



KURT BUSCH: Driver, No. 41 Ford Fusion

Birthdate: Aug. 4, 1978
Birthplace: Las Vegas
Hometown: Las Vegas
Residence: Mooresville, North Carolina
Spouse: Ashley

For Kurt Busch, driver of the No. 41 Haas Automation/Monster Energy Ford Fusion for Stewart-Haas Racing (SHR), the 2017 season marks a homecoming to Ford Motor Company, the manufacturer with whom he won the 2004 Monster Energy NASCAR Cup Series championship.

It was Busch's first NASCAR Cup Series title and Ford's most recent. Now reunited, the goal is to once again hoist the trophy during the season-ending Ford Championship Weekend at Homestead-Miami Speedway. Busch will attempt to surpass NASCAR Hall of Famer Terry Labonte's record for time between championships (a total of 12 seasons separated Labonte's two titles in 1984 and 1996), but do it with the Dearborn, Michigan-based manufacturer with whom his NASCAR Cup Series career began.

Busch's racing roots originate in his hometown of Las Vegas. The second-generation driver got his start the way most youngsters do – by tagging along with his father, Tom, on lengthy road trips to racetracks dotted among the Mountain and Pacific time zones.

At just 7 years old, Busch was behind the wheel of a go-kart and, by 15, competed alongside his father in Dwarf Car competition. In only his second start, Busch scored his first Dwarf Car win at Las Vegas Speedway Park. Busch didn't complete his first full season as a driver until 1994, but he made an immediate impact, earning Nevada State Dwarf Car Rookie of the Year honors. That set the stage for a banner year in 1995 when, at age 17, Busch won 10 consecutive races at 10 different tracks to secure the Nevada State Dwarf Car championship.

Recognizing his young son's talent, Tom Busch made the decision to move Kurt to Legends Cars and Hobby Stocks in 1996. By year's end, Busch was the Hobby Stock track champion at Las Vegas Speedway Park, the Legends Cars Western States champion and the Legends Cars national Rookie of the Year.

While Busch displayed his talent on the racetrack, he also displayed talent in the classroom, graduating near the top of his class at Durango High School. Racing was the priority, but Busch had a contingency plan if a career in motorsports didn't work out – the pursuit of a pharmaceutical degree. Busch enrolled in classes at the University of Arizona, but racing quickly won out. After a year of college, he secured a job with the city of Las Vegas. He constructed new water mains during the week and raced on the weekends.

Busch spent the latter part of the 1990s balancing school, work and racing. It was a balancing act that paid off.

By 1998, Busch was running full-time on the NASCAR Featherlite Southwest Tour. He earned Rookie of the Year honors that season with one victory and promptly won the series championship in 1999 with six victories.

During that championship-winning season, Busch's skill attracted the attention of successful NASCAR team owner Jack Roush, who decided to host driver auditions for a team he fielded in the NASCAR Camping World Truck Series. The auditions were informally known as "The Gong Show" and Roush invited Busch to participate. In a pivotal moment in Busch's life, he won the audition and started competing in Ford F-150s for Roush in 2000. It ended up being a whirlwind year.

Busch started the 2000 season by scoring a second-place finish in the season-opening Camping World Truck Series race at Daytona (Fla.) International Speedway. He scored his first Truck Series win July 1 at The Milwaukee Mile and then added three more victories before the year was out, including two from the pole. In his rookie season, Busch finished second in the championship standings.

Although it was only one season, Roush saw all he needed to know that Busch was a star. Less than a year after hiring him to race in the Camping World Truck Series, Roush announced that Busch would succeed Chad Little as driver of his No. 97 Ford in the NASCAR Cup Series. Barely a year removed from running Late Models on the Featherlite Southwest Tour, Busch took over for Little in the final seven races of 2000 as he prepared for a full-time effort in 2001.

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At just 22, Busch entered the 2001 season as a rookie competing with the best drivers in the world. Busch didn't make it to victory lane that year, but moments of brilliance flashed, including a pole-winning effort at Darlington (S.C.) Raceway and a fifth-place finish in the Brickyard 400 at Indianapolis Motor Speedway.

If there was any disappointment during the 2001 season, it was quickly forgotten in 2002 in what can only be described as a breakout year. Busch started the season by finishing fourth in the Daytona 500. Less than two months later, he scored his first NASCAR Cup Series win March 24 at Bristol (Tenn.) Motor Speedway. Busch earned three more wins, all in the final five races of the season en route to a third-place finish in the championship.

The momentum of 2002 carried over into the early part of 2003 as Busch started the year with runner-up finishes at Daytona and North Carolina Speedway in Rockingham. He found victory lane at Bristol for the second consecutive year, boosting him to second in the championship standings. But title aspirations were derailed by a series of engine failures the team experienced later in the season. Busch finished the year with four wins, nine top-five finishes and 14 top-10s.

In 2004, NASCAR introduced the Chase for the NASCAR Cup format during which, after the season's first 26 races, the top-10 drivers in points competed in a 10-race dash to the championship. Busch took his first step toward his title run in March with a third consecutive trip to Bristol's victory lane. He followed it up with another win in July at New Hampshire Motor Speedway in Loudon. When the series returned to New Hampshire in September for the first race of the playoffs, Busch won again to stake his claim on the championship. With a fifth-place finish in the third playoff race at Talladega (Ala.) Superspeedway, Busch took the points lead and never relinquished it.

Busch went into the season finale at Homestead-Miami Speedway with an 18-point lead over Jimmie Johnson. After starting the race from the pole, Busch's championship hopes were nearly ruined when he lost a tire early in the race while coming through turns three and four. Busch narrowly avoided the wall separating pit lane from the racetrack. Quick work by his team, along with Busch's composure, helped overcome the setback. Busch rallied to score a fifth-place finish and capture the title.

Busch started 2005 as the reigning series champion and spent the season performing as such, winning three races and collecting nine top-five finishes. During this season, Busch was presented with the opportunity to replace champion driver and NASCAR Hall of Famer Rusty Wallace, who was retiring at the end of the year from Team Penske. Although Busch was less than a year removed from having won a championship with Roush Racing, Busch couldn't pass up the opportunity to drive for highly regarded team owner Roger Penske.

Unfortunately, the 2006 season didn't go as Busch or Penske planned. The team struggled to find consistency on the track. Busch earned six poles but found victory lane only once. The inconsistency proved to be too big of a hurdle and Busch did not qualify for the playoffs for the first time in three seasons.

Off the track, however, life was rewarding for Busch as he made a \$1 million donation to the Victory Junction Gang Camp, which offers children with serious illnesses life-changing camping experiences at no cost. Busch's donation allowed for the construction of an indoor sports park, known as the Kurt Busch Superdome.

The 2007 season brought Busch back into the championship fray. Paired with crew chief Pat Tryson, Busch found victory lane twice in August – at Pocono (Pa.) Raceway and Michigan International Speedway in Brooklyn – and he qualified for the playoffs. Busch finished the season seventh in points and had high hopes for the following year. But the 2008 season mirrored the results of 2006 as the team once again lacked the consistency required to make a run for the championship. Busch scored only one win and finished 18th in points.

Busch returned to his winning ways in 2009. He scored his first victory of the year at Atlanta Motor Speedway after leading an impressive 234 laps. Season-long consistency placed Busch firmly in the playoffs and he finished fourth in points.

It was more of the same in 2010 as Busch scored three wins, including a prestigious victory in the non-points All-Star Race at Charlotte (N.C.) Motor Speedway. He qualified for the playoffs for the fifth time in his career, but the team was unable to duplicate its early-season performance once the playoffs began. Busch finished the season 11th in the points.

Busch started 2011 strong, nearly sweeping all of the main events that are a part of Speedweeks at Daytona. He won The Clash and his Can-Am Duel qualifying race. He came up short in the Daytona 500, finishing fifth, but momentum was high for the season. While he went on to win two races and qualify for the playoffs, Busch sought change at the end of the year.

Busch left Team Penske and, in 2012 opted for the simple and straightforward environs of Phoenix Racing, a single-car team based in Spartanburg, South Carolina. They welcomed Busch and he brought the best out of the organization, earning a hard-fought third-place finish in June at Sonoma (Calif.) Raceway.

Consistency was tough to find, however, and with six races remaining in the 2012 season, Busch moved to another single-car team, Furniture Row Racing. He ended the year on a strong note with three consecutive top-10 finishes, setting the stage for a solid year in 2013 for Busch and his new team.

Qualifying for the playoffs was Busch's goal that year. He and the single-car team from Colorado defied the odds and achieved that goal, proving Busch's talent behind the wheel was as strong as ever. It was the seventh time he qualified for the playoffs.

Despite not winning for the second-consecutive season, Busch did score a pole at Darlington and twice finished second – at Richmond (Va.) International Raceway and Kansas Speedway in Kansas City. He finished the season 10th in points after 11 top-fives and 16 top-10s. Busch's top-five tally was his most since 2002, when he scored 12 top-fives.

It was Busch's ability to defy the odds that piqued the interest of Gene Haas, who founded Haas Automation in 1983 and has since grown it into the largest CNC machine tool builder in North America. Haas wanted to grow SHR into a four-car team, with the No. 41 carrying the banner for Haas Automation. Naturally, Haas wanted a driver with the desire and capability to win immediately, and Busch was his man. His directive to his new driver was clear: Win.

Busch delivered for Haas in just his sixth start with the team, winning the March 30 NASCAR Cup Series race at Martinsville (Va.) Speedway. The victory earned Busch a spot in the 16-driver playoffs and, perhaps more importantly, gave Haas Automation its first NASCAR Cup Series victory as a primary sponsor.

The victory was a popular one for Haas, his employees and the distributors and dealers of Oxnard, California-based Haas Automation, but it was also a poignant one for Busch. It was his 25th career NASCAR Cup Series victory and it ended an 83-race winless streak dating back to Oct. 2, 2011, when he won at Dover (Del.) International Speedway.

Busch made the most of his first season with SHR, finishing with six top-fives and 11 top-10s, punctuated by the Martinsville win and his eighth playoff appearance. But the 2014 season was tough for Busch. Despite scoring the victory in April, he struggled to compete consistently for additional wins. The No. 41 team failed to advance beyond the opening round of the playoffs, spurring a change for the final three races of the season.

A crew swap between the teams of Busch and Danica Patrick went into effect in November at Texas Motor Speedway in Fort Worth in preparation for the 2015 season, putting veteran crew chief Tony Gibson atop the No. 41 pit box. Busch came on strong at the end of the season thanks to the addition of Gibson. In the final three races of 2014, the pairing earned three finishes of 11th place or better, including two top-10s.

But 2014 wasn't all about NASCAR. Busch did what only three other drivers have attempted – compete in the Indianapolis 500 and the Coca-Cola 600 on the same day. In an Indy car fielded by Andretti Autosport, Busch finished an impressive sixth, earning Indy 500 Rookie of the Year honors. After completing all 500 miles at Indy, Busch jetted off to Concord, North Carolina to compete in the Coca-Cola 600 that evening at Charlotte Motor Speedway. He raced competitively but, 271 laps into the longest race on the NASCAR schedule, engine problems sent Busch to the garage 129 laps short of the race distance. In all, Busch completed 906.5 miles, leaving Tony Stewart, who co-owns SHR with Haas, as the only driver to complete all 1,100 miles in the grueling trek known as "Double Duty." Robby Gordon and John Andretti are the only other drivers to attempt the Double.

Venturing outside of NASCAR wasn't new to Busch as he had competed in NHRA Pro Stock events. Busch is only the third driver to compete in NASCAR and NHRA events, joining Richard Petty and John Andretti.

In 2015, Busch found victory lane twice – at Richmond in April and at Michigan in June. By virtue of the victory at Richmond, Busch made NASCAR's revamped 16-driver, 10-race Chase for the NASCAR Cup playoffs. However, Busch came up short in his bid to make it to the Championship 4 at Homestead when he was caught up in a wreck not of his making in the seventh race of the chase at Martinsville. Despite scoring a pair of seventh-place finishes in the remaining two races of the Round of 8, the wreck was too much for Busch to overcome and he was eliminated from championship contention. Busch finished the 2015 season eighth in points.

Busch's 2016 season closely mirrored his 2015 effort. He earned a victory at Pocono in June, poles at Atlanta and Las Vegas, nine top-five finishes and 21 top-10s. Busch qualified for his 10th overall and fourth consecutive appearance in NASCAR's 10-race playoff via the win at Pocono. He once again made it to the Round of 8, but a pair of less-than-desired finishes at Martinsville and Texas saw him fall just short of making the Championship 4. Busch finished the season seventh in points.

Busch's 28 NASCAR Cup Series victories have him tied for 25th on the series all-time win list with NASCAR Hall of Famer Rex White. He enters his 17th full NASCAR Cup Series season in 2017.