

Hagan, Capps Fight for Championship, Take Mopar Dodge Funny Cars to Semis at NHRA Vegas

- Points leader Ron Capps, driver of Don Schumacher Racing (DSR) Mopar Dodge Charger R/T, reaches semifinals at NHRA Nationals in Las Vegas
- DSR's Mopar Express Lane Dodge Charger R/T driver Matt Hagan keeps Funny Car championship hopes alive with Las Vegas semifinals finish
- Team Mopar leaves Las Vegas on the cusp of earning Funny Car championship with drivers 1-2-3-4 in points
- HEMI®-powered Top Fuel driver Leah Pritchett drives DSR dragster to semifinals to strengthen career-best finish

October 30, 2016, Las Vegas, Nevada - The 2016 NHRA Mello Yello Drag Racing Series is nearing completion, and as the championship chase heats up, Team Mopar is in the thick of the battle. On Sunday at the 16th annual NHRA Nationals on the pristine grounds of The Strip at Las Vegas Motor Speedway, Don Schumacher Racing (DSR) drivers Matt Hagan and Ron Capps, in their respective Mopar Dodge Charger R/T Funny Cars, took their fight all the way to the semifinals to set-up a thrilling end to the chase at the season closer in two weeks.

Capps' performance this season has been one of dominance in his HEMI®-powered Funny Car; he has reached the semifinals at each race on the tour except one – Denver – since this past spring's Topeka event. Las Vegas marked the ninth consecutive race in which he reached the semifinals. In the early rounds, No. 4 qualifier Capps knocked out Paul Lee with a strong display of Mopar muscle before accepting a single in the quarterfinals when Cruz Pedregon, who pulled a massive, damaging wheel stand in the first round, was a no-show. Capps recorded a 3.921-second pass at 323.43 mph in his solo trip down the racetrack. Courtney Force nudged ahead of Capps in the semifinals, 3.880/326.48 to 3.937/317.49.

For the driver who has led the points for the majority of the year, the dominance throughout the season has been exhilarating, despite missing the trophy in Las Vegas. Capps, who made his NHRA debut in Phoenix in 1995 behind the wheel of a Top Fuel dragster, has finished No. 2 in the nation four times (1998, 2000, 2005, 2012), and is racing towards his first NHRA world championship.

"This weekend was just another incredible job by [crew chief Rahn] Tobler and this Mopar Dodge Charger team," said Capps. "I always brag about Tobler, but he adjusted to so many changes in the conditions over the weekend, and our Dodge was one of the quickest in every qualifying session, then we advanced to the semifinals on Sunday. It's all about how this team has done all year, not what I've done. It comes down to one more race left, and we have a lot of things left to do. But we're closer. This is, by far, the best chance we've had going into Pomona."

Hagan was making a habit of displaying HEMI® horsepower at the event, and on Friday he was the provisional pole-sitter with the quickest pass the Las Vegas racing surface had ever seen to that point. Ultimately, Hagan qualified No. 2 and brought a cool 3.911/328.14 to the table to erase fellow Mopar campaigner John Hale's chance for the trophy in the first round of eliminations. In the second round, Hagan was quick on the throttle, launching with a very efficient .054-second reaction time, and he sent Del Worsham home with a large 3.887/329.02 that was the second-best of the round. In the semifinals, tire smoke sent Hagan home empty handed but moved up to the No. 2 spot in the points.

"When I felt it go up in smoke, I just feel my heart fall," said Hagan, the 2011 and 2014 Funny Car world champ. "But at the end of the day, we have a great team and a great car. We'll just go to Pomona and see if we can add a trophy

to the collection.”

DSR driver Jack Beckman, pilot of the Infinite Hero Dodge Charger R/T Funny Car and the No. 1 qualifier in Las Vegas, had a very distant chance at the championship entering the event, and he was elevated as he clocked the second-quickest run of the opening act – but he saw his hopes go up in a cloud of tire smoke as he shook and rattled the tires in the second round of eliminations. Beckman was the only DSR Funny Car driver officially eliminated from the championship chase.

"You go 23 races into the season, and you fight for the championship, but then there comes that one round when you realize you're out of it," said Beckman, the 2012 Funny Car champ. "We knew, realistically, that we weren't going to be able to win the championship coming into this race, but now it's official. We're staying and testing tomorrow, but not so much to get an advantage for Pomona. We're testing to get a head start for next year. We'll go to Pomona and try to turn on four win lights Sunday, and I gotta tell ya, a trophy would make the off-season go by really, really well. Right now, everyone is staying positive. We'll go there, unload, and get to work."

Tommy Johnson Jr., who entered the race No. 2 in the championship Funny Car standings, also had his hopes all-but-dashed when he was ousted in round one as Worsham just barely edged ahead at the finish-line stripe for a 3.923/327.35 win over a 3.9494/321.65. Johnson, who dropped to No. 3 in the points, still has a chance at the championship – but only if Capps fails to qualify at the NHRA Finals in Pomona in one week.

"Coming here, we knew we had to do well – and it's just frustrating to lose first round," said Johnson. "It was such a close drag race, and there are no easy rounds in drag racing. It's so tough right now in the Funny Car class, but we gave it a heck of a run. It was a great race between Del and I, we just came up on the losing end. I'm not disappointed with our year, but I'm disappointed with this weekend. We'll regroup and go to Pomona, and we aren't mathematically eliminated from the championship yet, so we'll see if we can make it dramatic."

In the Top Fuel ranks, Leah Pritchett and her HEMI®-powered Top Fuel dragster performed exceptionally well during qualifying, ultimately landing the No. 2 position. On raceday, the newest DSR driver was vaulted to the semifinals by her powerful Mopar, and she continues to fight for the highest finish she can in her best season on record in the Top Fuel category.

Next Event in NHRA Countdown to the Championship

Next up is the final race of NHRA's 2016 Countdown to the Championship, the NHRA Finals at Auto Club Raceway at Pomona, scheduled for November 10-13, 2016. The playoffs are run 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)

Funny Car

- 1. Ron Capps, Dodge Charger R/T (5) – 2,546**
- 2. Matt Hagan, Dodge Charger R/T (4) – 2,460**
- 3. Tommy Johnson Jr., Dodge Charger R/T (2) – 2,433**
- 4. Jack Beckman, Dodge Charger R/T (2) – 2,395**
5. John Force (4) – 2,387
6. Del Worsham (1) – 2,373
7. Courtney Force (1) – 2,334
8. Robert Hight (1) – 2,313
9. Tim Wilkerson (2) – 2,262
10. Alexis DeJoria (1) – 2,184

Top Fuel

1. Antron Brown (7) – 2,581*

2. Steve Torrence (3) – 2,424
3. Doug Kalitta (3) – 2,413
4. Brittany Force (3) – 2,366
5. Shawn Langdon (3) – 2,365
6. J.R. Todd (1) – 2,352
- 7. Leah Pritchett, Mopar HEMI (1) – 2,334**
- 8. Tony Schumacher, Mopar HEMI (1) – 2,332**
9. Clay Millican – 2,232
10. Richie Crampton – 2,227

Pro Stock

1. Jason Line (8) – 2,532
2. Greg Anderson (7) – 2,513
3. Shane Gray (1) – 2,438
4. Vincent Nobile (1) – 2,394
5. Drew Skillman (2) – 2,371
6. Bo Butner – 2,369
7. Chris McGaha (1) – 2,275
- 8. Allen Johnson (1), Mopar Dodge Dart – 2,245**
- 9. Jeg Coughlin Jr., Dodge Dart – 2,177**
- 10. Erica Enders, Mopar Performance Dodge Dart – 2,167**

*Clinched championship

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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