



Bennett Lane wines



Bennett Lane Maximus
White Feasting Wine
\$28



Bennett Lane Maximus
Red Feasting Wine
\$35

The Taste

Beer may have the pole position when it comes to NASCAR fans' favorite drinks, but wine is coming on strong. According to a study conducted by ACNielsen and Nielsen Sports, race car enthusiasts are drinking 22 percent more wine than a year ago. It's true, the average fan spent only \$14.60 more in 2006 than they did in 2005, and the grand total was only \$81.40 per year. Then again, there are 75 million NASCAR freaks in the U.S. alone. That means a lot of extra cabernet and pinot is getting poured during Daytona.

A number of race car drivers run wineries, as well, including Mario Andretti, Richard Childress and Randy Lewis. Former racer Randy Lynch is the first vintner to own a NASCAR team. Lynch and his wife Lisa bought Bennett Lane Winery in Napa Valley a few years ago and launched the Bennett Lane NASCAR team to much fanfare. Their wines are about as subtle as the sponsor stickers on a stock car. The choicest offerings are the red and white Maximus Feasting Wines. A blend of merlot, cabernet sauvignon and syrah, the red has been a critical darling since its inception. The 2003 vintage jumps out of the starting gate with a deep, rich earthiness that gives way to racy hints of red currant, cherry, tobacco, cedar and mocha. (It may be hard to find but the 2004 is being released any day.)

The white has telltale signs of muscat (orange blossom) mixed with chardonnay and sauvignon blanc. It's crisp and sweet with peach and passion fruit notes, balanced by a layer of minerality. The 2005 sold out. The 2006 will be available in April, and you better get it while you can. These NASCAR folks act fast.

-- James Oliver Cury

