

TRIPS WEST ARE MOST DIFFICULT FOR WINSTON CUP TRANSPORTER DRIVERS

Barry Sheppard, truck driver for the #21 Motorcraft Racing Team hauler, talks about how this week differs from his “normal” weeks on the road to and from Winston Cup events. The trip to Fontana is 2807 miles one way from Stuart, Virginia, to the California track.

“When we leave Talladega I’ll go straight back to the shop and I’ll have to unload and reload for California. Then we leave either late Monday or real early Tuesday morning so we can be in California on Thursday. We check in Thursday evening and we’ll have to park then. Normally, we just park on Friday.

“Normally, I go home on Sunday night and have Monday off. I go back in on Tuesday about lunchtime, clean the truck up and reload it for the next race. Then we leave on Thursday for the track. But for California we have to leave two days earlier to get there. And we run two drivers out there and back. The law is strict. If they catch you driving over ten hours they will shut you down for eight hours. And if they shut you down for eight hours then you are going to be late for the race. That’s the reason we run two.

“Jon’s (Wood Brothers Winston West team) truck will have to leave Monday in the morning so he can be on the track to practice Thursday afternoon. So we won’t run together going out there, but we might run together coming back. Going out we might hook up with a couple of other teams, the 36 and 66 maybe. We might talk back and forth and try to stop and eat at a certain time, but if they aren’t there we won’t wait on them.

“Leon Walker will go with me, and we’ll take turns sleeping and driving. Sometimes that is hard because I never have slept too well on the road.

“Before I went with the Wood Brothers I drove U.S. Mail, but that was days. I’ve been with them for four years full-time. Part-time I was with them for about six seasons. I started out sweeping the floors in the afternoons. I’d clean the shop up. I did anything Eddie and Len asked me to do. Then I hauled the cars up and down the road, getting them worked on and the trucks worked on. Then the job came open for the truck driver and they asked me if I wanted it. I thought long and hard about it. I really like it, but it’s long, hard hours.

“When I get to the track I work on the car and keep the car cooled down, change gears, whatever they need. My biggest job is keeping the truck cleaned up, outside and inside.

“When the race is over we’ll have to start back to Virginia to get ready for the race at Richmond. We’ll have to leave on Thursday so we can go into the Richmond track early Friday morning.”

While this may not be the truck driver’s favorite trip of the season, driver Elliott Sadler is really looking forward to the California visit. The team tested in Michigan in preparation for the event at California Speedway. Elliott is now anxious to get to California not only to race but maybe do a little shopping and sightseeing along the way.

“I’m looking forward to going to California. We always seem to run fairly well there. We tested at Michigan to get ready. We are going to run a different tire there (in California) than we did at Michigan. It’s the same tire we had at Texas. We checked out the tires to see how they were different. It’s always hotter there and the track is going to be very slick so we worked on a lot of long runs during the test so we’ll see what happens. I’ve always adapted very well to that place. I like it. It’s a lot of two-wide racing, especially off of turn two. A lot of cars would rather be on the outside than the inside so it makes it pretty tricky.

“California is a great place to go. I’m going out a little bit early. I like shopping there. I like that mall about two miles from the racetrack. I could get lost in there for about two days. I like doing that. I’ve been to the Hollywood Bowl before to a concert. We’re going to see some sights. I’m not going to tell you everything we’re going to do, but we’re going to have a good time, and we’ll be ready to race by the time Sunday comes around.”

Sadler’s history at California:

	Started	Finished	Status
2000	19	43	Engine
1999	39	21	Running

NOTE: Sadler will be appearing at the GameWorks location at the Ontario Mills Mall Thursday, April 26, from 6:00 to 7:45 p.m.