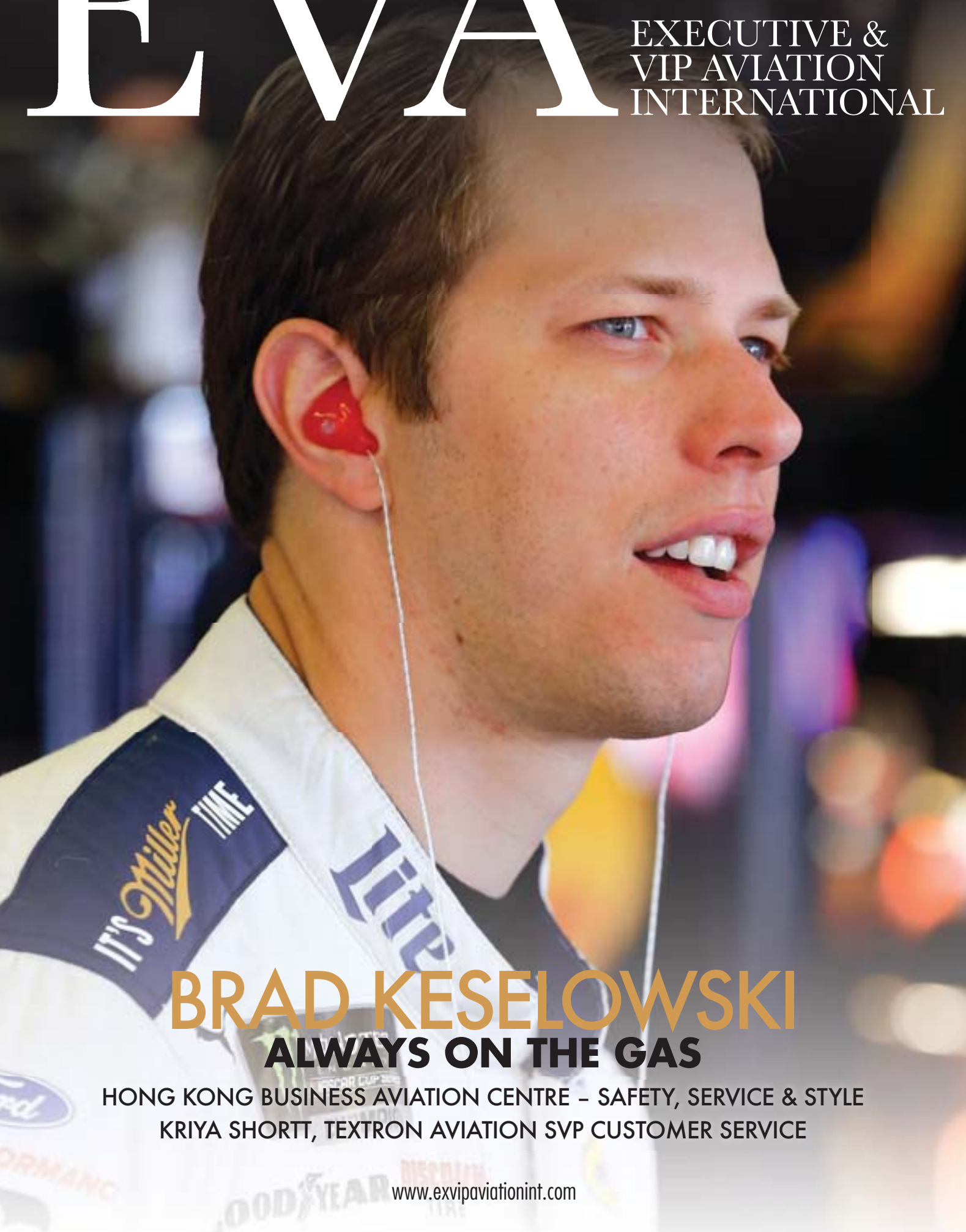


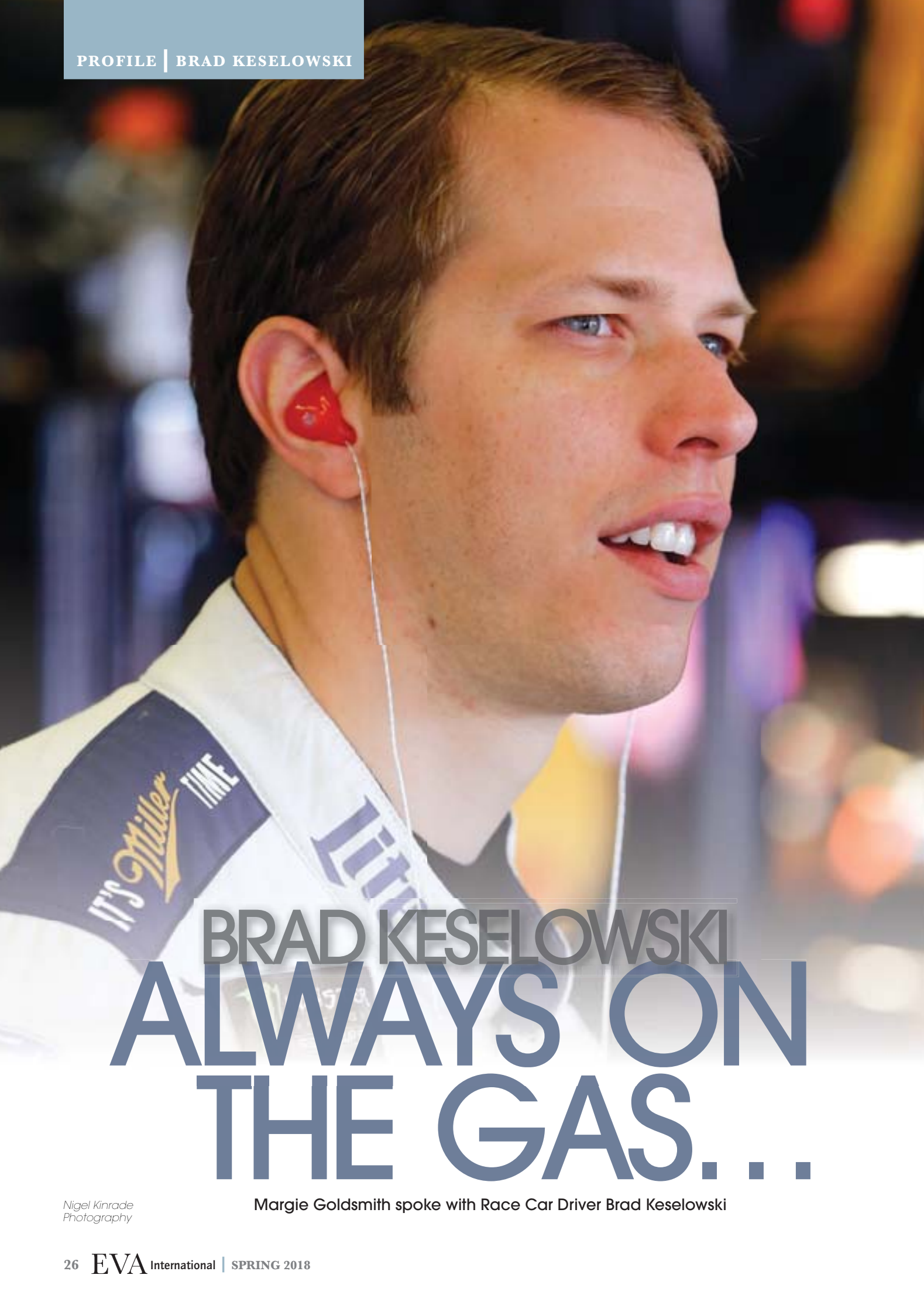
# EVA

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## BRAD KESELOWSKI ALWAYS ON THE GAS

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BRAD KESELOWSKI  
ALWAYS ON  
THE GAS...

*Nigel Kinrade  
Photography*

Margie Goldsmith spoke with Race Car Driver Brad Keselowski

**S**eventy-two years ago, bootleggers who'd souped up their vehicles to evade the authorities during prohibition, founded National Association for Stock Car Auto Racing (NASCAR). Today, stock car racing is among America's most popular sports, with top-level races ranging between 200 and 600 miles in length and cars reaching speeds in excess of 200 mph (322 km/h).

Team Penske, owned by Roger Penske, is one of the most successful teams in NASCAR history and Bradley Aaron Keselowski, one of the sport's top drivers, competes full-time for Team Penske in the Monster Energy NASCAR Cup Series (MENCs), driving the No.2 Ford Fusion, and part-time in the NASCAR Xfinity Series (NXS), driving the No.22 Ford Mustang.

Voted most popular driver by his fans, Keselowski is hoping to bring home a third Daytona 500 victory for Team Penske in 2018 and a second MENCs championship. Continuity is an important element in the 33-year-old Michigan native's success and he has the same crew chief and most of the road and pit crew he had in 2017.

Keselowski entered the 2017 MENCs season among the pre-season favourites, tipped to take home a second career series championship, and advanced to the Championship 4 during Ford Championship Weekend at Homestead-Miami Speedway. Along the way, Team Penske won three races, scoring 15 top-five and 21 top-ten finishes. Keselowski also won two pole positions, including his first at Michigan International Speedway, his home track.

Raised in a racing family, Keselowski previously worked full-time for his family's NASCAR Camping World Truck Series team while managing his own short-track career, racing Factory Stocks and Limited and Super Late Models. His first break came in 2007,

when he competed for Germain Racing at Memphis Motorsports Park.

He took pole and led for 62 laps, a performance that landed him a ride in Dale Earnhardt Jr's No.88 NXS full-time entry two weeks later. In 2008, Keselowski won two races for JR Motorsports and in 2009 claimed his first MENCs victory, driving for James Finch at Talladega Superspeedway. He was also owner of Brad Keselowski Racing, fielding two full-time teams in the NASCAR Camping World Truck Series.

In Talladega, Keselowski caught Roger Penske's eye and was hired to compete full-time for his team. Since joining Team Penske in 2010, Keselowski has won a remarkable total of 53 MENCs and NXS races, the team's first MENCs championship, an NXS driver title and four NXS owner championships.

Away from the racetrack, Keselowski married his long-time girlfriend, Paige, a year ago and lives in North Carolina with their two-year old daughter. Both Brad and Paige are active in his Checkered Flag Foundation, which honours and assists those who have given great sacrifice for America. Since 2010, the foundation has supported more than 50 organisations and individuals in helping veterans and first responders on their road to recovery.

*EVA* caught up with him during a rare off-track moment.

#### **What did your father do?**

My uncle, grandfather and dad were car experts. My dad had a business as both a race car driver and helping to tune other people's cars. He was a little bit of a do-it-all performance car guy, but mostly race.

#### **Did your mother work?**

She was in real estate and then transitioned to administrative work for my dad's business.

#### **What did you want to do as a kid?**

Win the Daytona 500. I don't remember ever not wanting to become a race car driver.

#### **Did your father teach you how to drive when you were young?**

I wouldn't say he taught me, but he helped me learn. He got me a go-kart when I was about eight and we'd run it in the backyard, out in the fields, anywhere it would run; I learned some of the basics there. I also had snowmobiles dating back to when I was five.

#### **Was your father a race car driver?**

Yes, up until 1999. He had a number of bad accidents that essentially retired him as a driver, so he took the family's business and transitioned to putting trucks together in what's now the NASCAR Camping World Truck Series.

#### **You first drove trucks, then went out on your own and your career took off. How old were you?**

I would say 22.

#### **What were the most important things he taught you about racing?**

I'm not a big guy, I'm 6ft tall and weigh about 175lb and when I was in my early 20s I was about 150lb. He said, "Never forget, when you get in the car, everyone weighs the same, everyone's the same size, everyone has the same opportunity. It's about what you have in your heart and your mind, it's not about what you were born with physically." Mental strength with respect to desire, passion and overcoming obstacles has stuck with me my entire career.

#### **You won your first race in 2009. What did winning feel like?**

A huge stress relief, because you are always fighting for your spot, fighting for your seat. And winners always get a seat reserved. The next season I transitioned to driving for Team Penske. I've been driving with them for the last eight years.

**How did you advance from your first races to driving Xfinity?**

In 2006, when I was on my own, I bounced around from different car owners until 2008, when I finally found my first full-time gig outside my family, driving for Dale Earnhardt Jr. It was with him that I really had my most measurable early career success.

**What goes through your mind when you're driving?**

Probably the biggest thing is to always try to be perfect with the things that I can control and to always look for opportunity. There's always an opportunity – you just have to find it. Occasionally you'll get used to a really good routine and rhythm and you'll start singing a song to yourself, like running on a treadmill and your brain takes you other places, but you are still running. Sometimes that happens, but it's pretty rare. Usually, what happens is I'll be racing, and I'll be thinking, "If I win this race, what would that mean?" Or if I have a bad race, what does it mean, how do I handle it, how do I leave the team? It's not usually like, "Hey, what do I want to have for dinner tonight?" It's usually more team related.

**If you're having a negative thought, does it encourage you to take more chances, to try to go faster?**

I try not to think that way, but every once in a while, those thoughts enter your mind. As they say in racing, you're only as good as your last race, so you're constantly striving to prove yourself, week in, week out, despite how good or how bad your record has been. Because I'm a proven winner right now, I don't think about losing as much as I did earlier in my career. But I do think a lot about making sure I'm putting in the effort and producing the results my team deserves.

**Do you ever think about the fact that you've won more than 50 races? Is the thrill always the same or do you now just expect this of yourself?**



Keselowski joined a Checkered Flag Foundation 'Huntsman Shootout' event in June 2017.  
*Dana Jo Photography*



I expect it of myself, but I also enjoy it, probably more than ever. I'm married now with a young daughter, so the wins mean more than they did before because I have a family to celebrate a win.

**Did your father discourage you from racing?**

I wouldn't say he discouraged me, but he never encouraged me early on. He wanted me to do it because I wanted to do it, not because he wanted me to do it. And I thought that was one of the best ways of handling that, so I'd probably do the same with my daughter – I'll let her race, but she's got to want to. Dad always told me my college fund was racing, so I better figure it out.

**Have you ever thought you've had enough and want to quit?**

Not seriously. I do have some bad days where I'm just frustrated and feel like that. It happens to anyone in any profession, but never enough to where I have actually wanted to quit.

**What is the Checkered Flag Foundation?**

The Checkered Flag Foundation is a 501(c) (3) which is fancy words for a US tax code, a recognised and approved foundation that I started in 2010 as a way to give back to the community. The emphasis is on military personnel and first responders who've made some pretty big sacrifices and maybe not come back the way they went out with respect to mental or physical trauma. It's my way to kind of embrace them, sending the elevator back down to those who are not only less fortunate than me, but are also much braver than I am as a race car driver; they go out and risk life and limb not to entertain, but to save lives and maintain our way of life at home. I also think it's a necessary way to engage the community, because the community has given me so much.

**What does the Checkered Flag Foundation do?**

We have many initiatives. We help put on camps for service members who have come back from the battlefield and are trying to return to their normal life with their family. We're helping build what's called a Fisher House, which is essentially like a hotel close to a military hospital that allows family members to be with their loved ones while they are being treated for something that might have happened to them on the battlefield or even at home. We have sponsored race weekends for military families to come to race tracks and have a first flag experience. I think all of those have been fun and engaging, allowing us to meet people, inspire them and get them excited about life again.

**You are an elite athlete. What do you do to physically prepare for a race?**

I think having really strong cardio is important. Hydration is critical. Eating healthily is critical for maintaining energy. And then there's a mental aspect of preparation. A lot of times the airplane is where I study, to be ready for an event on or off the track. That requires reviewing notes from others or myself, which is why having inflight internet is also critical. It gives me the opportunity to pull through notes and do research.

**Talk me through a race from the time you get off the plane in the city where the race is being held.**

Most every race weekend, I'll have a fan and/or sponsor event that's usually timed to when I land and lasts two or three hours. We'll transition from there to on-the-track practice sessions. The day after is usually some kind of qualifying session and final practice, along with a team briefing. Some race weekends are just two-day shows and others might be three days, with more fan events and then the race.

**Are you in competition with your two team mates?**

Absolutely, but we're probably the closest friends in the world.

**As an elite driver, you must have endless requests for appearances?**

**How do you balance your life between preparation, being on the track, qualifying, checking the car and going through the race?**

It's a challenge. First, we travel a lot and have the airplane to help with that; it helps reduce the stress and keep the schedule as maintainable as possible. Then, we have people to help us schedule. That's actually part of my flight ops team's responsibility. Unfortunately, I have to say no to a lot of things, but we try to fit in what we can. It's a very tough balance, probably the hardest thing about my job is trying to find time for everyone and everything, without sacrificing on track performance.

**What do you think is the secret to your success?**

Persistence first, in growth. I am not using the same tactics today that I was ten years ago; I've developed and advance them every year. Then there's persistence in physical training. It's not good enough that I kept a strong heart rate for a full race last year; I've got to keep working out to make sure that I can do the same this year. Then there's persistence in making sure that we show great value to our investors, sponsors, partners, and so on, through programmes that incentivise them. I hate to use the cliché, but I just haven't taken my foot off the gas, on the track or off.

**What's left for you to do?**

More than I'll ever be able to. I don't know what God has planned for me, but I really have a lot of desire to win another championship at the highest level of the sport. That's probably my biggest desire right now. Along with that, I want to be able to raise my daughter and enjoy the time with my family and see and do things together. Those are probably the two most critical things to me right now. Of course, I have my business interests and I want to see those be successful and take care of the people that are working so hard for them.

**What do you think has been your key accomplishment?**

I would say my biggest accomplishment would be winning the NASCAR Championship in 2012.

**Considering how many races you do a year, what percentage of your time is spent travelling?**

I fly probably 200-250 hours, about 200 segments, in a year, mostly by private airplane, a Lear 45.

**Do you own it? Why fly privately?**

Yes, I own it. My schedule is very unforgiving. I might have to be in two or three places in one day and I can't be late. There's no excuse that the airplane is late; I'll get fired if I don't show up,



A family selfie after Keselowski won the 2017 Monster Energy NASCAR Cup Series STP 500 at Martinsville Speedway, Virginia.  
*Nigel Kinrade Photography*



Wi-Fi is an essential tool aboard Keselowski's Learjet 45.  
*Matthew T Thacker/  
Nigel Kinrade Photography*

whether it's my fault or not. If there's a race on a Sunday, they'll run the race without us. And if I don't show up for my job, I get fired. But I may need to be somewhere else that same day or two days before, and I'm able to be more places and do more things because of my airplane. I'm also able to have more flexibility with my schedule and take my family to the race track. If I had to fly commercial with my daughter, we'd never make it to the track and I think everybody would want to kill me!

**What year did you buy your plane?**

I started leasing in 2009 and I bought my first airplane in 2011. I've also helicoptered about 30 hours a year too.

**Why did you decide to buy the Lear rather than lease it?**

I leased two planes before and the value package for purchasing the airplane was pretty significant, to where I think in the long run it was better for me financially. Also, I would have better control over maintenance and upgrade, and felt more comfortable with the wear and tear that my family put on the airplane being something that I owned rather than something that's leased.

**If you were going to move or upgrade from your existing Lear, which model would you choose?**

Well, the Lear has been very good to me, it would be hard to leave. If I was going to leave that series, I would most likely consider something in the Gulfstream line. And I'd say a mid-size Gulfstream G250. But again, the Lear's been very good to me and I would be hard pressed to leave it.

**When you're visiting a new destination, do you leave the decision of which FBO you'll use to your flight ops team or pilot, or do you have your own preferences?**

I always leave new destinations to the team and I'll pick destinations we've been going to over the years.

**Do you have a preference for on-board catering or do you leave that to the team?**

I definitely have preferences. I expect the food to be nice and I have my own chef. I tell my team that the flying is a reset point for me and so what that means to me specifically is more often than not, the places I go and the things I do at work are not situations where I can eat. I'll land somewhere, go do whatever I have to do, whether it's drive, meet with someone or host an event – and even though the people there might be eating, I usually don't get the chance because I'm working. So, the plane is my reset point for dietary needs, where I

don't have to worry about where to find food and I know that what I'm eating is healthy, because I work as an athlete.

**How much of a concierge service do you expect from your flight department, including hotels, transportation, the car you might have to rent and other logistics at the destination?**

My head of flight ops manages the airplane and my flight department handles everything. I also have my own hangar.

**Do you put the Lear out for charter?**

Nope. Our hours and schedule are so demanding that I can't give up access.

**How close an eye do you keep on expenses? Do you scrutinise bills or do you take the view that if the maintenance and running charges fall within an expected range, that's fine?**

If they fall within the expected range, that's fine. I don't count nickels and dime. I have people I trust and if anything, I sometimes ask them to spend more, not less, to make sure we are not taking any chances on anything. I don't like to cut corners.

When people ask me about owning my own airplane, I understand that not everybody owns their own airplane. But I don't own an airplane for luxury. I don't fly my airplane for luxury. Every once in a while, I'll go on a vacation and we'll take the airplane, but my airplane is really my car. I couldn't do my job without it. I think a lot of times there's a bit of stigma to private aviation, that the people who own private airplanes are just getting on their jets and flying to Hawaii every week and having a giddy old time. I'm not saying that never happens or there aren't people who do that. But I don't own an airplane so that I can hob nob with the rich and famous. I own an airplane so that I can be the best I can at my job. It's my car, it's my way of living and the airplane is a heavy, heavy part of the equation. ■



Keselowski's Checkered Flag Foundation supports military and civilian emergency services personnel who've suffered severe trauma in the line of duty. *Nigel Kinrade Photography*