

Mopar, Pritchett Return to Top Fuel; Enders No. 1 in Dodge Dart on First Day of Mopar Mile-High Nationals

- Don Schumacher Racing (DSR) Top Fuel driver Leah Pritchett debuts Mopar/Pennzoil® dragster at 37th annual Mopar Mile-High NHRA Nationals
- Mopar Performance Dodge Dart Pro Stock pilot Erica Enders rockets to provisional pole for first time this season
- Jeg Coughlin Jr. takes Magneti Marelli Offered by Mopar Dodge Dart to season-high No. 4 spot
- Tommy Johnson Jr. leads DSR Dodge Charger R/T Funny Cars on first day of Mopar's premier NHRA event
- Mopar fields racecars in three professional categories for the first time since 1999
- Professional fields plump with HEMI®-powered entries at Mopar Mile-High Nationals

July 22, 2016, Morrison, Colorado - Mopar fans came out in full force to cheer on the NHRA Mello Yello Drag Racing Series tour on the first day of the 37th annual Mopar Mile-High NHRA Nationals, and they were treated to quite a show as newly christened Don Schumacher Racing (DSR) driver Leah Pritchett debuted the brand new Mopar/Pennzoil® Top Fuel Dragster. In the Pro Stock category, another Mopar driver was blazing a trail as Erica Enders showed renewed vigor and led the field on the first day of her sponsor's premier NHRA event.

Pritchett's first race behind the wheel of the HEMI®-powered nitro dragster marked a return for Mopar to Top Fuel for the first time in 17 years; the last time Mopar fielded a Top Fuel car was 1999 with Mike Dunn behind the wheel.

Pritchett's most recent journey down the racetrack at Bandimere Speedway was when she was 14 years old and competing in NHRA's Jr. Drag Racing League.

"The other drivers in competition have been racing, winning, and gathering data here, but I haven't been on this racetrack in a very long time, and our Mopar/Pennzoil Top Fuel Dragster has not been down this track yet," said Pritchett, the 28-year-old who calls Avon, Ind., home. "But that doesn't matter because we're here now, and we're racing. This has already been a great weekend, and we'll have many more opportunities to make it even better."

Pritchett is tentatively qualified in the No. 6 position with a best time of 3.881-second at 312.35 mph.

Tony Schumacher, driving the HEMI-powered U.S. Army Top Fuel dragster, raced to a 3.836/313.07 to grab hold of the No. 5 spot on day one in Denver.

Dodge Dart Pro Stock Cars In Fine Form

The reigning NHRA Pro Stock world champion and back-to-back season title winner has had a challenging year to date, but on Friday at the Mopar Mile-High Nationals, Enders wheeled her Mopar Performance Dodge Dart right on up to the top with a brisk 6.963-second pass at 197.74 mph in the later session. Mopar teammate Jeg Coughlin Jr. clocked in with a best time of 6.979/196.73 for the No. 4 position. Not only were the Mopar Pro Stock drivers perched loftily at the top, but they also out-qualified – by a bunch – the KB Racing cars that have dominated nearly every race so far in 2016.

If it holds, the No. 1 will be the 19th of Enders' career and her first since the Las Vegas event last fall, where she went on to score the trophy on Sunday. The Bandimere Speedway low qualifier award would also be her first pole at the Mopar Mile-High Nationals.

"What better race to have a turnaround weekend than at our sponsor's event, the Mopar Mile-High Nationals," said

Enders. "It might come as a shock to some people, but this just goes to show that hard work and determination pay off. Week in and week out, we've been coming out here and qualifying in the bottom half of the field. We just don't get discouraged; we go home, and we go to work.

"We came here knowing what we found on the dyno this week was pretty significant, and we wanted the scoreboards to show what we found. They did. Our goal for tomorrow is to just get our race day setup ready to go for Sunday and to stay consistent."

In addition to the Team Mopar naturally aspirated factory hot rods, there are four other Dodge Dart Pro Stockers racing for the Mopar Mile-High Nationals trophy. Veteran Dodge campaigner Allen Johnson has held the title of "King of the Mountain" for many years with a very dominant performance that has amounted to six victories so far, and he is currently No. 7 in the line-up. Richie Stevens Jr. (No. 12) is competing in a Mopar Dodge as teammate to Deric Kramer (No. 13), who debuted a new Dart in Denver. Alan Prusiensky is piloting the sixth Dodge Dart in the Mile-High Nationals field and is No. 14 at the conclusion of the first day of the event.

Johnson Leads Mopar Funny Cars

Conditions in Denver are notoriously challenging for crew chiefs and drivers across the board. The thin air at high altitude all but starves the oxygen-hungry racecars and demands a wholly different tune-up than anywhere else on the circuit. Tommy Johnson Jr. and his John Collins-tuned Make-A-Wish Dodge Charger R/T were the best of show for the Don Schumacher Racing (DSR) Mopar Funny Cars with a 4.136-second pass at 291.63 mph that set him in the No. 7 position.

DSR teammate Jack Beckman was next-best in his Infinite Hero Dodge, provisionally qualifying in the No. 9 spot with a 4.175/236.05. Matt Hagan and the Mopar Express Lane Charger are settled 10th for now on a 4.444/198.90, while Ron Capps is No. 12 with a 6.514/107.35 best time in his Mopar Dodge.

Qualifying will continue on Saturday with two more rounds before the field is set for the 37th annual Mopar Mile-High NHRA Nationals at Bandimere Speedway, one at 4:00 p.m. CT and the final session kicking off at 6:30 p.m. CT.

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About Mopar Motorsports

The Mopar brand's commitment to professional motorsports competition was established in the 1950s when a partnership ignited with drag racing pioneer Don Garlits, resulting in the breaking of numerous speed and performance barriers in HEMI®-powered vehicles over the next several decades. In 2016, Mopar will look to once again vie for a NHRA World Championship title in both Pro Stock and Funny Car categories. While Mopar remains involved in a various professional motorsports series, it continues to honor its roots by being a proud supporter of Sportsman racing within the NHRA with its sponsorship of the HEMI Challenge and Mopar's Tom Hoover Sportsman Challenge.

Mopar

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A simple combination of the words MOTO and PARTS, Mopar offers exceptional service, parts and customer-care. Born in 1937 as the name of a line of antifreeze products, Mopar has evolved over more than 85 years to represent both complete vehicle care and authentic performance for owners and enthusiasts worldwide.

Mopar made its mark in the 1960s during the muscle-car era with performance parts to enhance speed and handling for both on-road and racing use. Later, Mopar expanded to include technical service and customer support, and today integrates service, parts and customer-care operations in order to enhance customer and dealer support worldwide.

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