

Mopar Dodge Funny Car on Top in Bristol as Capps Races to Third Consecutive Pole

- Mopar Dodge Charger R/T Funny Car propels Don Schumacher Racing driver Ron Capps to third consecutive start from No. 1 position
- NHRA Thunder Valley Nationals No. 1 is 21st pole of points leader Capps' career
- Bristol Dragway pole is Capps' fourth of year, most he has had in any single season
- Bristol marks ninth race of 11 in 2016 season in which Mopar Dodge Charger R/T leads field
- Mopar-powered Allen Johnson, No. 6 seed, quickest of four Dodge Dart campaigners in Bristol
- Mopar Performance Dodge Dart pilot Erica Enders and Mopar/Elite Motorsports teammate Jeg Coughlin Jr. and his "Magneti Marelli Offered by Mopar" JEGS.com Dodge Dart qualify on opposite sides of ladder, setting up potential final-round meeting
- V. Gaines makes his best run of weekend in final session in Dodge Dart Pro Stocker

June 18, 2016, Bristol, Tennessee - Ron Capps is on quite a tear in his Mopar Dodge Charger R/T. Qualifying has wrapped up at the 16th annual NHRA Thunder Valley Nationals in Bristol – the 10th race of 24 in the 2016 NHRA season – and the incoming points leader continued his dominant performance with a third consecutive pole. The Don Schumacher Racing (DSR) driver now has four low qualifier awards this season, a personal best as he had never before earned more than three in any given year. Coming into the event on back-to-back victories in the last two Mello Yello Drag Racing Series events, Capps is well-poised to continue the string of spectacular performances for the powerful Mopars in the Funny Car category on raceday in Bristol.

A nitro-fueled Dodge Charger R/T has been the last racecar standing at five events so far this year, and each of the last four final rounds have featured a pair of the HEMI®-powered beasts battling for the trophy.

"My Mopar Dodge Charger is fun to drive," said Capps. "It's a wild car to drive, though – and any Funny Car driver would tell you that right now. There were two or three Funny Cars, both here and in Englishtown last weekend, that would have been in the top half of the field in Top Fuel. That's insane. A Funny Car has a 125" short [wheelbase], it's an evil-handling racecar, and these cars are running as well as the No. 8 or No. 9 qualified Top Fuel cars that are 300" [wheelbase] and very forgiving. There should be kudos given to all the crew chiefs in Funny Car right now, because it's been a spectacle for the fans, for sure."

Capps truly has had quite a racecar at the most recent events on tour. After winning the first race of the season, qualifying No. 1 at the second event on the schedule, and then flying to the final round at Race 3, Capps missed the field entirely in Las Vegas. However, he methodically rebounded from the dreaded DNQ, and just a few weeks later clocked 12 consecutive passes in the 3-second zone en route to back-to-back victories at Epping and Englishtown, snagging the points lead along the way.

He's sitting in a fine position at the conclusion of qualifying, but it hasn't been all sunshine and roses here at Bristol Dragway, a facility where Capps has won three times before. The weekend started on a sour note, as his supercharger backfired and quieted a cylinder. Capps coasted to an unsightly 4.285-second pass at 322.07 mph but in the later session was back in form and blasted to a monster 3.884 at 323.66 that obliterated the previous Bristol Dragway track record for elapsed time and sent the Mopar Dodge right up to the top of the field. The team was unperturbed when their tune-up simply overpowered the racetrack in the first round on Saturday, and they returned to close out qualifying with a big 3.972/315.78.

"After our first run down the racetrack, I thought, 'Uh oh; are we in trouble? Did we lose something here?' But then we

came up the next run and went low e.t.," said Capps. "It seemed like everyone was putting up a pretty good pace today, and we were pushing it. The level of racing has raised all across Funny Car. I'm just glad we've been able to continue this streak through varying weather and track conditions at each race. That just shows the versatility of my crew chief, Rahn Tobler, and how good my guys are at giving him a [well-prepared] racecar. It's a cliché to say that you're blessed to drive a racecar, but it's just a fun car to drive right now. I've been doing this a long time, so I know it won't last forever – but if we can keep the momentum going and just keep that performance up, then maybe we can enter the Countdown [to the Championship] one of the top three."

Capps will have a shot at a third-straight Wally trophy on Sunday at Bristol Dragway, beginning with a first-round meeting with part time campaigner Jim Campbell.

"Tomorrow is Father's Day, and everybody here wants to win that trophy," Capps continued. "It's a big deal, and there is a little extra intensity. This is a great racetrack. You can go up there and throw anything at it, and hopefully you make the right call. Tomorrow it's going to be hot and that track is going to be tricky, but I've got one of the best crew chiefs for that."

In all, Capps and his ultra-efficient, HEMI-powered Dodge scooped up a total of five bonus qualifying points. Mopar-powered DSR teammates Jack Beckman and Tommy Johnson Jr. each picked up three of their own in their respective Mopar Dodge Chargers. Matt Hagan, driving the Rocky Boots/Mopar Express Lane Dodge Charger R/T, made one of the strongest passes of the opening round on Friday with a 3.971/322.65, but no bonus points were awarded due to a timing malfunction in the right lane when a piece of rubbish flew into the beams and discounted a competitor's time that had shown very strong early numbers. Hagan bettered his best on Saturday with a solid 3.914/327.51.

"Our Rocky Boots/Mopar Express Lane Dodge is running pretty good," said Hagan, a two-time Funny Car champion. "It's going down the racetrack, and I think Wilkerson will be a tough one first round – he's good on a hot racetrack – but I just have to go out there and do my job, do my best for my guys, and I know they'll do that for me. Hopefully, it will all come together for us tomorrow. It's tough racing, but that's why we love it."

Performance is surging in Bristol, despite quite warm track temperatures and humid air. The Mopar Dodge Charger Funny Cars recorded eight passes in the three-second range during qualifying, a feat unimaginable one year ago.

Hagan, the No. 4 seed, will race Tim Wilkerson in the first round on Sunday; No. 6 qualifier Johnson Jr. will bring the Make-A-Wish Dodge to the starting line for a match with Cruz Pedregon; and Beckman, starting ninth in his Infinite Hero Mopar Dodge, will race John Force.

Team Mopar in Pro Stock

Last weekend in Englishtown, the ladder was not kind to Team Mopar drivers Erica Enders and Jeg Coughlin Jr. When all was said and done in qualifying, reigning and two-time Pro Stock world champion Enders was called to the starting line for a first-round meeting that pitted her Mopar Performance Dodge Dart against Elite Motorsports teammate Coughlin Jr. and his "Magneti Marelli Offered by Mopar" Dodge. As he did in their first-round meeting at the season-opener, Coughlin Jr. got the nod – but here in Bristol, the teammates qualified on opposites sides of the ladder, thereby eliminating any head-to-head meetings with one another until, potentially, the final round.

Enders has won the most recent two Bristol events, bringing home the trophy on Father's Day in 2014 and 2015, her championship seasons. The fact that the 1/4-mile drag strip cuts right into the tree-lined hills – hence the nickname "Thunder Valley" – is part of what makes Bristol Dragway a very special place to race.

"Bristol is absolutely my most favorite racetrack in the country," said Enders, who qualified No. 10 and will race Vincent Nobile in the first round of eliminations. "Not because of our recent success here, but because when you're all strapped in your Pro Stock car and preparing to do your burnout, you look down the racetrack and it's amazing. There isn't another facility that we go to that is anything like Bristol. We've had a lot of success here the last four years with two wins and then two runner-up finishes. [But at any racetrack], when you go up there, it doesn't matter what you've done in the past – good or bad. That moment is all about my Mopar Dodge, my lane, and my guys. It's up to us, and nothing is going to stop me from having a positive mental attitude and believing with all my heart that we're going to

be successful."

Coughlin Jr., the No. 12 qualifier, is fired up for a first-round meeting with Bo Butner – but he is also focused on claiming the trophy in his "Magnet Marelli Offered by Mopar" Dart in front of his baby daughter, Carly, who is in attendance at the event. Son, Jeg III could not make the race.

"It's very cool to have my daughter here," said Coughlin Jr., a five-time Pro Stock champion. "Not to steal my father's phrase, but every day feels like Father's Day with two great kids like Jeggie and Carly. It's good to be in Bristol, and it's great to have Carly here with us. I know Jeggie is with us in spirit. He's always been one of my biggest fans, without question.

"We've done some things to both of our cars over here that have brought some consistency, and that's good. Now we can fine-tune the setup without major changes. We look to come out tomorrow, put forth good effort, and learn from what we've done in qualifying. We changed quite a bit of our philosophy coming into today, and we ran fairly decent – so we're going to peck away at that and see if we can have an even better car for tomorrow."

Hometown racer Allen Johnson took his Mopar-powered Marathon Performance Dodge Dart to a best time of 6.708/204.66 to nail down the No. 6 position. He is scheduled for a first-round meeting with Alex Laughlin.

"We consistently did what we meant to do in qualifying," said Johnson, who is eager to claim his first Bristol Dragway Pro Stock trophy. "We think we'll have a great racecar for tomorrow. The track is going to be a little grimy because we run after the fuel cars, but hopefully the track will come to us. Race day is always a driver's day. If you do your job, you'll do good."

V. Gaines made his best pass of the weekend in the final qualifying session as his Kendall Oil Dodge Dart put a 6.755/205.04 in the books. Gaines, No. 11, will race Drew Skillman.

NHRA on FOX Sports 1 and FOX Sports 2

Two hours of qualifying highlights from the 16th annual NHRA Thunder Valley Nationals will air on FOX Sports 2 (FS2) on Sunday Morning, June 19, beginning at 9:30 a.m. ET. Three hours of eliminations coverage will air on FOX Sports 1 (FS1) that same day, beginning at 4:00 p.m. ET.

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 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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