

Charles Brown

Side 1:

Charles was born in Asheville in 1967, briefly lived in Charlotte but returned in 3rd grade, to graduate from T.C. Robertson High School. He attended Montreat-Anderson College. Was active in sports and spent two years with the Baltimore Orioles in Frederick, MD. He was released due to injury and took up stock car racing in 1987.

[16] His father raced before he was born, on the Asheville-Weaverville track when it was dirt, Greenville SC - all over the place. He won Track Championship in 1963. Both his father's brothers were mechanical. [Alvin Brown, Trenton Brown, Perry Brown]

[23] He was interested in baseball but wished he had started working on cars earlier because it took longer to be a good mechanic. He owned a car and worked on it every spare minute. Sponsors helped pay the bills.

[35] Elmer Ownbey (see his tape) knew him at the Post Office. His father worked the third shift so he could work on his car in the daylight. If he had a good week he might break even but tires, gas, gas for the truck used to haul the car, cost a lot of money. It is necessary to have sponsors to pay for the cost. [Elmer Ownbey]

[52] Charles sold his car and now only owns a new motor he has had built. He drives for other people. With a wife and three sons to support he can't afford the expense of owning his own car. He is temporarily living in Tennessee where his wife's family live but is planning on moving to Leicester soon. [Vana, Dillon, Garrett, Austin]

[70] He met his wife while they were both attending Milligan College in Tennessee. He was playing baseball and was drafted to play for the Orioles.

[80] He never saw the races at the Ball Park [McCormick Field] but he has seen pictures of it with Banjo Mathews (see enclosed). His father had an 8 millimeter film made of the Asheville-Weaverville speedway and the Harris track. This is a silent movie. Johnson is also in it. [Banjo Mathews, Junior Johnson]

[99] The Winston Cup Race will be held April 13, five days before the Amboy Speedway. The Amboy races are held on April 18th or 20th every year. The Winston Races are shown on TV on Sundays, so the Amboy track is not running then.

[110] We discuss the Winston signs at the speedway and the cigarette endorsement (see the enclosed magazine and reference to cigarette advertising controversy) There are 65 Winston tracks across the country sanctioned by NASCAR (National Stock Car Racing). Racing is big in the Southeast.

[129] Advertisers sponsor cars and drivers as they would advertise in the newspaper or on TV. They pay about \$100 a week and reach 2,500-5,000 people. The drivers go out and talk to

the people and, if appropriate, take their car to the sponsor's place of business. Drivers use four tires a week and each tire costs \$110. The Speedway people order the tires which are brought in by truck.

[169] NASCAR has recently developed a truck division (see enclosure). There are various divisions - his is the "grass roots" or lowest level. His division around here, however, is the highest level one can go locally - it is like the Winston Cup around here. These are not standard cars - they have to be built. His father's car was built in Park City Racing Equipment Co. in Georgia. It had a Winston Cup motor with 535 horse power. The "All Pro" division has a similar motor but a fiberglass body. The Bush Grand National or Truck is another series. The closest Bush race is in Hickory and there are two in Bristol.

[187] Originally the NASCARS started as regular but modified cars. They were made famous here through Banjo. Now it is impossible to use those cars on the road because motors won't drive at lower MPH. The tires are slick. They have no grooves for the road, only being suitable for the track. [Banjo Mathews]

[199] In order to run a car one needs 2-3 guys on hand so all you have to do is drive the car. (see newspaper clipping about competition to be a pit stop helper)

[210] He has been a pit man and carried tires for Preston in Daytona. The Bush race was on Saturday and Winston Cup on Sunday. This is almost as much fun as driving. Drivers have an option to go into the pits to change tires or make adjustments on their car. Ninety-five percent go to the pits. [Robert Preston]

[223] On the local level the laps are short (75 compared to 500 for the Winston Cup) so fewer tires are changed unless they aren't holding up. The tires cannot be re-treads. When a tire gets hot the car breaks sidewise. They cost \$1,400 for four and for big races 7-11 sets are used.

[243] His father told him about the early days of racing when it was the outgrowth of running liquor in this area. His father worked for Banjo who used to go to junk yards to get old cars. He would "gut them out" and add roll bars.

[272] Bob Terrell wrote about Banjo, a very smart man of few words. He got a recliner from Charles' store. His wife died 15 years ago and affected him deeply.

[301] Driver's wives are concerned about safety but his mother knew what it meant to him and his father. He can't get it out of his blood. It is not so dangerous here but on bigger tracks a driver can get "jarred up" a bit. [Evelyn Brown]

[323] He hopes that the people he is driving for now will have the finances to move up to the Bush national in a year or two. He won't get his own car again because of the expense.

[344] When he was playing baseball his father told him to go as far as he could and he would help him with racing. In 1988-1992 he was with him when he wasn't winning and wrecking a lot, but he loved it more than his son. He stayed by and made sure everything was safe. He had a

stroke at the track and died 4-5 hours later. He has won a bunch of races now and his father would have had a blast if he could have seen it. His children seem to like going to the races but he is not going to urge or discourage them.

[395] He doesn't know any bootlegging stories but his father told him about the time he and some friends flipped a car over in Emma. He went back and stuck a hole in one of the tires so the police wouldn't think he had been drinking.

[414] Car racing used to be considered a sport for southern country boys but this is not true anymore. The sport is growing all over the country.

[424] There is no cross over between motor cycles and car racing. It is necessary to keep oneself in good shape. The more you race the better you get. Pressley is 63 years old. [Bob Pressley]

[476] Drivers do not go to the track to practice but to see that everything is in good shape. Most people in this area don't have the money to go to other tracks twice a week. They need 2 cars and boys to help them full time.

[509] The Amboy Speedway is called "The River." Complaints about noise from West Asheville residents (see enclosure) resulted in a mandate to put mufflers on the cars. This cuts the noise by 1/4 but, causing more back pressure to the exhaust, creates a little more horse power and no significant loss of speed!

[533] [I was going to interview Jim Harrin who owned the track for several years and went to his body shop. However, I learned that his wife had recently died and he was in Florida selling their winter home. Lou Harshaw, who had bought property for the Brown family when she was dealing in real estate suggested Charles - See her tape] Charles remembers Harrin as a child and knew him at the track. Harrin always had the sand and gravel plant by the track which is now owned by Gregg. [Jim Harrin, Roger Gregg]

[550] While there are no "fan clubs" the people who come to the track seem to be loyal and come regularly. The fees for admission vary - the first race of the year it is \$15 and \$15 once a month when there are two races and two purses. After this the cost is \$10 for adults and \$5 for children. The sponsors pay part of the purses and the race track owners the rest, from the admission fee. The rewards are: \$1500 for the winner, \$1000 second, \$750 for third and down the line. Running a track is chancy business but Amboy is a gold mine. Before the improvements were made the bleachers were too far from the action and it was hard to see.

Side 2:

His father started the furniture store with his brother in partnership in 1973. His father bought out his brother's share in 1982. Charles worked on weekends but had no interest in the business. One employee has been with the store since he was 9 and the other since he was in the 7th grade. His mother works there (see her photo) and if neither he nor his mother are there, the store is well-cared for. He wants to work out every day and would like to race full time. [Alvin Brown, Perry Brown]

[2/14] Each day he drives here from Johnson City, where he still lives, checks in at the store and goes to work out in the race shop in Marshall before going home. His mother has lived in Arden since 1983 or 1984 and he will be moving to Leicester in May.

[2/30] The furniture store business has its ups and downs. It is not an outlet store as one finds in the Blue Ridge Mall or the newly opened Stein Mart (see enclosed) on Merrimon. Their concept is not like Pearlman's with lights, "set ups" and decorative frills. Their store is more like a factory floor - a customer picks out an item, pays and puts it on his truck. They don't go to the furniture markets in High Point. Sales representatives come to the store and 20-30 recliners are bought and put on the floor. His uncle purchased "over runs" and seconds. He also bought "close outs", purchasing two truckloads of bedroom suites. He is afraid to buy too many so buys a lot of different suites.

[2/92] Newspaper advertising is too expensive for him. (\$2000 for a full page in color.) He checked with new customers who said that they knew of the business through TV ads (81%). He does the commercials.

[2/114] They have the same markup on furniture now as they had in 1988 and can beat 99% of other stores on price. The larger stores charge close to 100% markup. Most customers pay cash on the line and any needing credit do this through a financing company in Kentucky. There is no in-house financing. They honor Master and Visa cards despite the 3% service charge.

[2/144] He is concerned with his charge card expenses. He charged \$7,500 on his Master card for golf expenses. He got rid of his clubs because they were too much temptation.

[2/156] Asheville is probably the only city in the country with four Donald Ross golf courses. Grove Park costs \$10 for 18 holes for a member, \$40 for a non-member going with a member. At Biltmore Forest Country Club, one has to be a member or go with one as well as the Asheville Country Club (which used to be the Beaver Lake Club). The Municipal Golf Club costs \$32 for 18 holes.

[2/167] The furniture business provides a good living. His father was not rich, had no hidden accounts, but gave freely to his mom and himself. He would have bought him a Bush car if he could. However, if he told his mother he wanted to sell tomorrow, she would go along. The business pays insurance and gives a way to make a living.

[2/194] His job is to do the TV ads and he helps unload furniture. He can't stand standing around. They have reached their market share and he sees no way of getting bigger and better. Over 60% of his customers are returns. His father put in 9 hours a day in the store and he thinks it is hard for the workers to see him playing golf and racing. His mother carries a lot of the responsibility when she is not helping his wife with the children.

[2/226] His uncle Perry has a million square foot shop in Charlotte. He has no computer but knows his stock and makes money. [Perry Brown]

[2/274] Solid wood furniture is expensive - usually all that is needed is a thin veneer on the top and front. They carry solid ash and some all particle board. They bought seconds once and tagged them as such.

[2/303] In their TV ad they don't advertise particle board as solid. People are more interested in quality and the "high end" merchandise sells as well as the "low end". They only sell mattresses with coil construction - not latex or sponge rubber.

[2/325] He always feels guilty when he is on the golf course, not playing well and has reached the 17th hole. He went with the gang to play at the Grove Park on Sunday and shot 74, but won't go again and miss church with his family.

[2/383] The family goes to Trinity Baptist in Fairview. The children go to Sunday School and so does he. This takes the whole morning. He wants to play all the time and the only way you can stay good is to play enough. He goes to the driving range but finds this frustrating. "If I want to do something, I want to do it good."

[2/413] He has been drinking four Mountain Dews (caffeine) in a morning and is trying to quit "cold turkey." He is also going to try to quit dipping tobacco, although it helps him kill time while driving back and forth from Johnson City.