

Mopar Funny Car Driver Johnson Jr. Launches into Countdown with Final Round

- Make-A-Wish Dodge Charger R/T driver Tommy Johnson Jr. wheels his way to final round at first race of Countdown to the Championship
- Don Schumacher Racing (DSR) driver Johnson makes third final of season after qualifying No. 1 at NHRA Carolina Nationals
- Johnson moves up from No. 7 to No. 4 in the Funny Car championship points
- DSR Mopar Dodge Charger Funny Car campaigner Ron Capps reaches semifinals, retains points lead heading into second race of Countdown
- St. Louis and NHRA Midwest Nationals next on NHRA tour, second race of 2016 Countdown to the Championship

September 18, 2016, Concord, North Carolina - The Make-A-Wish Dodge Charger R/T piloted by Don Schumacher Racing (DSR) driver Tommy Johnson Jr. dominated the Funny Car field when it mattered most during qualifying at the NHRA Carolina Nationals and produced a start from the pole for the Avon, Indiana-based competitor. On Sunday, at the first race of six in the 2016 Mello Yello Drag Racing Series Countdown to the Championship, Johnson was again on a sweet ride as the monstrous HEMI® under the hood took him all the way to the final round.

All four of the Team Mopar DSR-housed Funny Cars are running for points in the Countdown to the Championship, and on Sunday at illustrious zMAX Dragway, three of the four advanced to the second round or better with their Dodge Charger entries. Jack Beckman and the Infinite Hero Dodge had trouble maneuvering the tricky, hot racing surface and bowed out in the first round, but Mopar Express Lane Dodge Charger R/T driver Matt Hagan advanced to the second round, and Ron Capps, in his Mopar-powered Charger, thundered ahead to the semifinals to sock away valuable points in the championship chase. Capps will retain the points lead heading into the second race of the Countdown.

The day started on an unexpected note for Johnson, who had a solo run in the first round when Bob Gilbertson was unable to get his Funny Car to fire. Crew chief John Collins was afforded the opportunity to gather valuable data as Johnson attempted to navigate the sticky, steaming racing surface on the hottest day of the weekend. Johnson struck the tires and clocked a 5.330-second pass at 132.70 mph, which meant he was to forfeit lane choice in a second-round meeting with DSR teammate Hagan.

Known for his quick reaction times, Johnson launched ahead with a very efficient .039-second start to his opponent's .071, and the two put on a great show with their Mopar machines as they raced side-by-side towards the finish line. It was Johnson who tripped the timers first, recording a winning 3.970/320.74 to Hagan's 3.992/322.11. The round win sent him ahead to the semifinals for a meeting with Del Worsham, and again it was Johnson who took the lead at the hit of the throttle. A .046 reaction time to a .075 provided momentum and his strong and steady Charger was off on a tear, clocking out of the round with a cool 3.949/321.19 to 3.990/322.27 to send Johnson to his third final of the season.

He was again phenomenal on the starting line with a .032-second reaction time that bested his opponent's .059, but at the top end it was John Force with the win light, 3.946/324.05 to 3.987/315.71.

"Peaking at the right time is what we came in here saying we needed to do, and I think we showed that we're ready to peak," said Johnson, who moved up from No. 7 to No. 4 in the points. "We qualified No. 1 and went to the final, and we lost a close race there. We wanted a little more than that, but I'm very happy with the way the car is running and the way the team is doing. We're going to take this as a positive and not a negative, and we'll go on to St. Louis and

continue.

"This gives everybody confidence. You can either come out of this first race of the Countdown with confidence that you've got a shot and that you're one of the cars to beat, or you can come out of here not being one of the cars to beat. This will put a kick in the guys' steps, and everybody is going to work a little harder. We're really close to being one of the dominant cars right now. A little more hard work and focus will get us there."

Hagan and the Mopar Express Lane Dodge Charger will leave the first race of the Countdown to the Championship in the No. 5 position. The two-time Funny Car world champ was level-headed and looking ahead at the conclusion of the event.

"TJ and the Make-A-Wish Dodge Charger guys just did a great job, and at the end of the day, you have to go over there and shake their hands," said Hagan. "They just did a good job, and we don't leave empty-handed. We at least got a few points in qualifying, and we learned and we'll move on to St. Louis. We have five more races to make this thing happen. A lot can happen in just five races, so we'll just keep digging."

In the Top Fuel chase, Leah Pritchett and Tony Schumacher, the two DSR HEMI-powered Top Fuel drivers, leave the first race of the Countdown in the No. 8 and No. 5 positions, respectively. Pritchett won her first-round battle with Richie Crampton before falling to Doug Kalitta in round two, and Schumacher was on the bad end of a big upset in the first round when his dragster fell into tire shake and allowed rookie Cameron Ferre to advance.

Pro Stock points chaser Jeg Coughlin Jr., in the Magneti Marelli Offered by Mopar Dodge Dart, accumulated points on Sunday when he got ahead of fellow Mopar campaigner Allen Johnson in round one.

Next Event in NHRA Countdown to the Championship

The second race of NHRA's 2016 Countdown to the Championship will take place in one week at Gateway Motorsports Park just outside of St. Louis, Sept. 23-25, 2016. The playoffs are in a six-race format that pits the top 10 drivers in each professional category against one another for the season title.

2016 NHRA Championship Point Standings (season wins in parentheses)

Pro Stock

1. Jason Line (8) – 2,233
2. Greg Anderson (7) – 2,183
3. Vincent Nobile – 2,129
4. Bo Butner – 2,123
- 5. Allen Johnson (1), Mopar Dodge Dart – 2,095**
6. Chris McGaha (1) – 2,082
7. Shane Gray – 2,081
8. Drew Skillman (1) – 2,073
- 9. Jeg Coughlin Jr., Dodge Dart – 2,052**
- 10. Erica Enders, Mopar Performance Dodge Dart – 2,020**

Funny Car

- 1. Ron Capps, Dodge Charger R/T (5) – 2,194**
2. Del Worsham (1) – 2,152
3. John Force (3) – 2,144
- 4. Tommy Johnson Jr., Dodge Charger R/T (1) – 2,132**
- 5. Matt Hagan, Dodge Charger R/T (3) – 2,122**
6. Courtney Force (1) – 2,094
7. Robert Hight (1) – 2,093
- 8. Jack Beckman, Dodge Charger R/T (1) – 2,084**
9. Tim Wilkerson (2) – 2,067
10. Alexis DeJoria (1) – 2,036

Top Fuel

1. Antron Brown (5) – 2,226
2. Doug Kalitta (3) – 2,184
3. Steve Torrence (2) – 2,126
4. Brittany Force (3) – 2,110
- 5. Tony Schumacher, Mopar HEMI (1) – 2,099**
6. J.R. Todd (1) – 2,074
7. Shawn Langdon (2) – 2,067
- 8. Leah Pritchett, Mopar HEMI (1) – 2,054**
9. Clay Millican – 2,052
10. Richie Crampton – 2,046

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

Mopar is the global name for Stellantis genuine parts and authentic accessories.

A simple combination of the words MOtor 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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