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Johnson Jr. Earns Win at “Mopar Express Lane NHRA SpringNationals Presented by Pennzoil” to Keep MD Anderson Dodge Charger SRT Hellcat in Fight for Funny Car Championship

- Don Schumacher Racing (DSR) driver Tommy Johnson Jr. drove his MD Anderson Dodge Charger SRT Hellcat Funny Car to his third win of the 2020 season at the Mopar Express Lane NHRA SpringNationals Presented by Pennzoil near Houston
- Johnson’s victory puts him second in the standings and in contention for the Funny Car world championship for the first time in his career with just one race left in the National Hot Rod Association (NHRA) Drag Racing Series season
- DSR Funny Car drivers Matt Hagan, Johnson and Jack Beckman will battle for the crown next weekend at the Dodge NHRA finals in Las Vegas
- DSR remains undefeated this season in Funny Car competition and extends the Dodge Charger SRT Hellcat win streak to a record 13 consecutive national events since October 2019
- Leah Pruett takes her Pennzoil Top Fuel dragster to a quarterfinal appearance
- No. 2 qualifier Mark Pawuk takes his Mopar Drag Pak to a second consecutive semifinal appearance in Factory Stock Showdown

October 25, 2020, Baytown, Texas - A clutch performance by Don Schumacher Racing (DSR) driver Tommy Johnson Jr. at the Mopar Express Lane NHRA SpringNationals Presented by Pennzoil not only gave the MD Anderson Dodge Charger SRT Hellcat driver his third Wally trophy of the year, but it kept him firmly in contention and fighting for his first Funny Car world championship with just one race left in the 2020 National Hot Rod Association (NHRA) Drag Racing Series season.

From his sixth place seeding, Johnson began his run through eliminations with a first round win over Jim Campbell, followed by a close battle with J.R. Todd in the quarterfinals that advanced him into the semifinals to meet top-ranked Matt Hagan and his No. 2 seeded Pennzoil Dodge Charger SRT Hellcat for a match-up with critical championship implications. Johnson’s 3.941-second run to beat Hagan’s 3.981-second lap lessen the points margin between them in the standings and sent the MD Anderson Dodge Charger SRT Hellcat driver to his fourth final of the year.

Johnson continued to show his mettle against Ron Capps in a head-to-head battle for a Wally, marking the sixth time this season that DSR teammates would meet in a final elimination. Johnson double-bulbed his opponent, then by posted a 3.929-second pass at 321.04 mph to beat Capps’ 3.9520-second run at 325.14 mph for a three-thousandths-of-a-second margin of victory at the finish line.

“It was a must-win,” said Johnson who moved up into the second place in the standings just 42 points behind Hagan and one point ahead of Jack Beckman heading into the Dodge NHRA Finals next weekend in Las Vegas.

“I think we've been a thorn in their side a little bit because we just keep coming back every time. It’s like a heavyweight battle. We get back up and here we come again and keep swinging. Just really proud of these guys. They don't quit. You can't quit. It's been a weird year and it's been a good year for us. Three wins this year. Just super happy to see the fight in these guys.”

While Johnson finished third in the championship on three occasions (2014, 2015 and 2018) and runner-up in the 2016, this is the first time he has had a viable chance to win a championship with just one race remaining.

“This has got drama written all over it when we go to Vegas,” said Johnson of the three-way battle with his teammates thanks to a points-and-a half format that will likely only see a winner determined in the final round. “It's probably our best shot. In the years past we have been third three times and been second once and we weren't expected to be. We're kind of like, ‘oh where they come from’ and this time we're there and wanting to go.”

The victory at Houston Raceway Park has also kept DSR’s quad of Funny Cars undefeated this season, extending the Dodge Charger SRT Hellcat win streak to 13 national events that dates back to October 2019. The DSR Dodge foursome continue to dominate the Funny Car championship rankings, occupying the top four spots with Hagan, Johnson, Beckman and Capps respectively heading into the season finale.

Capps for his part came into the penultimate race weekend fourth in the standings, and the Pennzoil/NAPA AUTO PARTS Dodge Charger SRT Hellcat driver did everything he could to do to remain in the fight. He upset the No. 1 qualifier Jack Beckman in the opening round, dropping his teammate to third in the standings with the loss. He then used a holeshot win to defeat Cruz Pedregon and advance to the semis where he crossed the finish line ahead of Alexis DeJoria but on fire after the engine expired, necessitating a swap to the backup car for the final against Johnson. While finishing runner-up doesn’t completely mathematically eliminate Capps from the battle for the crown, the Vegas odds are not on his side.

From her third place spot in the Top Fuel standings, Leah Pruett was looking to keep championship hopes alive for her black and yellow Pennzoil dragster after qualifying in the top half of the eliminations ladder. A win over Lee Callaway meant a second round pairing with Billy Torrence with important points on the line. Both posted identical 3.708 second elapsed time runs, but her opponent’s quicker start brought Pruett’s day and championship hopes to end as it allowed category leader Steve Torrence to further his lead to an insurmountable 198-point margin.

The Factory Stock Showdown (FSS) championship was determined by a semifinal match-up that pitted the top-ranked competitors in the category. No. 2 qualifier Mark Pawuk and his Empaco Equipment Mopar Drag Pak lined-up against points leader Aaron Stanfield but unfortunately saw a quick end to his race and title chase with a rare red-light start, thus handing Stanfield the round win and allowing him to also claim the FSS championship. While the title chase might be over for Pawuk, he will work to secure his No. 2 ranking with four more rounds of racing left to contest in Las Vegas.

Meanwhile Pawuk’s teammate Pruett qualified her Mopar Dodge Challenger Drag Pak 11th in a quest to post a win this season, but unfortunately saw an early end to her day after hitting the throttle in the opening round only to lose traction and watch her opponent turn on the win lights.

The 2020 NHRA season will conclude next weekend at the Dodge NHRA Finals in Las Vegas with television coverage to be broadcast on FS1 on Sunday, Nov. 1, from 4- 7 p.m. ET featuring live coverage of the final rounds.

ADDITIONAL NOTES and QUOTES:

Jack Beckman, Infinite Hero Foundation Dodge Charger SRT Hellcat Funny Car
(No. 1 Qualifier – 3.884 seconds at 328.14 mph)
Round 1: (0.086-second reaction time, 5.012 seconds at 207.88 mph) lost to No. 16 Ron Capps (0.055/4.158/320.51)

“A lot of cars struggled out there and we just didn’t capitalize on it. And you can say (Matt) Hagan was fortunate, but you can also say he did a good job catching the car and getting it to the finish line. This is the back breaker about drag racing. There’s no do-overs. You don’t to go back out for the rest of the race and earn some points. It’s sudden death and that’s a bitter pill. To have such a good car and come out here and qualify No. 1, our fate is not in our hands right now. We’re going to have to win (Las) Vegas and what Hagan does here and at Vegas will determine if he’s catchable. That’s the nature of our sport.”

“I’ve never been a fan of points-and-a-half. No round should be worth more than any other round and I’m consistent whether I’m leading or trailer. That’s the way they’re going to award the points, so in essence there’s the equivalent of six rounds worth of points up for grabs in Vegas. We’re going to have to hope Matt doesn’t go deep here or in Vegas. Ideally, we’d match up with him first round in Vegas and we could make up lot of rounds.”

“I’m back to being a dad tomorrow. I’m not going to dwell on this. All that does it sends failure programming and

negative thoughts. I got that out of the way here at the track. I still love what I do for a living. We're still got a great car and a great team and if Vegas is my last race, I want to go out holding a Wally trophy in my hands."

Matt Hagan, Pennzoil Mopar Express Lane Dodge Charger SRT Hellcat Funny Car
(No. 2 Qualifier – 3.907 seconds at 327.74 mph)
Round 1: (0.073-second reaction time, 4.286 seconds at 301.00 mph) defeated No. 15 Dave Richards (0.180/4.421/212.86
Round 2: (0.092/3.914/328.78) defeated No. 10 Blake Alexander (0.077/13.014/54.58)
Round 3: (0.040/3.981/321.12) lost to No. 6 Tommy Johnson Jr. (0.058/3.941/321.96)

"A really good weekend here in Houston with the Pennzoil colors again. We'd have liked to been in the final round, but we picked up some points this weekend. It was a close race with TJ (Tommy Johnson) in the semis and I have all the confidence in the world in my crew and Dickie Venables rolling into Vegas. I'm confident we're going to do what we need to do and win this thing. I've been on both sides of it. I've led and chased and I'd rather lead than be chasing going into Vegas. It's a hard task trying to make up points. I'm proud of my guys to put ourselves in the position to make some ground this weekend and extend the lead."

Tommy Johnson Jr., MD Anderson Dodge Charger SRT Hellcat Funny Car
(No. 6 Qualifier – 3.973 seconds at 317.94 mph)
Round 1: (0.089 second reaction time, 6.373 seconds at 110.91 mph) defeated No. 11 Jim Campbell (-0.104/7.324/86.96)
Round 2: (0.057/3.934/327.51) defeated No. 3 J.R. Todd (0.078/3.979/326.00)
Round 3: (0.058/3.941/321.96) defeated No. 2 Matt Hagan (0.040/3.981/321.12)
Round 4: (0.065/3.929/321.04) defeated No. 16 Ron Capps (0.045/3.952/325.14)

"We've learned from our mistakes. We've been out here and won a race, then stumbled on the next one, so we can't do that this time. We've got to go out there, go to Vegas where it's points-and-a half (format) and it's going to be a really interesting race. I'm just so proud of these guys. They just don't quit. They keep fighting. To win in MD Anderson Cancer Center's home town is just so special and happy to do it for Mopar and Pennzoil who are sponsoring this race. The Dodge Charger Hellcat is a pretty bad boy and I was pumped up for that final. I just said 'We got to win this, we'll just go do it.' I'm happy we did it."

"This Dodge Charger SRT Hellcat was running good all day. We didn't qualify like we wanted to I mean, we qualified sixth and we weren't quite on. Tricky track conditions in the first round, we shook (the tires) but got lucky with Jim Campbell red lighted first round. But (Crew Chief) John (Collins) and Rip (Reynolds) figured out the tune up after that and we come back out in the second round and made a nice run and had a big victory over J.R. Todd who ran really good first round so I knew we had to step it up. Big semifinal match against Matt Hagan with the championship coming down to just one more race to go. We had fallen back to third (in the standings) and little ways behind after we had a tough race in Dallas, but these guys never quit. We had to come in here and see it is a must-win and when you can do that and win, that shows you what caliber of a team you have behind you. I did my job and they did their job. Every time they think we're out of it, we're like a thorn in their side. We just keep coming. Just one race to go. You've got Hagan, me, and (Jack) Beckman in the points. All Dodge Hellcats. May the best man win."

Ron Capps, Pennzoil NAPA Auto Parts Dodge Charger SRT Hellcat Funny Car
(No. 16 Qualifier – 5.295 seconds at 136.44 mph)
Round 1: (0.055-second reaction time, 4.158 seconds at 320.51 mph) defeated No. 1 Jack Beckman (0.086/5.012/207.88)
Round 2: (0.073/3.962/326.87) defeated No. 8 Cruz Pedregon (0.077/3.961/324.36)
Round 3: (0.103/4.160/247.38) defeated No. 5 Alexis DeJoria (0.087/5.175/142.10)
Round 4: (0.045/3.952/325.14) lost to No. 6 Tommy Johnson Jr. (0.065/3.929/321.04)

"We were trying to implement some new parts and do some testing and that's hard to do with only two qualifying runs and you definitely don't want to do that on Sunday. That put us behind. But I say it time and time again, coming in Sunday morning I've never not thought we had a chance at winning the race no matter what position we start from. We sure had the FOX Sports TV people scrambling to see when the last time someone won from the 16th spot. You hate to knock out a teammate in the championship, but it's mano-a-mano up there and Sunday morning you have

one of the leading cars in the points race, but we knew we were capable. It's just one of those grind 'em out days. These are those weekends where you look back at the end of the season and you sort of circle them and you remember that this is where most teams would have gone out early and we gutted out a lot of big round wins and 20 points here and there. When you're running great and things don't go wrong it seems a little easier. Today was one of those knock-down drag-out fights. The semifinals I stayed in the throttle and I didn't see Alexis (DeJoria). In a nitro Funny Car, when you stay in the throttle bad things can happen when you stay in it and unfortunately we hurt the beautiful Pennzoil body. But fortunately, we have great sponsors with Pennzoil and NAPA Auto Parts and we have plenty of parts at DSR and we have four days to get to (Las) Vegas and do it again."

Leah Pruett, Pennzoil Top Fuel Dragster
(No. 6 Qualifier – 3.767 seconds at 324.20 mph)
Round 1: (0.069-second reaction time, 3.745 seconds at 321.65 mph) defeated No. 11 Lee Callaway (0.073/6.22/96.74)
Round 2: (0.079/3.708/322.58) lost to No. 3 Billy Torrence (0.063/3.708/331.61)

"The highlight of this weekend is that we solved a lot of problems with the car after really starting over after St. Louis. That put us behind and we feel we're now in front of it. We have a race car that is performing very well. We had some additional software problems and we've been on the good side of these holeshot wins, but sometimes you're going to find yourself on the other side of it. The most exciting thing about it is that we have one of the top, fastest hot rods going into Vegas. We have done very well in Vegas. I think points-wise we're out of the championship, but we still have our eyes on moving forward on a high note."

Mark Pawuk, Empaco Equipment Mopar Drag Pak– Factory Stock Shootout
(No. 2 Qualifier – 7.814 seconds at 175.48 mph)
Round 1: (0.071-second reaction time, 7.900 seconds at 173.38 mph) defeated No. 13 Lindsay Wheelock (0.000/8.157/167.36)
Round 2: (0.006/7.901/173.09) defeated No. 8 Steven Bell (0.022/7.905/173.45)
Round 3: (-0.012/7.904/173.70) lost to No. 3 Aaron Stanfield (0.026/7.894/173.87)

"Another great weekend for the Don Schumacher Racing Empaco Equipment/Ohio CAT/Mr. Heater Dodge Drag Pak. Driver did his job second round, and unfortunately left a little bit early in the semis and the red light got us this weekend. But hey, another semifinal finish keeps us in the points. Unfortunately, we don't have a shot at No. 1 anymore, but I think we are pretty solid at No. 2, and hopefully we can go to Vegas and carry this momentum for one more race. My last race I won as a professional, when I ran Pro Stock, was in Vegas in 2001. Would love to go back and win that race!"

Leah Pruett, Mopar Dodge Challenger Mopar Drag Pak – Factory Stock Shootout
(No. 11 Qualifier – 7.955 seconds at 172.32 mph)
Round 1: (0.025-second reaction time, 8.611 seconds at 171.08 mph) lost to No. 4 John Cerbone (0.029/7.903/170.77)

"We're glad our qualifier from St. Louis held to carry us over. We were really running out of options with our program so we decided to make a setup change during the week and no thanks to a delivery company, we didn't get the parts we needed until late Saturday evening. We ran first round of eliminations rolling the dice with a setup we've never tested before and we had to go for it. We're not in a position to test and it was the power we were looking for, but definitely too much. That's given us good insight into Las Vegas. It's a different mindset when you're not chasing a championship and you're chasing progression, that's what I've seen. We have something to work from for Vegas. Mark is carrying the Mopar flag. We figured out some things with El Bandito (nickname for Pruett's Drag Pak) and we're feeling pumped."

NHRA Championship Points Standings:
(Following the Mopar Express Lane SpringNationals Presented by Pennzoil)

FUNNY CAR (season wins in parentheses)
1. Matt Hagan (Dodge Charger SRT Hellcat) – 842 (2)
2. Tommy Johnson Jr. (Dodge Charger SRT Hellcat) – 800 (3)

3. Jack Beckman (Dodge Charger SRT Hellcat) – 799 (3)
4. Ron Capps (Dodge Charger SRT Hellcat) – 679 (2)
5. Bob Tasca III – 595
6. J.R. Todd – 584
7. Tim Wilkerson – 570
8. Alexis DeJoria – 489
9. Cruz Pedregon – 388
10. Paul Lee – 382

TOP FUEL (season wins in parentheses)
1. Steve Torrance – 868 (4)
2. Doug Kalitta – 767 (1)
3. Billy Torrence – 675 (1)
4. Leah Pruett (Mopar Dodge//SRT) – 670
5. Shawn Langdon – 544 (1)
6. Antron Brown – 534
7. Justin Ashley – 485 (1)
8. Terry McMillen – 436
9. Tony Schumacher – 415 (1)
10. Clay Millican – 414

DodgeGarage: Digital Hub for Drag Racing News
Fans can follow all the NHRA's action this season at DodgeGarage, the one-stop portal for Dodge//SRT and Mopar drag-racing news. The site includes daily updates and access to an online racing HQ, news, events, galleries, available downloads, and merchandise. For more information, visit www.dodgegarage.com.

@DodgeMoparMotorsports on Instagram
The @DodgeMoparMotorsports Instagram channel continues to share content capturing Dodge//SRT Mopar drivers on the track. Fans can see action from the NHRA Mello Yello Drag Racing Series and NHRA Sportsman grassroots racers competing in classes such as Factory Stock Showdown, Stock and Super Stock, as well as additional motorsports series.

Official Driving School of Dodge//SRT
Dodge is the official sponsor of the Bondurant School of High Performance Driving in Chandler, Arizona, where guests get behind the wheels of the fastest street-legal cars in the world with professional instruction and time on the track. Customers who buy a new SRT model receive one full-day session as part of the Dodge//SRT Package and have the opportunity to learn how to get the optimum performance from their new vehicles in a controlled environment. For more information, visit dodgegarage.com/track-experience.

Mopar
Mopar (a simple contraction of the words MOtor and PARts) is the service, parts and customer-care brand for FCA vehicles around the globe. Born in 1937 as the name of a line of antifreeze products, the Mopar brand has evolved over more than 80 years to represent both complete care and authentic performance for owners and enthusiasts worldwide.

Mopar made its mark in the 1960s during the muscle-car era, with Mopar Performance Parts to enhance speed and handling for both road and racing use, and expanded to include technical service and customer support. Today, the Mopar brand's global reach distributes more than 500,000 parts and accessories in more than 150 markets. With more than 50 parts distribution centers and 25 customer-contact centers globally, Mopar integrates service, parts and customer-care operations in order to enhance customer and dealer support worldwide.

Complete information on the Mopar brand is available at www.mopar.com. Mopar is part of the portfolio of brands offered by global automaker Fiat Chrysler Automobiles. For more information regarding FCA (NYSE: FCAU/ MTA: FCA), please visit www.fcagroup.com.

Dodge//SRT

For more than 100 years, the Dodge brand has carried on the spirit of brothers John and Horace Dodge. Their influence continues today as Dodge shifts into high gear with muscle cars and SUVs that deliver unrivaled performance in each of the segments where they compete.

2021 marks the year that Dodge is distilled into a pure performance brand, offering Hellcat-powered, 700+ horsepower SRT versions of every model across the lineup. For the 2021 model year, Dodge delivers the drag-strip dominating 807-horsepower Dodge Challenger SRT Super Stock, the new 797-horsepower Dodge Charger SRT Redeye, the most powerful and fastest mass-produced sedan in the world, and the new 710-horsepower Dodge Durango SRT Hellcat, the most powerful SUV ever. Combined, these three muscle cars make Dodge the industry's most powerful brand, offering more horsepower than any other American brand across its entire lineup.

In June 2020, Dodge was named the "#1 Brand in Initial Quality," making it the first domestic brand ever to rank No. 1 in the J.D. Power Initial Quality Study (IQS). Dodge is part of the portfolio of brands offered by global automaker Fiat Chrysler Automobiles. For more information regarding FCA (NYSE: FCAU/ MTA: FCA), please visit www.fcagroup.com.

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