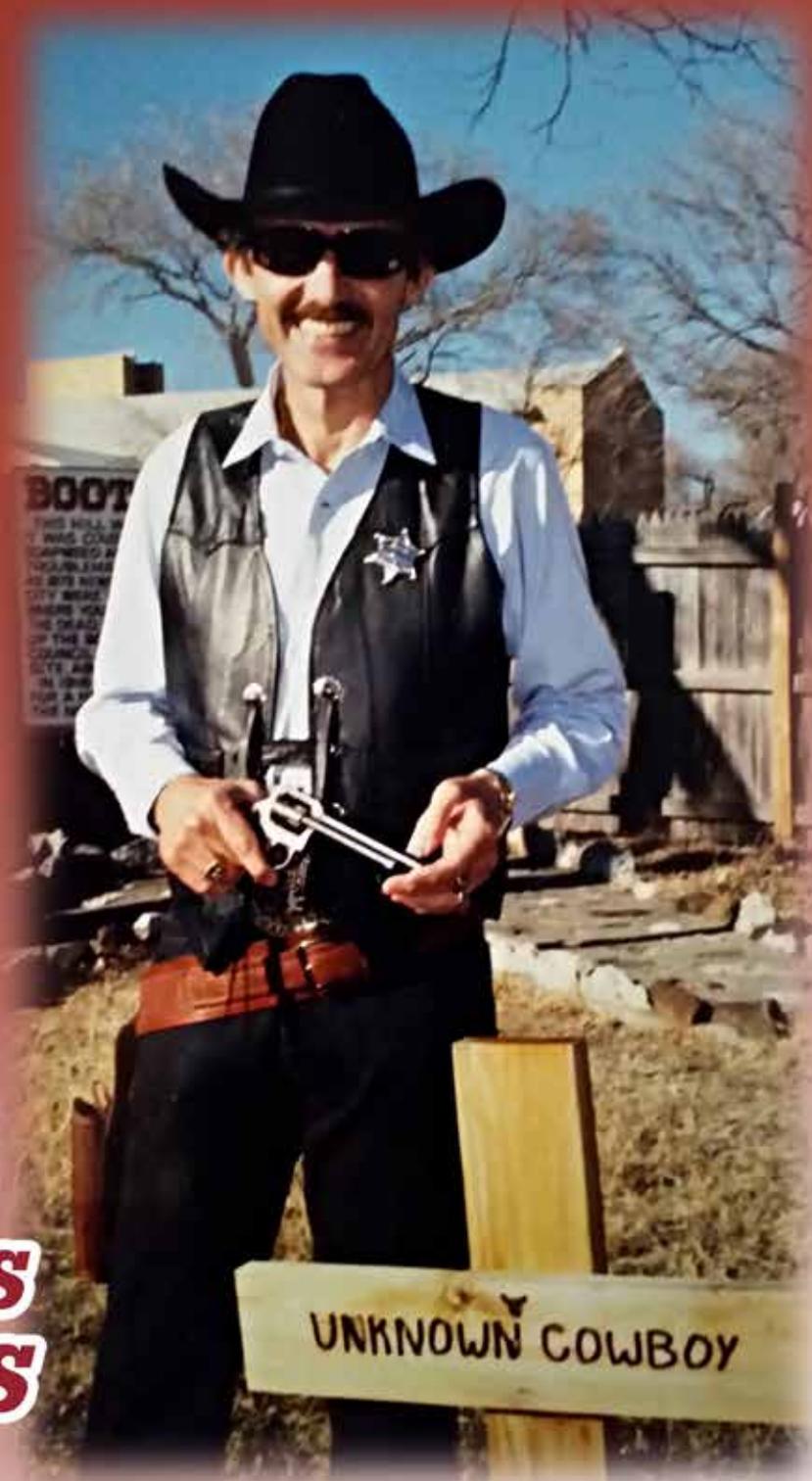


# “THE KING, *Richard Petty* BECOMES A DODGE CITY MARSHAL”



**MotorSports  
Moments**



The King after being sworn in. He liked the name on this name plate in the Boot Hill Cemetery.

**I**t hardly seems possible that all this happened about 40 years ago, but it did. . . . So many people were affected by the appearance of true icons that have come to Dodge that a review of one of the most significant seemed appropriate. This is the story about the visit of the King of Stock Car Racing, Richard Petty, to ole Dodge City in 1989.

Richard Petty is one of the main reasons that NASCAR is



the popular sport that it is today. You will never meet a nicer person on this earth. He is so sincere and has always been very special to his fans. Some sports historians feel that he has signed more autographs than any other sports figure. He has won 200 NASCAR races, a record 7 NASCAR championships, a tie with Dale Earnhardt, and his 200th victory was witnessed in person by the President of the United States, Ronald Reagan.

The President actually started the race in Daytona from Air Force One, "Gentlemen Start your Engines" and then landed on an airstrip right behind the track, called the race on the broadcast and then was there for the post race ceremonies. It was quite a celebration for NASCAR as well as the King. Nothing like this has happened since and certainly not before.

Our first true meeting with the King came at Talladega International Speedway in Alabama in 1978. We were there with the Kansas Jack company representing the Southwest Kansas Area Vocational School. Kansas Jack was a sponsor of one of the teams and we were working to find the proper equipment for our Auto Body Collision Repair program at the school. When we arrived at the pit gate we were greeted by Buddy Baker, a great driver who took us directly to the garage area and to our meeting with one of the crews. Buddy is another one of the reasons that NASCAR is what is today. He is currently on SiriusXM radio with a daily program.

We had brought along some SWKAVTS hats and Ralph Salvino, director of racing for STP, and a life-long friend took us over to the Petty garage area. Richard had a brace on his neck from an accident at Pocono Raceway. The hats said Dodge City, and Cowboy Capitol on the logo of the school. We were visiting and I gave him the hat and he immediately started to autograph it. "Whoa, we said, the hat is for you", and he really enjoyed that. Most of the time people



The Official Swearing in of Richard Petty as a Dodge City Marshal.



Eddie Estes, the King and the editor, Barbara Oringderff, take a photo opportunity.



Cindy and the King at Heartland Park Topeka, a picture that is very uncommon, Richard without his Cowboy Hat!



want something and we had so much fun giving him the hat. He said he would take good care of it and we wished him the BEST and he told us that he could only run a few laps and then come in for a driver change due to his injury. We suggested that he come to Dodge City as our guest and he really was interested in doing that.

There is no way to believe all this was happening; remember, this was 1978. Ralph suggested that we come to Indianapolis Motor Speedway during the time trials or the first weekend of practice as Richard made an appearance there as a part of his sponsorship agreement with STP. We were covering the INDY 500 for the local radio station KGNO in Dodge City since 1975 and thought that would work out fine. Little did we know that it would take 11 years to make it all happen!

The races in the '80s at Daytona International Speedway were certainly different than they are now. One major difference is the number of makes of cars that used to be in the 500. Currently Chevrolet, Ford and Toyota are the only brands that participate. During the late seventies and eighties, Chevrolet, Ford, Dodge, Buick, Mercury, Pontiac and Oldsmobile were all competing in the CUP Series. Drivers then were very identified by the brand they drove or didn't drive. That was then. Also, the testing program at Daytona was set up so that the different brands were tested as a unit. In other words, when Buick was on the track, it was Buick's test day and so forth. A lot more test days were required and therefore the month of January was really full of tests.

My true hope was to bring Richard to Dodge City and honor him as a Dodge City Marshal during the same week as the Tournament of Champions, Kansas's best known basketball tournament. The Fellowship of Christian Athletes has a breakfast on Saturday morning that honors the players. Pat George, currently the Kansas Secretary of Commerce was always

involved with the breakfast and finding speakers. Who better than the King? He always wanted to come to Dodge and it seemed like the perfect fit. The problem was the schedule at Daytona for testing his chosen brand, as it always was a conflict.

Finally we hit a date there were no conflicts. We met with Ralph Salvino and Richard at Charlotte Motor Speedway and January 1989 would work for everyone. Needless to say, Pat George was thrilled and the Breakfast would have a true legend as its speaker.

January rolled around and the board of directors at the Boot Hill Museum voted for Richard to become a Dodge City Marshal. We started working on arrangements to get him here from the Wichita Airport. Junior Maupin loaned us his plane and pilot and we headed for Wichita. Richard came in on a commercial flight and the scene created when he got off the plane was really something. People were waiting on him and he signed every autograph he could. We finally boarded the Maupin plane and headed back to Dodge, and on the way he said to me: "I didn't think anyone would even know who I was out here". Richard, are you kidding?

Landing in Dodge City was really special as Pat George, Dale Northern, the mayor, Miss Kansas and several others were waiting for us at the Dodge City airport with a red carpet laid out. I later told them it should have been "Petty blue". Pat was a part owner of a Rolls Royce and Dale had his limo; Richard had never ridden in a Rolls and that was a first for him. We headed to Boot Hill for the ceremony. He was very honored to become a Dodge City Marshal. We went downstairs and watched the welcome movie and saw the photos of the others honored as marshals. He was very impressed.

Our next adventure was to catch some lunch at the Silver Spur. Again, with his western gear and shades everyone knew he was in town.

From there we paid a surprise visit to George Nielsen Motor Company, Richard said that normally he would have gone to the Pontiac dealership, but with Pat and my brother Ralph there this worked out fine. From there we went out to Winter Feedyard and he also wanted to see an irrigation circle on the ground. No time wasted when the King is in town.

That night we went to the TOC and he was excited about going to the game. He thought he could just go



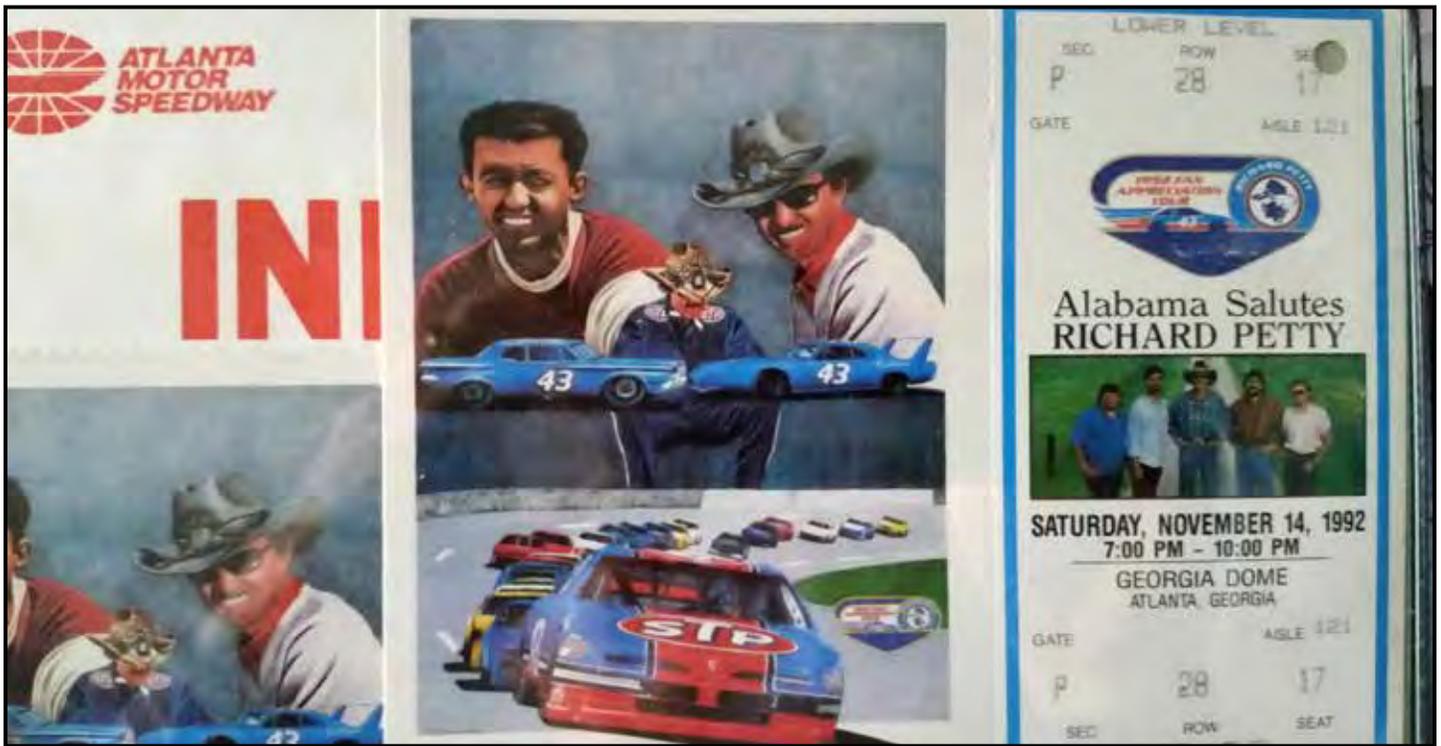
The Vo Tech hat that we gave to Richard at Talladega.

and see some hoops. Wrong! We sat down across from the court scoring table on the other side of the court. Once people realized he was there it created a stream of fans wanting autographs.

As half-time of the game approached TOC officials asked me to introduce Richard to the crowd. He followed me to the scoring table and I introduced him. I had never heard such an ovation, it was actually a standing ovation. He said very few words, "Thank you so much."

We realized we would have to go, and going out the door a lady stopped us and said she just had to have an autograph and she gave him a neatly pressed diaper; yes, a diaper—no kid-





The tickets from the Salute to Richard from Alabama at the Georgia Dome, November 14, 1992.



Everyone wanted an autograph after the TOC Breakfast and Richard's speech.

ding, and he signed it. Quickly we were out the door. So much for the TOC.

The TOC breakfast the next morning was a sellout—700 attended. Richard did a great job of relating to the players by showing some racing footage and encouraging the young people to always do their best. After the speech the crowd lined up for autographs. It was an amazing thrill for so many!

We had to fly back to Wichita, but before we left we were told that security would meet us at the Maupin plane and escort to his next flight to Las Vegas where he would be opening a Southern Pride Car Wash, one of his sponsors in the Cup Series. Security didn't tell us why they wanted to escort us but just to wait for them.

When we landed in Wichita, Security was there, and said someone had been calling the airport asking all kinds of questions about the King's arrival. When we walked in we decided to stop for a Coke for some refreshment before the flight to Vegas. All of a sudden, a man in a wheelchair painted PETTY BLUE with a spoiler on the back with "Richard Petty's Greatest FAN" written on the spoiler. The terrific fan was pushed by his wife and followed by his two sons who were dressed in STP crew uniforms made by their mom. It was a scene that was not to be believed. A moment that was unreal. Richard shook his hand and spent time with the whole family. Just wish we had the pictures of that moment. It is just impossible to describe.

Just so you know, Cindy and I have

been on several appearances with the King in Kansas, Indianapolis, and several other stops/through the years. We were invited to attend his last race at Atlanta in 1992 and the Tribute to Richard Petty concert featuring Alabama. He actually drove his #43 in the dome to another standing ovation. Most of you are aware of the many contributions the Petty family has made to this sport. Richard was one of the first members of the NASCAR Hall of Fame along with his father Lee and brother Maurice, who also are members. Lynda Petty, Richard's wife, who recently passed away, was one of the most popular NASCAR first ladies. Kyle, his son, after his driving career, is in broadcasting and operating the Victory Junction Camp in memory of his son, Adam Petty who lost his life in a racing accident. Cindy and I have also sponsored several Richard Petty Driving Experiences at Las Vegas Motor Speedway, Kansas Speedway, and Pikes Peak International Raceway.

We are hoping the King will get "the heck back into Dodge" someday as our guest at the 3i SHOW or Dodge City Days. ●

