

Racing no shelf item for Menard

BY MATT MARKEY
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Paul Menard, the son of the improvement store family, will compete in both Nationwide and Sprint Cup events this weekend at Michigan International Speedway. He has started every sprint race over three seasons.

BROOKLYN, Mich. – Each time he lines up for a stock car race, Paul Menard has to take on the field, the track conditions, the vagaries of his car's performance . . . and then there is that other element – all those that automatically doubt his worth as a driver.

You see, they look at you differently when your name is on the side of the car, on the fenders, on the hood, and on the 263 home improvement stores your family owns.

Instead of the silver spoon, they think you got a free pass into the sport.

"I still encounter that type of thinking, but I don't let it bother me," Menard said Friday at Michigan International Speedway where he will be competing in both the

Nationwide and Sprint Cup series events this weekend.

"I'm out here to race and do the absolute best we can in every event. But regardless of where we finish, some people are always going to be stuck on that point. I'm not here to change their minds."

Menard has started every race in the Sprint Cup Series over the past three seasons. He was 23rd in Cup points last year, with six top-10 finishes. In his final two full seasons in the Nationwide Series, Menard was sixth in both – 2005 and 2006. After the first 14 races of the current Sprint Cup season, Menard is 19th in points with three top-10 finishes.

"For the most part, we've had fast cars," Menard said. "We hit a bump with our finishes in May, but we've bounced back and I'm looking forward to what we can do this weekend."

Menard comes from a racing family, so the venture has always made perfect sense to him.

"My dad was at Indy going to races before I was born, so I grew up around racing," Menard said. "I raced go-karts when I was eight, so I've been involved in the sport for a long time, and it's something I've always loved."



The 30-year-old Menard got started in ice racing in his native Wisconsin at 15, and made his NASCAR debut in 2003. He had his first job working for his dad's home improvement centers at just 10 years old, so Menard developed an understanding of the business before he climbed into a stock car with the family's logo splashed all over it.

"I've been involved in the family business most of my life,



Paul Menard signs his autograph for fan Kevin Griebach, right, as crew member Jody Jennings, center, stands by before practice run.

so I understand that part really well, and I also understand what our vision is," Menard said. "Racing, or anything that we get involved in, has to first make sense. And on the racing side . . . so far, so good."

Menard spent close to five hours practicing on the two-mile MIS track Friday, changing from his Nationwide car to his Sprint Cup car during the four separate sessions. Since the

cars are different, he was working to keep performance and response information in two separate mental files.

"It sounds silly, but you have to remember what car you are in. Just keeping track of the two cars and how they function under certain conditions and at certain places on the racetrack is very important," Menard said.

"Switching back and forth is the toughest part."

Menard will qualify in his Nationwide car Saturday morning, and then take his Sprint Cup car out for its qualifying run Saturday afternoon. The Alliance Truck Parts 250 Nationwide race takes off later Saturday, with the Helluva Good! Sour Cream Dips 400 Cup race on Sunday.

Menard, who races for Kevin Harvick Inc. in the Nationwide Series, has finished second and third in his two earlier starts for KHI this season. In his five previous Nationwide Series starts at MIS, Menard has finished outside the top 10 only once. He will drive the No. 33 Menards Chevrolet Impala in Saturday's Nationwide race.

"I really like racing at Michigan International Speedway. I've had some great runs there," said Menard, who will drive the No. 27 Pittsburgh Paints/Menards Chevrolet in Sunday's Cup race.

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