



LIFE in THE FAST LANE

By Andrew Borck

You meet a lot of interesting people, go lots of great places and do things that might otherwise be illegal.



You've probably never heard of Mitch Mentor, but more than likely you've seen his work. He's directed ads, promotional pieces and short films for the likes of Subway, NASCAR and MSNBC just to name a few. But you won't find him anywhere near Hollywood; instead the 1980 Eastern grad makes his home and runs his business, Mentor Films, out of Daytona Beach, Fla.

So how does one get from the slow lane of Cheney to the fast lane of Daytona? "Luck, timing and the willingness to take a chance," says Mentor.

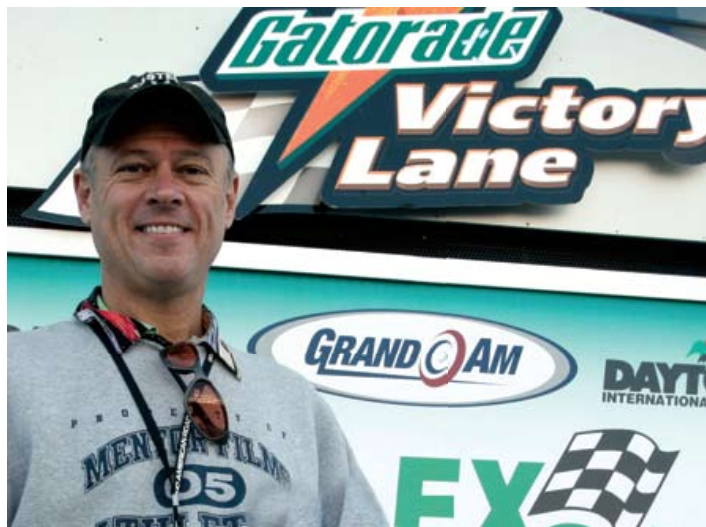
After graduating from Eastern, Mentor went on to Pepperdine Law School – hated it – and switched to Cal Lutheran, where he earned an MBA. He was a stockbroker in California for a time, and says he disliked the work but developed important contacts in the film industry. After a few weeks of sending out résumés, Mentor quit his brokerage job and got work in a production office, and then on an ad for Pontiac. Despite the long hours, he loved it, and quickly moved up the ladder from production assistant/gopher to producer. Always on a freelance basis, Mentor did TV commercials, music videos and a few marketing and sales pieces.

Flash-forward to summer 1994, or as Mentor refers to it, the "summer of exploitation." He did projects for Yamaha, Suzuki and Kawasaki. "If it had two wheels, we shot it that summer." Little did Mentor know that a big, life-changing project with four wheels was just around the corner – NASCAR.

"One of the companies I freelanced for was awarded a project for a movie that would show at the new visitor's center, Daytona USA, at Daytona International Speedway," says Mentor. "I had only gone to one NASCAR race before. After an initial meeting (and going to a few more races) I went down to Daytona in January 1995 for a four-day trip that turned into three months."

As he finished the movie for Daytona USA, Mentor entered an agreement with the speedway to produce the rest of the films needed in the visitor's center, keeping him in the area for the next 18 months. The warm weather and friendly people made Mentor feel at home in a heartbeat and before he knew it, that 18 months turned into 13 years.

Since making Daytona Beach his home, Mentor has continued to meet with success. Mentor Films received "Best Sports Documentary" awards from the Los Angeles, Las Vegas and New York film festivals. He also received a London Film Festival award and a Bronze Lion from the Cannes Ad film festival for his freelance producer work in California.



Mentor mounts a camera on a Lotus II

Whether he's managing Mentor Films or directing a crew of 100, Mentor is glad he "took a chance" on film.

"You meet a lot of interesting people, go lots of great places and do things that might otherwise be illegal," he says. "The challenge and success of capturing an event you have no control over...is very satisfying." **E**

(Check out Mitch Mentor's work at www.mentorfilms.com)