

Dodge Charger Funny Car Pilot Johnson Jr. on Top at First Race of NHRA Countdown

- Don Schumacher Racing (DSR) Mopar Dodge Charger R/T driver Tommy Johnson Jr. claims Funny Car pole at NHRA Carolina Nationals
- Mopar scores 12th No. 1 of season
- DSR's Ron Capps leading points heading into raceday, pads lead with bonus qualifying marks in HEMI®-powered Funny Car
- Tony Schumacher, Leah Pritchett aiming to claim first Countdown victory in DSR Mopar-powered Top Fuel dragsters
- Dodge Dart Pro Stock cars dialed in for Sunday eliminations, HEMI-fueled Allen Johnson starting from top half
- David Collette powers to Super Stock class victory in 2011 V-10 Dodge Challenger Drag Pak
- Mopar History at zMAX Dragway in Charlotte

September 17, 2016, Concord, North Carolina - Tommy Johnson Jr. stood strong at the conclusion of qualifying for the first race of NHRA's 2016 Mello Yello Drag Racing Series Countdown to the Championship, and he wheeled his Make-A-Wish Dodge Charger R/T right to the top of the pack at the NHRA Carolina Nationals to score his first low qualifier award of the season and reel in the twelfth No. 1 of the season for Team Mopar. Johnson, who begins the six-race playoffs as the No. 7 seed, will be looking for his second victory of the season on Sunday at zMAX Dragway.

The Mopar Dodge Charger Funny Cars have already made a bold statement in qualifying at the Carolina Nationals. Johnson led the charge and picked up a total of four bonus points throughout qualifying, while Don Schumacher Racing teammate and incoming points leader Ron Capps scored seven additional marks as one of the consistently quickest cars on the property. Capps qualified in the No. 2 position, while Jack Beckman, driver of the Infinite Hero Mopar Dodge Charger, scored a start from the fifth position. Matt Hagan and the Mopar Express Lane Dodge Charger qualified No. 9.

In the first session of qualifying, Johnson had trouble at the hit of the throttle and coasted to a 9.970-second pass at a disappointing 83 mph.

"I was aggravated, and the team was aggravated," admitted Johnson. "It wasn't how we wanted to start the Countdown."

But in the second session, the results were far different. Johnson scorched off the starting line in his swift Dodge and blasted down the racetrack to a monster, track record 3.876 at 323.43 mph. Johnson was vaulted up to the No. 1 position, and there he would stay for the remainder of qualifying.

"To come back and rebound like that, especially being the first pair down the track that session, shows how much we want this," said the Avon, Indiana-based nitro pilot. "We're on top of our game now. You have to go out and be aggressive, and that's what we did."

The second day of qualifying brought overcast skies in the morning that had Johnson questioning whether or not the No. 1 would hold. His concern proved to be unwarranted, however.

"When we left here last night, I was pretty confident – but this morning on the way to the track, I wasn't so sure it would stick," said Johnson. "I was a little selfish, hoping it would be hot and sunny today, and then the sun came back

out and I thought we'd be okay, but it kept coming and going. I knew we'd have to be careful, but we weren't backing off. We were standing on it in the heat, trying to get a good number for what we could run tomorrow. We definitely had an advantage after Friday, and we came into the last session confident that we would make a pretty nice run. We did."

Last season, Johnson was No. 1 in Charlotte to start the Countdown, and he took that strong start all the way to the final round on raceday. Ultimately, Johnson finished the year No. 3 in the points for the second consecutive season.

On Sunday in Concord, Johnson will begin his quest for the title with a first-round meeting with Bob Gilbertson. Hagan, on the same side of the ladder, will race Courtney Force; Beckman, also on the same side, will have Del Worsham in round one. On the opposite side of the ladder, Capps is scheduled for a first-round dance with fellow Mopar competitor John Hale and the Jim Dunn Racing Dodge Charger.

HEMI®-powered Top Fuel Dragsters

In Top Fuel competition, Tony Schumacher had the best-performing HEMI® in his Mopar-charged U.S. Army Top Fuel dragster. Schumacher raced to a best time of 3.730/325.14 to earn a start from the No. 3 position. DSR teammate Leah Pritchett, in her Mopar rail, recorded a best time of 3.765/323.74.

Schumacher will race Top Fuel newcomer Cameron Ferre, and Pritchett will challenge Richie Crampton.

Mopar in Pro Stock

Magneti Marelli Offered by Mopar Dodge Dart driver Jeg Coughlin Jr. will begin the Countdown to the Championship with a first-round square-off with fellow Dodge campaigner Allen Johnson – not an ideal situation for Team Mopar but one that ensures forward movement for one Dodge Dart on raceday at the NHRA Carolina Nationals. Coughlin is starting from the No. 11 spot, while Johnson will have lane choice as the No. 4 qualifier. Coughlin's Elite Motorsports and Mopar teammate Erica Enders did not make the field for the first time since 2010.

"We'd certainly love to win this race," said Coughlin. "This is the first round of six in the Countdown to the Championship, and we're going into raceday probably as good as we've been most of the year in relation to the rest of the field. We'll get out there and see if we can't race hard and turn on some win lights."

Super Stock Class Trophy for Mopar

Sportsman competition at the NHRA Carolina Nationals is well underway at zMAX Dragway, and Team Mopar is already coming out on top. In Super Stock class eliminations, David Collette got a nice lead at the starting line in his 2011 V-10 Dodge Challenger Drag Pak and parlayed the starting line advantage into a win at the finish line stripe. Collette launched with a .059-second reaction time to opponent David Thomas' .076 and cleared the final timer on the drag strip in 9.275-second at 143.93 mph to top a 9.326/142.93.

History of Mopar at NHRA Carolina Nationals

The very first NHRA Carolina Nationals at zMAX Dragway was contested in 2008, and Dodge Charger Funny Car pilot Jack Beckman brought home the win for Mopar. Matt Hagan, who now drives the Mopar Express Lane Dodge Charger, scored a Funny Car trophy in a Dodge Charger in 2011 at the event. Mopar won again with Ron Capps in 2012, and in 2014 Hagan raced to victory once more. Jeg Coughlin Jr. drove a Dodge Avenger to a final-round win in Pro Stock in 2013. In NHRA's Sportsman categories, Larry Miller wheeled his '70 Barracuda to the winner's circle in Super Stock in 2012.

Championship eliminations for the 9th annual NHRA Carolina Nationals at zMAX Dragway in Concord are scheduled to begin at 12 noon Sunday.

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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