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This Week's News

A fast start for Sprint Cup

By **MICHAEL SMITH**
Staff writer
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Sprint Nextel is putting a Sprint stamp on its NASCAR sponsorship with a name change to the Cup series, announced Saturday, and a \$1 million giveaway promotion that launches July 15.

The "SprintSpeed Million" **sweepstakes** is the wireless carrier's first NASCAR promotion under the Sprint flag and signals a transition away from the Nextel brand.



NASCAR's top racing series, which has been known as Nextel Cup since 2004, will be called the Sprint Cup beginning in 2008. Nextel's original contract with NASCAR allows for one name change over the lifetime of a 10-year deal, for which Sprint Nextel spends close to \$100 million annually.

But the rebranding of the sponsorship from Nextel to Sprint begins in earnest next week with the "SprintSpeed Million."

"We're weaving Sprint into the fabric of the sponsorship," said Dean Kessel, Sprint Nextel's director of NASCAR marketing.

Sprint Nextel began a new branding campaign on July 1 with the tag line "Sprint Ahead" and a focus on "Life at SprintSpeed" to reflect the emphasis on its data and voice network. The "SprintSpeed Million" will be the first promotion tied to the new branding campaign, which was created by Omnicom's Goodby, Silverstein and Partners, San Francisco.

Nextel has essentially been left behind, except for specific references to the walkie-talkie phones, making it more of a feature than a brand moving forward.

The "SprintSpeed Million" will launch this weekend through a series of billboard ads and promotions when the Nextel Cup circuit visits Chicagoland Speedway and run through Sept. 3. Consumers can begin entering the **sweepstakes** July 15.

Television advertising for the "SprintSpeed Million" is expected to debut two weeks later on ESPN around the Allstate 400 at the Brickyard with a 30-second spot featuring driver Denny Hamlin.



The promotion will award \$1 million to a fan based on the outcome of the Chase for the Nextel Cup. Fans may register at Sprint Nextel stores, nextel.com/speed, via their Sprint Nextel handset, or at the Nextel Experience at the track to choose the driver they think will win the title. One fan will be paired with each of the 12 drivers who make the Chase based on a random draw. Each of the fans will win a trip to at least one Chase race and other prizes.

The fans paired with drivers still mathematically eligible to win the title going into the season finale at Homestead will be flown to the race. Sprint is working with ABC/ESPN to incorporate the promotion's climax into race coverage, Kessel said.

The fan aligned with the winning driver will take home \$1 million.

"This is really important to us because our brand proposition is bringing fans closer to the sport," Kessel said. "This brings 12 fans very much closer to the sport, and because of the sport, one of them is going to walk away with \$1 million."

In Hamlin's 30-second spot, he takes a phone call from a fan during a pit stop. The fan reminds Hamlin what's riding on the outcome and then comically chastises Hamlin for trying to end the call and get back to racing. Hamlin, a second-year driver, was chosen in part because he sat in second

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place in the points standings going into the Pepsi 400 and seems assured of a spot in the Chase.

Sprint Nextel has not said how much it will spend on "SprintSpeed Millions," but it will be supported with radio, online, in-store and billboard advertising, as well as the TV spot. Additionally, almost all of Sprint Nextel's presence at the track, from banners to golf carts and haulers, will be branded with the "SprintSpeed Million" beginning at Chicagoland.

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