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Hagan Takes Mopar Express Lane Dodge Charger R/T on Record Drive to Earn No. 1 Qualifier at the NHRA Midwest Nationals

- Matt Hagan drove the Mopar Express Lane Dodge Charger R/T to record 3-second passes to earn No.1 qualifier honors at National Hot Rod Association (NHRA) Midwest Nationals
- All four Don Schumacher (DSR) 2015 Dodge Charger R/T Funny Cars qualify in the top-five with runs in the three-second range for second of six playoff events in the NHRA 'Countdown to the Championship'
- Allen Johnson qualifies HEMI-powered Dodge Dart eighth in battle for NHRA Midwest Nationals title and shot at second NHRA Pro Stock Championship

September 26, 2015, Madison, Illinois - Don Schumacher Racing (DSR) Funny Car pilot Matt Hagan took his Mopar Express Lane 2015 Dodge Charger R/T for a track record three-second drive and posted a national speed record to earn the No.1 Qualifier spot at the fourth annual AAA Insurance National Hot Rod Association (NHRA) Midwest Nationals. All four DSR Mopars qualified in the top-five for the second national event of the six-race playoff series known as the NHRA "Countdown to the Championship" which takes place in the shadow of the famed St. Louis Gateway Arch and is the second of three races in three consecutive weeks.

Prior to this weekend's event, drag racing fans at Gateway Motorsports Park had never seen a sub four-second Funny Car run. That changed dramatically during this year's qualifying sessions as no less than ten drivers posted times below that, including all four DSR 2015 Dodge Charger R/T Funny Cars who also all came away with bonus points for their efforts to post a top-three pass in each session.

When all was said and done, the reigning Funny Car world Champ's final qualifying pass was one for the record books as Hagan reset both the track's time and speed records twice, lowering the mark on his final attempt to an incredible 3.883-second elapsed time pass, the second-best ever recorded, at an unprecedented 330.47 miles per hour to also reset the NHRA national speed record, and earn his 21st career No.1 qualifier position.

Hagan won four titles earlier this year and credits his crew chief Dickie Venables for taking some chances with the set up in the latter half of the regular season to put his Mopar Express Lane team in a position to win races in the Countdown and vie for his third world title when it counts most.

"It took a lot of courage to do that," said Hagan of the drastic changes Venables has been making since the western swing. "It's one of those things where everybody was watching (Beckman and his crew chief) Jimmy Prock do some incredible things and had everyone wondering how we were going to catch them. Watching what he (Venables) has been doing has been cool, to see the changes he's made starting to work and the confidence it brings."

"To hang on to a lap like that is just awesome, but you have to keep working," added Hagan who is the first driver to break the 330 mph mark in a Funny Car. "You have to stay humble, keep digging because there's a bunch of great racecars out there right now. This championship hunt is absolutely the most competitive one I've ever been in. It says a lot about the competition out there. I'm stoked to do it."

Should Hagan replicate the run (within 1 percent) in eliminations to back up his 3.883-second elapsed time for a national record, he would be awarded points equivalent to a round win to give him a boost in the standings where he currently sits fourth behind two of his teammates and winner of the first countdown race, Del Worsham.

"We want the 20 points," said Hagan who earned six bonus points in qualifying for topping the time charts in the last two sessions. "Points matter now with five races left. It's great to have that run and the data to work off, and the morale lifts our team, Dickie (Venables) and these crew guys."

Driver of the Infinite Hero Dodge Charger R/T, Jack Beckman, also initially reset the track e.t. record on his final own

run with a 3.907/327.27 pass for the provisional pole position until the next and final pair of Funny Cars driven by DSR teammate Hagan and points leader Worsham (3.899/ 327.82) crossed the stripe at the finish with their record runs to bump him down to third on the eliminations ladder. Beckman, who earned five extra bonus points for his runs and sits third in the championship standings, will see John Bojec in the lane next to him for his first round match-up.

In fourth place behind Beckman on the qualifying sheets is teammate Ron Capps, who has won at Gateway Motorsports Park three times. He earned the spot as well as two bonus points by taking his 2015 Dodge Charger R/T for his best career run with a 3.937/ 327.19 pass. He'll have John Hale as his opening round opponent.

Also posting a career best runs in qualifying was driver Tommy Johnson Jr. aboard his DSR Make-A-Wish Mopar which sits second in the Countdown after last weekend's runner-up finish at the NHRA Carolina Nationals for the 18th of 19 final round appearance for the newly designed 2015 Dodge Charger R/T Funny Car this season. Johnson Jr.'s 3.941/318.54 pass rounded out the top-five in qualifying, gave him two extra points, and pits him against Alexis DeJoria in the first round of eliminations.

Sitting fourth in the Pro Stock class standings for the NHRA "Countdown to the Championship" and vying for a second career world championship with five races to go, Allen Johnson qualified his "Magneti Marelli Offered by Mopar" Dodge Dart eighth on the qualifying sheets for Sunday's Midwest Nationals after he improved steadily through each session posting a best run of 6.524 seconds at 212.16 mph in the final session.

"We're making really good runs but seems like we're just not running down the back and speeds like we should be," Johnson said. "We'll tune on it a little bit for race day, but we're consistent and made two really good runs today. We just need to get another hundredth of a second and half a mile an hour out of it and we'll be in the top two or three cars.

"We've got lane choice for first round and while it's not exactly where we'd like to be but we'll go digging tomorrow as best we can," he added. "The testing we did here helped, but they ground the track before this weekend's event and it changed a bunch. We're not quite as good as we were in testing but we're not far. We need to make a really good first run tomorrow against Shane Gray in the opening round and then build on it because it doesn't get any easier in the second with the possibility of facing Greg Anderson."

While Johnson knows what to focus on for Sunday's eliminations, he can't help but find it just a little bit more difficult to do with a very important element missing from this weekend's nationals as his father and engine tuner, Roy Johnson, underwent spinal surgery earlier this week and will miss a number of events during his recovery.

"I think Roy maybe missed one race (following a heart attack in 2007) in the 20 years we've raced together," said Johnson. "We're missing his presence and insight and I'm feeling my focus drifting out of the lane a bit, so to speak, but we have a job to do to put us into contention by the time he gets back."

Fellow Dodge Dart driver, Deric Kramer drove to a 12th place spot on the eliminations ladder on the strength of a 6.545/ 210.70 pass to face Jonathan Gray in first elimination round. Fellow HEMI-powered driver, V. Gaines qualified 13th with his best pass of 6.556 / 211.30 in the final session to draw Drew Skillman as his first opponent on Sunday.

Greg Anderson was Pro Stock's No.1 qualifier for a third consecutive event and the fourth time this season when he posted a 6.492 second run at 213.20 mph.

ESPN2 will televise 90 minutes of qualifying coverage on Sunday, Sept. 27 starting at 3:00 a.m. (ET) and then re-air an hour of qualifying highlights at 2 p.m. (ET) that afternoon. Fans can also watch the fourth annual NHRA AAA Midwest Nationals elimination rounds live on the internet from 12 noon to 6 pm ET via ESPN3.com, and then three and a half hours of eliminations coverage televised on ESPN2 on Sunday, Sept. 27 starting at 8:30 p.m. (ET).

2015 NHRA Countdown to the Championship Standings (following NHRA Midwest Nationals qualifying results)

PRO STOCK (season wins in parentheses)

1. Erica Enders-Stevens* – 2271 (6)
2. Greg Anderson* – 2198 (4)
3. Chris McGaha* – 2162 (2)
4. **Allen Johnson – Dodge Dart – 2155 (1)**
5. Larry Morgan – 2147 (2)
6. Vincent Nobile – 2135
7. Jason Line* – 2125 (2)
8. Shane Gray – 2117
9. Drew Skillman – 2091
10. Jonathan Gray – 2066

FUNNY CAR (season wins in parentheses)

1. Del Worsham – 2227 (1)
2. **Tommy Johnson Jr. – (2015 Dodge Charger R/T) – 2211 (2)**
3. **Jack Beckman – (2015 Dodge Charger R/T) – 2188 (5)**
4. **Matt Hagan – (2015 Dodge Charger R/T) – 2177 (4)**
5. John Force – 2158 (2)
6. **Ron Capps – (2015 Dodge Charger R/T) – 2137 (2)**
7. Alexis DeJoria – 2103
8. Robert Hight – 2099 (1)
9. Tim Wilkerson – 2087 (1)
10. Cruz Pedregon – 2076

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