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Thriving decal company traces roots to NASCAR advertising

BY KELLY POE

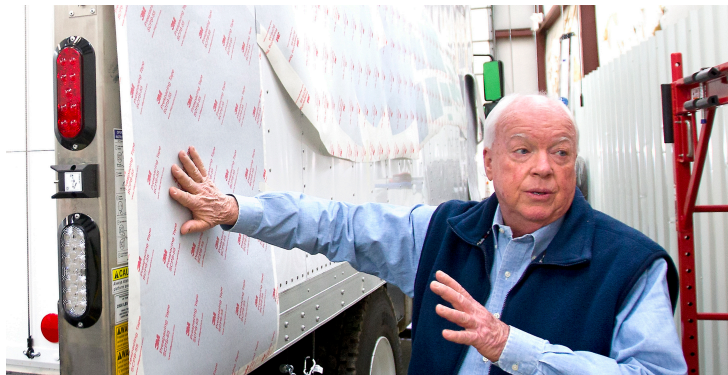
HIGH POINT - Images of NASCAR drivers decorate the walls of McKenzie Industries on Kivett Drive. Dale Earnhardt. Tyler Walker. An autographed cover of Danica Patrick on Sports Illustrated.

Owner John McKenzie loves to name drop as he points to the images. Those were his cars back in the day. Well, maybe not his cars — but those were his decals.

Today, McKenzie's company applies commercial decals to truck bodies. But along the way, he and his brother, Steve McKenzie, revolutionized advertising in NASCAR.

The brothers grew up in Trinity, where Richard Petty was their hero.

In 1981, the two started moonlighting in decal application. Their first client: Hatteras Yachts, which



John McKenzie with a Mickey unit in the process of having decals applied at McKenzie Industries in High Point.

was then located in High Point.

"Once we were able to do decals that stayed on the yachts in saltwater and guarantee that they would work and perform, that's what gave us the idea to go to Richard Childress in 1982," McKenzie said. "That was our first racing account, and he had the Piedmont Airlines sponsorship."

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Mickey Truck Bodies is the most versatile manufacturer of specialized truck bodies and trailers in the world, with a customer base that reads like a "who's who among global brands." Leading companies across dozens of industries - from beverage to battery, from furniture to fuel, from snack foods to fast foods - deliver their products in Mickey bodies and trailers, and they all require that those products are depicted with "picture perfect" graphics.

So at Mickey, we put as much attention into how your body or trailer looks as we do into how it works.

The same folks that revolutionized decal installation on the NASCAR circuit are now applying their craft to Mickey's truck bodies and trailers to produce the most impressive rolling billboards on the road today. McKenzie Industries is Mickey's exclusive decal application partner - installing decals is all they do and they do it to perfection, whether it's an image of an icy cold beverage bottle, an automotive battery, vending machines, a box of cookies, a propane tank or dining room furniture.

We work very closely with our decal suppliers and McKenzie Industries to make sure we are using the highest quality materials that are produced to the customer's exact specifications.

The article in this brochure, which appeared in the February 27, 2014 edition of The Greensboro News & Record, looks at McKenzie's transition from NASCAR to Mickey in much greater detail. You can also read more about our partnership with McKenzie Industries on our web site at www.mickeybody.com/decal-dynasty. From one era and one industry to the next, it's been the same material, the same precision installation, and the same passion for picture perfection.

Sincerely,

Dean Sink
CEO, Mickey Truck Bodies

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Continued from other side

Up until then, NASCAR sponsorships had been hand-painted onto cars. It was a time-consuming, imperfect process — and almost impossible to fix if there was a wreck.

Decals were another story.

"We were just good, old Randolph County boys, and we liked racing a lot, so that's why we got into it," McKenzie said.

In 1982, the McKenzies incorporated Motorsports Designs, which they believe put the very first vinyl decal in a NASCAR race.



A Mickey truck body gets "wrapped" by a McKenzie installer.

"The difference between the painted race car and Childress' decaled car ... there was just no comparison," McKenzie said. "The TV people ... they loved it. They said, 'Man, this puts NASCAR on the map.'"

NASCAR was once a very regional sport, concentrated heavily in the Southeast, said Dan Pierce, a UNC-Asheville professor who wrote a book about the sport's history.

"When Piedmont Airlines was in existence, NASCAR was much more regional than it is now," Pierce said. "As NASCAR's popularity grows, the companies become bigger and bigger."

And businesses like Motorsports Designs took off.

Every team wanted the decals, McKenzie said. Paint was old news. He estimates that by 1984, Motorsports Designs had more than 90 percent of the market.

In the mid-1990s, McKenzie introduced his first "full wrap" design, meaning every bit of the car's exterior was covered in a decal instead of paint. But the glory days got tiring.

Competitors popped up, and running the business was consuming.

Jeff Weller (left) and Brandon Craven look over a layout for truck decals.



"Any time you're involved in pro sports, no matter what it might be, it's a 24-7 occupation," McKenzie said.

So in 2006, the brothers sold Motorsports Designs, which had grown to about 55 employees, to a St. Paul, Minn.-based graphics company.

Motorsports Designs still does some race cars, but about 80 percent of its business today is commercial.

That may have been for the better.

As NASCAR suffered advertising losses during the recession, teams started getting more companies to sponsor races for smaller portions of the season.

"It's a big, money-making marketing circus sometimes, and the digital aspect has really driven that," said Mark Sexton, Motorsports Designs plant manager in High Point.

"When we first started doing wraps, the wrap would be used until the car was wrecked," Sexton said. "Nowadays, the sponsors change so fast they only use the wrap once."

Today, McKenzie Industries applies decals to a majority of High Point's Mickey Truck Bodies' trucks. The company does between six and nine trucks a day, but it's expanding production next week to accommodate up to 12 a per day.

It's almost back to where they started, McKenzie said. "We're actually using the same material; it's just a different purpose."



Brandon Craven works up high to "wrap" a Mickey body at McKenzie Enterprises.