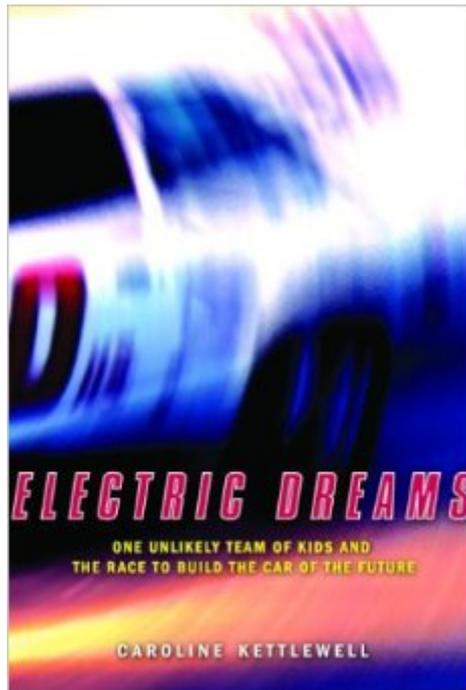


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# Electric Dreams: One Unlikely Team Of Kids And The Race To Build The Car Of The Future



## Synopsis

When Berkeley graduate Eric Ryan was sent by Teach for America to a hardscrabble high school in the heart of North Carolina's NASCAR country, he didn't count on Harold Miller — a big guy with a big laugh and a tarheel accent as thick as sorghum syrup — sticking his head into his class one morning and announcing, "Hey Mr. Ryan, we're gonna build an electric car." Two regional utilities had challenged a group of elite schools throughout the South to design and build battery-powered electric vehicles to be judged during a final contest at NASCAR's Richmond International Raceway. Although Ryan's underprivileged high school was not on the list, Miller managed to squeak them in. With a Ford Escort rescued from the compacter, a few hundred pounds of scavenged golf cart batteries, a local minor league NASCAR driver as coach, and the local constabulary looking the other way as the reborn "Shocker" began careening over back roads on test runs, the kids get their pasted-together dark horse to the big contest in Richmond. *Electric Dreams* offers drama built on marvelous small-town characters, and a story of never-say-die invention which would make North Carolina's other pioneers, the Wright Brothers, proud.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

Caroline Kettlewell has written an inspirational book that captures the essence of the people behind the successful and now world-renowned electric car team from northeastern North Carolina. From the old codger shop teacher Harold Miller, to the young, energetic educator from California, Eric Ryan, Kettlewell has painted a lifelike picture of the people involved in this project. These are people you begin to care about as the story unfolds. It's evident from reading this book that only Divine Intervention many times along the way made the project successful. If John Parker had not been

friends with Miller and knew that he had been interested in building an electric car for quite some time, Miller would never have been chosen. If Ryan had not decided to move to a rural community in North Carolina and live with Parker, the project clearly would not have been successful. If Randy Shillingburg had not known Parker and had faith in his friends in North Carolina, the project would never have even begun. And if the wonderful group of students and other teachers had not decided to devote their free time on evenings and weekends, the team's electric car would never have been completed on time. Kettlewell's story also makes a strong environmental statement. Her book questions how a group of students and teachers from poor, rural schools could build an environmental-friendly vehicle -- while the nation's automakers are reluctant to do the same a decade later. *Electric Dreams* is a true story that makes one think, while providing an inspirational message for anyone who believes that obstacles can be overcome and students from even the poorest, most rural schools can be successful.

The quality of writing and the humanness of this story should tickle the cockles of your heart as it did mine as this is all about the underdog achieving the impossible. You will become part of the team to create an electric car from absolutely nothing using the expertise of a few noble men who had to learn while on-the-job. This is done by a handful of teachers in a high school located in Northampton County, North Carolina noted for its majority of "poor people." The students are the drivers and the teachers the guides in a story that makes you feel good all over with a group of young people that overcome being made fun of and do accomplish the impossible.

Berkeley graduate Eric Ryan's journey to North Carolina to an improvised high school where his encounter with Harold Miller would lead to an electric car's design and development would change his life. *Electric Dreams: One Unlikely Team Of Kids And The Race To Build The Car Of The Future* documents how an unlikely band of kids would build the car of the future in the heart of NASCAR country, beating the odds to win a high school competition. An exciting and true story of determination and true grit - and fast cars.

Once in a while, not all the time, but once in a while you need to read a book like this one, just to make you feel like there is at least hope in the world. As the author says on her web site: "I decided to cut loose and have some fun with my second book. The result is the lively true tale of long odds and underdogs, *Electric Dreams*. In these times when there seems to be a bottomless supply of overwhelmingly depressing and discouraging news from every quarter, I thought we could use a

good, inspiring read to remind us that we all have the power to help change the world."When a school from the backwoods of nowhere can put together a team of kids, teachers, and the community to win an electric car competition, it's not major news- nobody is bleeding, it won't make the television. But it just might make these kids turn out a lot better than they would otherwise. And it just might give all of the readers a good feeling in the bottom of the stomach. This is a simple little book, you already know the story, but it's written with a flair that makes it read like a mystery novel. You know those kids are going to win, but Ms. Kettlewell makes you feel every little victory, every little mishap. Brilliant book. There is one little point there at the end. "Why can a bunch of high-school students manage what the big car companies insist can't be done?" As the last words in the book say, "It don't make sense."

It's not necessary to have any particular interest in electric automobiles, or any sort of automobiles, to thoroughly enjoy this engaging book. It's as much about people daring to dream and bucking the odds as it is about cars (though Ms. Kettlewell does make a compelling case for the development of electric cars, and an even more compelling one to stop being dependent on oil). The author had a great cast of characters to work with, and she really makes these kids and their teachers, and their struggle to build a viable electric auto, come alive. The prose here is almost electric, the way it sparkles and zings, and the final scenes, in which the students put their car through the paces on an honest-to-God NASCAR track will have you squirming with tension and body English and rooting for these underdogs to triumph. A sterling example of how a real life story, when it's written well, can outshine fiction.

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