

Biographical Description for The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History with William Alexander Lester, III

PERSON

Lester, Bill, 1961-

Alternative Names: William Alexander Lester, III;

Life Dates: February 6, 1961-

Place of Birth: Washington, District of Columbia, USA

Residence: Suwanee, GA

Occupations: Race Car Driver

Biographical Note

Race car driver Bill Lester, III was born on February 6, 1961 in Washington D.C. to William Alexander Lester, Jr., an electrical engineering professor and researcher at IBM Corporation, and Rochelle Lester, a social worker and elementary school teacher. Lester graduated from Skyline High School in Oakland, California in 1979, and was awarded a Regents Scholarship to attend the University of California, Berkeley, where he earned his B.S. degree in electrical engineering and computer science in 1984.

Lester began his career as a project manager at Hewlett-Packard Company in Palo Alto, California. In 1985, Lester attended Sports Cars Club of America driving school; and that same year, he was named SCCA's Rookie of the Year for Northern California, winning the SCCA Regional Road Racing Championship in 1986. He made his International Motor Sports Association debut in 1989, finishing twelfth at Sears Point International Roadway race, part of IMSA's GTO Series. In 1998 and 1999, Lester competed in the 24 Hours of Daytona race, finishing fifth and tenth respectively. In 1999, Lester became the first African American to race in NASCAR's Busch Series, where he represented Team Rensi Motorsports and finished in twenty-first place. In 2000, Lester raced in the No. 8 Dodge Ram in NASCAR's Craftsman Truck Series for Bobby Hamilton Racing. In 2002, he began racing in the Craftsman Truck Series full-time in the No. 8 Dodge Ram. Lester switched to Bill Davis Racing in 2004; and in 2006, he began racing in the No. 22 Toyota Tundra. Lester became the first African American since 1986 to participate in the Nextel Cup at Atlanta Motor Speedway. He switched to Billy Ballew Motorsports for a season before leaving NASCAR racing in 2007.

The following year, Lester joined Southard Motorsports, where he drove in the Grand-Am Rolex Sports Car Series from 2008 to 2010. Lester spent the 2009 season with

Orbit Racing and the 2010 season racing for Starworks Motorsport. In 2011, Lester became the first African American driver to win any Grand-Am division. After retiring as a driver, Lester served as a member of the National Motorsports Appeals Panel as well as the NASCAR Diversity Council.

Lester and his wife, Cheryl, have two sons, William Alexander IV and Austin Richard.

Bill Lester, III was interviewed by The HistoryMakers on March 10, 2018.

Related Entries

Booksin Elementary School [STUDENTOF]

[from ? to ?]

Edwin Markham Middle School [STUDENTOF]

[from ? to ?]

Skyline High School [STUDENTOF]

[from ? to ?]

University of California, Berkeley [STUDENTOF]

[from ? to ?]

B.S.

Hewlett-Packard [EMPLOYEEOF]

[from 1984 to 1988]

Software Engineer

Hewlett-Packard [EMPLOYEEOF]

[from 1988 to 1998]

Project Manager

Bill Lester Racing [EMPLOYEEOF]

[from 1989 to ?]

Owner

Finish Line Investing [EMPLOYEEOF]

[from 2014 to ?]

Owner

NASCAR [MEMBEROF]

[from 1999 to 2007]

Driver

Grand-Am Road Racing [MEMBEROF]

[from 2007 to 2012]

Driver

Sigma Pi Phi Fraternity [MEMBEROF]

[from 2008 to ?]

Member

NASCAR Appeals Panel [MEMBEROF]

[from 2012 to ?]