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The rich tapestry of colors that comprise the history of American motorsports—particularly the genesis of NASCAR—would not be complete without a book about the phenomenally gifted car builders, drivers, crew chiefs and craftsmen who have been a part of the legendary race team Holman-Moody.

Holman-Moody was to motorsports what the Packers are to the NFL, the Brooklyn Dodgers to baseball, and the Celtics to basketball.

I knew these people well, and authors Tom Cotter and Al Pearce have woven a rich story about this group, which included Fred Lorenzen, Ralph Moody, A.J. Foyt, the late Curtis Turner, Parnelli Jones, Dan Gurney, the Wood Brothers, Dick Hutcherson, Banjo Matthews, Junior Johnson, Cale Yarborough, John Holman, and even the late Jimmy Clark. And these were just a few of the legendary racers you’ll read about in this well-researched and documented book.

The authors also weave an exciting story of the diverse abilities of the “Competition Proven” gang. Whether it was the Mulsanne Straight at Le Mans, or the red clay corners of the Spartanburg Fairgrounds, they proved they could make anything on wheels move very fast.

Perhaps the richest era this book chronicles is the beginning of superspeedway racing in the 1960s that led to the success of NASCAR. These high-banked tracks built at Charlotte, Daytona, Dover, Ontario, Michigan and Rockingham played a key role in the evolution of stock car racing, and teams anchored by Holman-Moody cars found great success amongst tough competition on those high banks.

This book is also an insightful look at a rich part of the history of Ford Motor Company’s racing program. As Holman-Moody spearheaded the way, the Blue Oval boys of Detroit experienced success in NASCAR during the 1960s against Chevrolet, Pontiac and the mighty Chrysler team led by the King himself, Richard Petty.

Read on and enjoy. You are holding in your hands the story of a great team that helped make NASCAR what it is today.

—H. A. “Humpy” Wheeler

Tiny Lund horses around with Humpy Wheeler in the spring of 1966. Wheeler was the Firestone Tire representative at the time.

Don Hunter / Smyle Media
Ralph Moody (left) and John Holman of the famed Holman-Moody race team pose next to their Thunderbird, created to run in the 1958 Southern 500 at Darlington Raceway. Tom Kirkland / Smyle Media

The Early Days

1953–1961

Timeline

1917 — Ralph Moody Born in Taunton, Massachusetts
1918 — John Holman Born in Nashville, Tennessee
1953 — Lincoln Wins Carrera Panamericana
1955 — Chevrolet Introduces 265-c.i. Small Block V-8
1955 — Indy Veteran Pete DePaolo Opens DePaolo Engineering
1955–56 — Karl Kiekhaefer Chrysler Team Dominates NASCAR
1956 — John Holman Assigned Head of DePaolo’s Charlotte Shop
1956 — John Holman and Ralph Moody Give DePaolo First NASCAR Win
1957 — Ford Withdraws from Racing
1957 — Holman-Moody Opens for Business
1957 — Ralph Moody Sees Fred Lorenzen Race for the First Time
1958 — Holman-Moody Moves from DePaolo’s Old Building to Airport Buildings
1959 — Holman-Moody-Prepared T-bird Almost Wins Inaugural Daytona 500
1960 — Holman-Moody Team Races Studebakers to Gain Publicity
1961 — Holman-Moody Sells Race Cars Guaranteed for 150 MPH
1961 — Holman-Moody Considers Switch to Dodge
1961 — Ford Executive Tells John Holman Changes May Be Coming
Smile for the camera, boys—Ralph Moody (left) and John Holman never agreed on much during their 15-year partnership in Holman-Moody, but argue as they might, the two fielded some of the most successful race cars in history. Don Hunter

Opposites Attract

“He had the gift of being believable. He could sell a project. He could bully and bluff his way into anything.”

Lee Holman, about his father John
In the early 1950s, few in the racing world had ever heard the names John Holman and Ralph Moody. Yet over the next two decades, the unlikely duo would build a racing dynasty that traversed the globe and was victorious in some of the world’s most important races, as well as some of the most obscure.

At the Daytona 500, Holman-Moody would defeat the legendary Richard Petty. At the 24 Hours of Le Mans, they would humiliate Enzo Ferrari. Holman-Moody won road races in Studebakers, European rally events in Ford Falcons and boat races with their own custom creations. They would share triumphs on dusty back roads in Mexico and drag strips in Middle America.

Along the way, Holman-Moody became the most prolific race-car builders in the world. And they learned
the hard way that in the always fickle and sometimes cruel world of racing, success and championships go hand-in-hand with failure and tragedy.

Their is a uniquely American saga of self-determination, hard work and success. John Holman and Ralph Moody didn’t have college educations or a business model to copy; they had only their organic talents and a yearning to win races. Those humble roots spawned one of the largest, most diversified and successful race teams in the history of auto racing.

The two came from diverse yet complementary backgrounds. It was sheer luck and good timing that the two met and became partners in business. Holman and Moody often didn’t agree, but there is a saying in business that goes, “If both partners agree on everything, one of them is not needed.”

**John Holman**

*He Turned Racing from a Hobby into an Industry*

John Clarence Holman was born in Nashville on November 18, 1918, but spent much of his youth in Southern California, immersed in the early days of hot-rodding. He got his first exposure to racing as a mechanic on Lou Fageol’s racing team in Los Angeles in the 1930s. Holman was hooked and began to hang around guys like Dean Moon and Vic Edelbrock, who were just beginning to make names for themselves in the nascent speed equipment industry.

Holman was both a hanger-on and a machinist apprentice in those days. But the young man had ambition and dreams much larger than could be contained within the walls of a machine shop. “He had the gift of being believable,” said Holman’s son, Lee. “He could sell a project. He could bully and bluff his way into anything.”

And he clearly was a risk-taker. Holman learned the art of living on the float at an early age. The
enterprising youth supported his family through a risky venture based entirely on his ability to sell. The scheme worked like this: He would drive a large truck from his California home to either Arizona or New Mexico, where he would seek out auto junkyards and buy all the popular front-end sheet metal he could fit into his truck. After paying for it all with a rubber check, the young Holman would drive his truck as fast as it would travel back to California, where he would sell the parts at a premium, then run to the bank to make good on the check. To anyone’s knowledge, his checks never bounced.

Years later, as a partner in the successful race team that would bear his name, Holman would be known by the nickname Honker, because he never lost his love of driving those big trucks and honking their air horns.

It was this spirit of making something from nothing that drove Holman from driving trucks and operating machinery to running the business end of one of the largest racing operations in history—Holman-Moody.
Ralph Moody

New England Legend Heads South

Ralph Moody was born in Taunton, Massachusetts, on September 10, 1917. He served in the U.S. Army, drove a tank for General George Patton in World War II and in 1949 married Mitzi, whom he had known since he was 16 years old.

Moody’s reputation as both a racer and an engineer traveled far beyond his small New England community. As a teenager in the 1930s, he built a Model T Ford race car with a 2 x 4 wooden chassis and drove it against his parent’s wishes. After the service, he operated a repair shop in his hometown during the day and raced nights and weekends. His Ford flathead V-8 60 embarrassed many an Offenhauser racing engine. “We were the last ones racing the V-8 60s,” Moody said.

Starting early in his career, Moody drove race cars with the number 28 emblazoned on the side. That number stuck with him throughout his racing