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Although he made his career driving around a track at speeds of more than 180 mph, Rusty Wallace, newly retired NASCAR driver and Nextel Cup champion, loves spending low-key time on the open road with his wife and their three children. The Wallace family knows road trips can be stressful, especially when you add kids to the mix. However, with a little planning, creativity and preparation, road trips can be a cherished experience for all. Here are a few tips from the professional to make your next road trip fun for the entire family:

• Safety first. "In the early days of my racing career, drivers had to be mechanics too," Wallace said. "I know the importance of making sure your vehicle is in tip-top condition." Wallace recommends having a mechanic perform a once-over on your vehicle before the trip. But don't forget to pack an emergency road kit just in case.

• Plan ahead. "With today's unpredictable fuel costs, a wrong turn can be costly," said Wallace. He recommends a trip-planning tool such as Microsoft Streets & Trips 2006 with GPS Locator to help your family map out the perfect route in advance. With a reassuring voice to guide the way and mapping information that is accurate and easy to use, you'll know exactly what to expect along the way. Streets & Trips 2006 with GPS Locator goes beyond simple driving directions to provide travelers with an easy way to plan personalized trips.

• Keep the kids entertained. Taking vacations is supposed to be fun, but after spending hours in the car your family may arrive at the destination in anything but a good mood. "Nowadays it's easy to keep kids entertained with portable DVD players and such, but then you miss some valuable bonding time. Our family plays games and takes a lot of breaks to stretch our legs and take in the scenery," said Wallace.

• Make pit stops fun. What would the great American road trip be without experiencing a bit of classic roadside Americana? From the World's Largest Ball of Twine in Cawker City, Kan., to the 18-foot-tall Paul Bunyan statue in Bemidji, Minn., there are landmarks all over the country to be discovered. If you are ever in Rusty Wallace's home state of North Carolina, he recommends visiting the Great Smoky Mountains National Park.

• Make it a family affair. The journey is an important part of the trip, particularly when you're traveling by car. It's an opportunity to see new places and spend time together as a family. Wallace suggests involving the entire family in the planning. "A weekend fishing trip may not always be the ideal getaway for my wife and daughter," Wallace said, "but if the whole family is involved in the preparation, we can plan activities that will make everyone happy."

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