



ON THE Right Track

Race car drivers help speed progress for animals

At the legendary Daytona International Speedway in February, Leilani Münter took a stand for animals ... at 180 miles per hour.

Thanks in part to donations from her fans, Münter circled the track in a race car painted to resemble the movie poster for *The Cove*—the Oscar-winning exposé on the annual dolphin slaughter in Taiji, Japan. The film “totally changed my life,” says Münter, who subsequently traveled to Taiji three times to help document the slaughter.

Dubbed the world’s top eco-athlete by Discovery’s Planet Green channel, Münter also spreads awareness about clean energy and promotes the Meatless Monday campaign to her more than 6,500 Twitter followers. And she has more plans for that car of hers.

Also on the fast track to help animals, up-and-coming driver Cory Joyce has teamed with The HSUS to promote shelter adoptions and speak out for the Give Wildlife a Brake campaign. “I do have that soft spot for animals,” says Joyce. “... And I wanted to give back to them what I can.”

In these edited interviews with assistant managing editor Michael Sharp, Münter and Joyce explain how they merge animal advocacy with life in the fast lane.

Leilani Münter

One of the slogans on your website reads: “Life is short. Race hard. Live green.” Where does your concern for the last part stem from?

I remember trying to get people to recycle when I was in high school. I grew up around farms. I rode around on my horse, and I’d hang out with the cows, and I’d hang out with the pigs, and they were my friends. When I first found out what meat was, I was horrified. And I put my hamburger down right then.

So I first went vegetarian at age 6, and it was out of love for animals. And of course, there’s all kinds of environmental benefits to that as well. I think a lot of people do not realize that more greenhouse gas emissions come from raising animals for livestock than from all of the forms of fossil fuel-based transportation put together.

What appeals to you about the Meatless Monday campaign?

That it can appeal to a larger group of people. I feel like that’s a doable thing for anyone on the planet.

I know I’m not going to get 75 million NASCAR fans to give up meat, but I might be able to get a large portion of them to join us, at least with Meatless Mondays. And that’s a start. And then I can only hope that Meatless Mondays starts to pour over into their other days of the week—once they see how great vegetarian and vegan food is.

Tell me about your plans to run a vegan-themed car.

The goal of my race car this year is that every time I hit the track, I’m addressing a different issue. Daytona, it was *The Cove*. I knew that people seeing *The Cove* would learn about not only the dolphin slaughter, but about mercury poisoning and the pollution in our oceans, and they’d learn about over-fishing—just by watching that film. So the call to action for the fans at Daytona was to watch *The Cove*. And I had the director, Louie Psihoyos, and the star of the film, Ric O’Barry, come to my race with me. They were signing the DVDs, and we gave a thousand DVDs away to race fans.

I want to do a similar thing with the vegan car, where maybe we’re giving a movie away, but maybe we’re giving vegan food away. And people are going to be shocked when they find out that it’s vegan. Because the food is so good, I feel like that’s a good way to win people over.

In what ways does your profession allow you to have a voice on the issues you care about?

It’s a gigantic sport, and my voice through racing gets much bigger than it would be if I was just a biology graduate from

[the University of California, San Diego], running around asking people to cut back on their meat intake, or please support clean energy, or please give up plastic bags and start composting. So I look at my race car as just being a really great tool for me to address these environmental issues to a group of people that's not seeing much of that at the racetrack.

I'm not moving the needle when I'm hanging out and talking to a bunch of people that already get it. So it's the exact opposite of preaching to the choir, and it's sometimes a more difficult conversation to have, but it's the most important one.

👉 **GET THE RECIPE** for Münter's wild mushroom risotto at humansociety.org/allanimals.

Cory Joyce

How did you find Macy, your pit bull-lab mix?

She was actually living in a car with a homeless lady when I found her. The lady just couldn't take care of her anymore. So I said, "Hey, I'll take care of her. I'll give her a nice home." She's kind of spoiled by me. She's like another family member. She lives on the lake with us, so she's basically in the lake 24/7.



After visiting shelters in North Carolina, what did you determine that they most need?

In Cleveland County, they do need beds for the dogs, and they needed more supplies and basically more room. So just anything that I can give them and help with. I'll even throw a hammer or two.

What was it like volunteering at the Randolph County shelter's vaccination and outreach event?

I think they touched 500 animals, and they did 700 vaccinations—and the line was just crazy long. And I actually ended up bringing a member of my team there, and she [helped] pass out leashes and collars with me, and I ended up walking down the line a couple times with treats for the dogs, and meeting all the little furry animals. It was just an awesome feeling at the end of the day of saying, "Hey, I helped out the animal shelters, and I helped out all these animals."

When you're in the garage area, catching up with other drivers, does your animal work ever come up?

I have had a couple drivers come up and say thank you for what I do for the animals. People notice it, and they get the idea of, "Hey, he helps out; why can't I?" So I'm hoping that more people will come out and help, and do what they can do for their local shelters.

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