

Rain-Shortened Qualifying Presents Challenge for Mopar Contingent at NHRA Keystone Nationals

- Weather conditions hamper Mopar contingent's qualifying efforts at the 31st annual National Hot Rod Association (NHRA) Keystone Nationals near Reading, Pennsylvania
- Don Schumacher Racing (DSR) pilots Ron Capps and Jack Beckman qualify their 2015 Dodge Charger R/T Funny Cars in top-three spot for eliminations
- All four DSR Mopars sit in the top-five positions for the "NHRA "Countdown to the Championship" following the conclusion of qualifying at Maple Grove Raceway
- Allen Johnson looks to improve on third place position in championship points as he qualifies Magneti Marelli HEMI-powered Dodge Dart tenth for eliminations

October 3, 2015, Mohnton, Pennsylvania - Cold and wet weather conditions on both Friday and Saturday hampered the Mopar contingent's qualifying efforts for the 31st annual National Hot Rod Association (NHRA) Keystone Nationals, the third of six "Countdown to the Championship" playoff events, being held this weekend near Reading, Pennsylvania, but a pair of Don Schumacher Racing (DSR) 2015 Dodge Charger R/T Funny Cars still made their way into the top-three spots before qualifying concluded.

After rain washed out Friday's two sessions at Maple Grove Raceway, qualifying resumed on Saturday afternoon with unseasonably cold air and track temperatures hovering in the 50 degree Fahrenheit range, but all pro category competitors were then limited to just one run as inclement weather returned to the area in the later afternoon. With just one chance to make the field on an uncharacteristically cold track, the results were rather mixed for the Funny Car category with just two cars making relatively clean passes down the lane.

DSR's Ron Capps was one of the few to cross the finish line with a reasonable qualifying time after he had to pedal his 2015 Dodge Charger R/T slightly to regain traction to finish his lap with a 4.218 second elapsed time pass at 318.17 miles per hour (mph) and earn the No. 2 spot on the timing sheets. That qualifying effort helped propel him into the top-five for the NHRA "Countdown to the Championship" standings behind his teammates Matt Hagan in second place, Jack Beckman in third and Tommy Johnson Jr. in fourth place.

The only other car to make a full pull to the finish in Funny Car qualifying was driven by Robert Hight, who took the No.1 qualifier position with a track-record lap of 3.922/329.34, set prior to Capps' attempt.

"We heard Robert (Hight) run that 3.92 and I think that everyone that didn't make it down the track was underpowered," said Capps who draws Paul Lee as his opponent for the first round of eliminations. "We're into conditions we don't see. Super cold. Super good track. I'm just glad I was able to catch it. After last weekend, to be able to do something as a driver always makes you feel better. The funniest thing is that we got two points for pedaling the car. We reached our goal to qualify in the top half."

Seeded third for Sunday's racing action is DSR teammate Beckman aboard his Infinite Hero Dodge Charger R/T with an uncharacteristically slow 5.440 second pass at 203.12 mph that was achieved only by making several moves to regain grip on a tricky and cool track that had initially showed the promise of some record runs.

"It's frustrating because the left side grandstand was packed and the weather was miserable," said Beckman who moved to third in the Countdown standings with the effort. "It was cold, rainy, nasty and nobody left because everyone was licking their chops at what might be. And we got the opportunity, but the problem is that we have zero data to prepare us to run under these conditions. Some cars smoked. Some shook and very few made good runs. That was one of the tougher mental approaches for a qualifying lap. I pedaled it and went back to a half throttle and nursed it to

the finish line. Never did I think that was going to be good for one bonus point, and at the end of the year that one bonus point might just make a difference."

Rounding out the top-five spots in qualifying was reigning world champion Hagan as he skated his Mopar Express Lane / Rocky Boots Dodge Charger R/T down the track with a 8.170/103.23 written on the timing sheets.

"It was a really tough race track out there with it being this cold," said Hagan who will start the day against John Bojec. "It makes it really difficult for crew chiefs to make some calls because we've never seen conditions like this before which is why so few cars made it down the race track. (Crew Chief) Dickie (Venables) made the comment that he doesn't have too many pages in his book for track conditions like this. We'll hope for a warm up and maybe the sun to make an appearance and see what we can do."

Driver of the Make-A-Wish Dodge Charger R/T, Johnson Jr., saw his 10.022/71.26 lap place him 11th on the qualifying sheets to pit him against points leader Del Worsham, winner of the first two playoff races, in the opening round scheduled for Sunday morning. The results of that match-up will surely have consequences that will shake up the championship battle.

"We came in here knowing that Del (Worsham) had to go out early, and what better way to do that than to race him in the first round," said Johnson who sits fourth in the points but looks to make gains on the leader if he can take him out. "Depending on how it comes out tomorrow, we'll either have a shot at the championship, or that will pretty much be it. I like having our destiny in our own hands."

With two Pro Stock semi-final appearances in the first two NHRA "Countdown to the Championship" events to move driver Allen Johnson to third place in the hunt for a second world title, the Magneti Marelli Dodge Dart driver was looking to make some gains in qualifying and move up on the ladder at the Keystone Nationals to better his chances of getting further through eliminations in the third playoff event in as many weeks.

With Mother Nature helping to reduce the number of qualifying sessions to just one in preparation for race day, it didn't leave much room for error, and unfortunately the single run the Mopar team did have, did not go quite as planned. Their qualifying run was recorded as a 6.573 second pass at 211.30 mph to put the HEMI-powered hot rod tenth on the Pro Stock timing sheet.

"We didn't make a good run and we hurt a motor in the process but we'll go up there for first round and try to turn it into lane choice for the second round," said Johnson who will see Jonathan Gray as his first round opponent. "We qualified tenth and eight in the last two events and went on to the semi-finals, so we'll be looking to do the same and hopefully go even further. We've got something to work with but I just have to go up there and cut a good light and make a good run. The track was overly cold for qualifying and most everyone was overly cautious thinking we might have a second session to improve. Unfortunately we didn't. Those that had the courage to go after it were rewarded."

Fellow Mopar driver Alan Prusiensky qualified his Dodge Avenger in the 14th spot with a 6.809/203.71 to draw Bo Butner as his first round opponent, while the Dodge Dart of V. Gaines qualified 16th with a 6.922/155.33 and will go up against no.1 qualifier Drew Skillman who took the top spot with a low e.t. of 6.509 seconds at 213.13 mph.

ESPN2 will televise 90 minutes of qualifying coverage on Sunday, Oct. 4 starting at 6:00 a.m. (ET) and then re-air the highlights at 3 p.m. (ET) that afternoon. Three and a half hours of eliminations coverage will be televised on ESPN2 on Sunday evening starting at 8 p.m. (ET).

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

PRO STOCK (season wins in parentheses)

1. Erica Enders-Stevens – 2365 (6)
2. Greg Anderson – 2253 (4)
3. **Allen Johnson – Dodge Dart – 2227 (1)**

4. Drew Skillman – 2212
5. Chris McGaha – 2201 (2)
6. Larry Morgan – 2200 (2)
7. Vincent Nobile – 2187
8. Jason Line – 2159 (2)
9. Shane Gray – 2149
10. Jonathan Gray – 2099

FUNNY CAR (season wins in parentheses)

1. Del Worsham – 2361 (2)
2. **Matt Hagan – (2015 Dodge Charger R/T) – 2271 (4)**
3. **Jack Beckman – (2015 Dodge Charger R/T) – 2245 (5)**
4. **Tommy Johnson Jr. – (2015 Dodge Charger R/T) – 2243 (2)**
5. **Ron Capps – (2015 Dodge Charger R/T) – 2177 (2)**
6. John Force – 2211 (2)
7. Alexis DeJoria – 2154
8. Cruz Pedregon – 2149
9. Tim Wilkerson – 2142 (1)
10. Robert Hight – 2140 (1)

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