Dale Earnhardt's death didn't get it here Tuesday during a two-hour news conference by NASCAR to present the results of its six-month investigation into the wreck in which Earnhardt was killed in the Daytona 500.

In fact, the session raised more questions about Earnhardt's death than it really answered. It certainly didn't provide any definitive answers. There was no "smoking gun" revealed.

So the controversy continues. NASCAR's focus continues to be on Earnhardt's seat belt, which, once again, NASCAR said broke during the wreck, and which its medical experts yesterday pointed to as possibly the major factor in Earnhardt's death.

NASCAR's experts also raised the question that Earnhardt's seat-belt installation techniques might be at issue.

Still, NASCAR's experts wouldn't come right out and point to the seat belt alone. And after six months of hearing pleas from drivers, crew chiefs and team owners, NASCAR, through president Mike Helton, said yesterday that it has no plans to order any major changes in car design. Drivers have been pushing for more "crushability" in the front end of stock cars.

Black box wreck-data recorders will be added to race cars next season, Helton said, and NASCAR wants to hire a medical liaison to travel with the tour. NASCAR will add a wreck investigator to its staff and will continue to study safety issues, particularly seat belts.

But HANS (head and neck restraint systems) devices won't be mandated, no composite safety seats are in the works, and no soft walls are in the works.

And NASCAR executives offered no solid answer for why they undertook such an exhaustive investigation now, rather than last spring after the death of Adam Petty or last summer after the deaths of Kenny Irwin and Tony Roper.

The key point of yesterday's presentation was that NASCAR's wreck experts argued that Earnhardt died because of a basilar skull fracture because his head probably hit something in the car, either the steering wheel or the back

of the head rest, possibly because of a broken seat belt.

The two principal experts NASCAR presented were Dr. Dean Sicking, a civil engineer and the director of Midwest Roadside Safety Facility at the University of Nebraska, and Dr. James Raddin Jr., a medical doctor and director of the Biodynamic Research Corporation in San Antonio.

They provided an analysis of what they said was the broken belt discovered in Earnhardt's car. And they said that Earnhardt's head apparently rotated as it stretched extremely hard to the right when his car hit the wall just as it was also being hit by Kenny Schrader's car.

Raddin said he couldn't say that Earnhardt might have survived if he had been wearing a HANS. Raddin said he was not able to determine precisely when the belt broke, but that it did break during impact with the wall.

The two basically backed up NASCAR's general contention that its Winston Cup cars don't need major changes. In fact, they both argued against changing the race cars without careful study.

"Those things are being studied, but I think we need to be very cautious as to how they're implemented so we don't try to fix the last accident and end up creating a number of other accidents in things that are being handled very well right now," Sicking said.

Raddin said he came to the conclusion that Earnhardt was killed not just because of a violent whiplash that a head-and-neck restraint system might have protected against. Raddin said he came to that conclusion after reading the written autopsy report.

That conclusion seems to directly contradict the conclusion of Dr. Barry Myers, a medical wreck expert from Duke picked by a Florida judge to look at the actual autopsy photos in April.

Why the discrepancy? "First of all, I did not see the photos," Raddin said. "The reason why they are under legal seal."

"The discrepancy if there is a discrepancy, is not really a discrepancy related to two reports analyzing the same information and coming to different conclusions. I had access to the data as written from the autopsy, which I found to be detailed and adequate to reach reasonable conclusions.

"But I also had done a significant amount of work and

had the opportunity to utilize the significant work that Dean Sicking and his group did, which gave us different data upon which to base our conclusions."

"I think what you find is that there is a conclusion from Dr. Myers' report that it is likely to be some neck stretch with some head impact. I'm finding the same thing, except that based upon my kinematic analysis, I'm finding the location to be different."

But even Dr. Raddin and Dr. Sicking, despite voluminous data on just about everything related to the wreck, couldn't provide any simple, clear-cut explanations.

NASCAR's George Pyne emphasized "an obvious failure in the restraint system. NASCAR has never seen the failure of a belt before. NASCAR has never been aware of a 'dumping' issue (a tearing of the belt)."

Would Earnhardt's head have hit the steering wheel if the belt hadn't broken?

"I have not made a separate study of that, but I think that's certainly possible," Dr. Raddin said. "I think it's certainly possible for a head impact to occur with a steering wheel with an intact belt, because that does in fact happen."

Why did the belt break?

Bill Simpson, a safety expert who manufactures the belts for NASCAR teams, had said earlier that his belts are safe when mounted properly. And NASCAR officials had told teams earlier this season to check the way their belts were mounted.

Dr. Raddin said that Earnhardt's belt was not improperly mounted. "I can tell you very precisely that it was not a result of the mispositioning. It was not a misadjusted belt."

In fact, NASCAR's experts seemed to indicate that it was not possible to install seat belts incorrectly according to Simpson's instructions.

"Did Dale Earnhardt care about safety?" Pyne asked rhetorically. "The way he set up his restraint system he felt was in his best interests. He designed his restraint system. And someone who has been in some of the most dramatic wrecks in NASCAR history has a right to that."

What specifically will NASCAR change to make cars and tracks safer?

"It's not a quick fix," Helton said. "There is not a resolution tomorrow. We are not going to react just for the sake of reaction. There is not a bulletin ready to go out to change walls at race tracks or roll bars in race cars."

"But we are going to do everything we can not to have another separated belt."

"The one big change will be the communications process."

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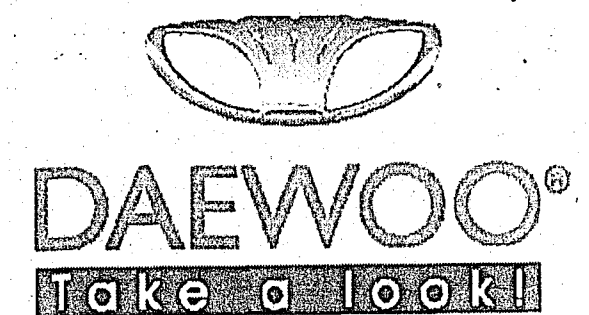
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