

People

NEWS, STYLE & FUN
FROM AROUND NASHVILLE!

COUNTRY

BEHIND
THE SCENES
WITH

Luke & Dierks!

THE COUNTRY SUPERSTARS
DISH ABOUT THEIR
LONGTIME FRIENDSHIP,
EGO CHECKS AND
HOSTING THE ACM
AWARDS TOGETHER

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The high jinks start before the first picture is snapped: Luke Bryan grabs Dierks Bentley's leg, and Dierks retaliates with a jab to his midsection. "Dierks is giving me sh-- about my muffin top!" Luke yells. Several pokes, pinches and "blue steel" poses later ("We're killing it!" Luke declares, as the two double over with laughter), an exasperated publicist watching the photo shoot calls out, "Guys! Remember, they need to use these photos!" It's a sign of their decade-old friendship that the country superstars are more interested in cracking each other up than competing with each other—and it's a taste of things to come when the pair host the ACM Awards April 3 on CBS. Bryan, 39, and Bentley, 40, sat down with *People* and talked afterparty antics, family time and why they'll be wearing straw hats and drinking beer together when they're 55.

Dierks, you're stepping into Blake Shelton's shoes hosting the ACMs with Luke. What can we expect?

DIERKS: Oh, here we go with the comparisons to Blake!

LUKE: Dierks naturally...

DIERKS:... Looks better!

LUKE: Yes, looks better. And Blake's not here to defend himself! Dierks and I don't take ourselves too seriously. And I think people can tell we're genuine buddies. I mean, we just spent an hour together taking pictures.

DIERKS: We touched a lot. I know your shoulders better than your wife does. And your love muffins.

You two became good friends on Dierks's 2008 tour when Luke was an opener. Favorite memories?

LUKE: We'd spend hours on the bus playing songs, and we just had a great time. We trashed a couple of backstage areas.

DIERKS: I showed this guy how to throw a backstage party. And you passed it on to [Jason] Aldean!

LUKE: Dierks used to have this amplifier...

DIERKS: It always overheated...

LUKE: And finally we just had enough and decided to end it. We doused it with beer and trashed it. The venue fined us like \$2,000.

DIERKS: The next day my crew had a memorial for the amplifier.

How crazy did the rabble-rousing get?

DIERKS: We did end up swinging from the rafters one night. Didn't you have a flip camera tied to your belt?

LUKE: Yeah. We had played the Palace of Auburn Hills in Michigan...

DIERKS:... It holds 20,000 people, and we were playing for 3,000 at the time. I remember walking in like, "Is Kenny Chesney closing this show?" Anyway, we had a hell of an afterparty.

LUKE: A lot of people who played to 3,000 people in a 20,000-seat arena would have found the nearest bridge, but instead we had a party. Dierks really made the most of every day. Me and Dierks ended up pouring shots for everybody at the bar.

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I FEEL LIKE
HE'S A BROTHER.
I'VE WATCHED
HIM COME UP
FROM ZERO
AND ALWAYS
KEEP THE SAME
POSITIVE
ATTITUDE”
—Dierks



Your careers have come a long way since. Ever had to ego-check each other?

LUKE: I've never sensed anything like that. The most uncomfortable thing was when Dierks came out on my tour [in 2014] and went on before me in the stadiums. But it's a testament to him that he was just so daggum excited to be a part of it.

DIERKS: I loved it. I love watching his success.

LUKE: Same here.

DIERKS: And I get very defensive if anyone ever talks any sh-- about him. He's been through a lot of personal stuff, and he goes out there and makes people smile. And he's playing stadiums and he's killing it and he's the same dude.

What's kept you close friends?

DIERKS: Being married and having kids—that's the biggest bond for us. That's the real stuff.

LUKE: We talk about music, but then it's "How's the wife? How are the kids?"

DIERKS: That's the most real connection you can have with some-



↑ EARLY DAYS

Bryan and Bentley first met in 2005 when Luke, then a newly signed artist, opened a show in Georgia for Dierks, whose second album had just topped the charts. "I remember walking backstage and seeing Luke play, and the crowd was going crazy," Bentley says. "Since then, we've had a similar trajectory of life and family. We both want to succeed not only in music but in our personal life." Adds Bryan: "We've watched each other grow so much."



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 —Luke

one in this business. There's no blueprint for how to do this, touring and having a family.

LUKE: It's a daunting task.

DIERKS: I look at Luke, and when a guy can have the intensity that comes with playing stadiums—that requires every ounce of commitment—and then his commitment to his wife and family is just as strong, that's powerful. It's easy to do this job when you have no responsibility. You get burned out? Go to the beach! But when we come off the road, you hit the ground running. Everyone wants stuff from you.

LUKE: We do get it. If we're out and about, and one of us says, "I need to get home," the other will be like, "Yeah, get home." If Dierks is like, "I can't go on a hunting trip with you, I have to stick around the house," I get it.

Do your families hang out together?

LUKE: We both have places on the panhandle of Florida, so we bounce back and forth.

DIERKS: A really good hang was that little house you were renting. He got lots of shrimp, and we were peeling shrimp and the girls were hanging out and the kids were all swimming.

LUKE: And tearing the house apart!

DIERKS: The funny thing was, I was thinking, "It's Luke Bryan—he's probably got some fancy house," but this thing was inland and there's three kids all sleeping on one pull-out couch. And there was maybe one other bedroom. It was tiny!

LUKE: When we're 55, we'll probably be fishing and hanging out.

What would 55-year-old Dierks and Luke get up to?

DIERKS: We'll be outside a lot.

LUKE: Big straw hats. Cutoff jeans.

DIERKS: Fly-fishing. Drinking beer! ●