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Solid Runs for Mopar Dodge//SRT Entries at Gatornationals to Kick-off 2021 NHRA Season

- No. 1 qualifier Ron Capps drove his Don Schumacher Racing (DSR) Dodge Charger SRT Hellcat Funny Car to quarterfinal appearance at the 52nd annual National Hot Rod Association (NHRA) Gatornationals at historic Gainesville Raceway
- Defending NHRA Funny Car World Champion Matt Hagan raced his DSR Dodge Charger SRT Hellcat Redeye to his best run of the weekend with a 3.922-second pass at 329.67 mph, missing the chance to advance past the opening round by just 0.0001 seconds
- DSR Top Fuel driver Leah Pruett took her No. 3 qualified Dodge Charger SRT Hellcat Redeye dragster to the quarterfinals
- Solid debut for the new-generation 2021 Dodge Challenger Mopar Drag Pak as Pruett posts her career best run in Factory Stock Showdown in a close first-round loss
- Mark Pawuk takes third-generation Dodge Challenger Mopar Drag Pak to Factory Stock Showdown semifinals finish at Gatornats

March 14, 2021, Gainesville, Fla. - Solid runs by the Don Schumacher Racing (DSR) contingent of Mopar- and Dodge//SRT-supported race cars marked the start to the 2021 National Hot Rod Association (NHRA) Camping World Drag Racing Series season at the 52nd annual Amalie Motor Oil NHRA Gatornationals at historic Gainesville Raceway.

In Funny Car competition, No. 1 qualifier and three-time NHRA Gatornationals winner Ron Capps took his DSR Dodge Charger SRT Hellcat for a 3.923-second elapsed time run at 323.74 mph to earn the opening round win over No. 16 qualifier Jim Campbell, who went up in tire smoke. For his quarterfinal match-up against Bob Tasca, Capps gave up lane choice which proved to be key, as traction was an issue in his lane, and hampered his progress resulting in an early exit from competition.

2020 NHRA Funny Car World Champion Matt Hagan took his DSR Dodge Charger SRT Hellcat Redeye into race day as the eighth seed and seeking his first coveted win at the Gatornationals, one of the few places left at which he has not yet earned a Wally trophy. The opening round of the new season saw him paired with No. 9 seed Bob Tasca, against whom Hagan drove his HEMI-powered Funny Car to his best run of the weekend with a 0.072-second reaction time and 3.922-second pass at 329.67 mph in a very close battle. However, while Hagan had a slim starting line advantage his opponent's 0.074-second reaction time and 3.920-second/330.47-mph pass provided the first upset of the year by the slimmest 0.0001-second margin of victory at the stripe to send the DSR driver home early.

Without a DSR entry advancing to the final round of eliminations for the first time in nearly a year and a half, the team's NHRA record streak of 14 consecutive Funny Car wins (dating back to October 2019) comes to an end.

In Top Fuel, DSR pilot Leah Pruett was also looking to score her first Gatornationals event win from the No. 3 qualifier position on the eliminations ladder, earned aboard her red, black and chrome Dodge Charger SRT Hellcat Redeye dragster. Her opening-round run of 3.787 seconds at 314.09 mph gave her the win over rookie Mike Bucher, who lost traction early. Pruett had the early advantage in her quarterfinals battle against Shawn Langdon but saw her opponent make the pass when her nitro-fueled machine dropped a cylinder and some oil to send the team home earlier than they had hoped.

Despite the early exit, Pruett put in a lot of track time throughout the weekend as she pulled double duty by running in both the Pro and Sportman categories, as she will at seven more events this season.

In Factory Stock Showdown (FSS) competition, Pruett took her 2021 Dodge Challenger Mopar Drag Pak for its first official eliminations drive as a No. 13 qualifier against the No. 4 seed John Cerbone. Pruett drove the new-generation Drag Pak to her quickest career run in FSS competition with a stout 7.806-second pass at 177.44 mph, bettering her previous personal records of 7.852 seconds set at Gainesville in 2019 and best speed of 173.94 mph posted at Charlotte that same year.

Unfortunately, while her new ride was faster on the track than her opponent's, Pruett fell just short of turning on the first win-light of the season as her 0.073-second reaction time was overshadowed by her competitor's 0.002-second start to give him the hole shot victory with a slower 7.808 seconds/174.80 mph pass. Pruett's next chance to take the new HEMI-powered Drag Pak for a quick drive in FSS competition will be at the Mopar Express Lane NHRA SpringNationals presented by Pennzoil in Houston on May 21-23.

Pruett's teammate, Mark Pawuk, came into race day at the Gatornationals as the 11th seed after steady improvement in his Empaco Equipment Mopar Drag Pak performance through each qualifying session. In the opening round of FSS eliminations, the team's hard work paid off as Pawuk drove his HEMI-powered Drag Pak to their quickest run of the weekend with a 7.855 seconds at 174.26 mph pass. He followed that up with an 8.038 seconds/170.17 mph lap in his round 2 win over No. 3 seed Gardner Stone, who left prematurely.

Pawuk was matched up with No. 2 qualifier Aaron Stanfield for the semifinal round but saw his day shortened by a red-light start. Pawuk now looks forward to taking delivery of one of the new-generation Dodge Challenger Mopar Drag Paks at an upcoming FSS series race in the next few months.

ADDITIONAL NOTES and QUOTES:

Matt Hagan, Mopar Dodge Charger SRT Hellcat Redeye Funny Car

(No. 8 Qualifier – 3.975 seconds at 321.35 mph)

Round 1: (0.072-second reaction time, 3.922 seconds at 329.67 mph) lost to No. 9 Bob Tasca (0.074/3.920/330.47) 0.0001 margin of victory

"We had a good test session in West Palm Beach to kick off the year and we were on the bad side of a really, really good drag race today to (Bob) Tasca. I wouldn't be surprised if Tasca goes out and wins it. That's a good car. It's tough out there and we were on the tough side of the ladder. We would have had (Ron) Capps, our teammate, in the second round. It was going to be a dog fight all day. I have to say a lot about (my crew chief) Dickie Venables and (assistant crew chief) Mike Knudsen and this Dodge Mopar team and their leadership. The guys worked late working through some gremlins and put a really good race car under me. We'll be back out here for the next one and will get back after it."

Ron Capps, NAPA Auto Parts Dodge Charger SRT Hellcat Funny Car

(No. 1 Qualifier – 3.895 seconds at 329.02 mph)

Round 1: (0.090-second reaction time, 3.923 seconds at 323.74 mph) defeated No. 16 Jim Campbell (0.125/12.844/76.95)

Round 2: (0.077/4.946/158.91) loss to No. 9 Bob Tasca (0.079/3.958/327.11)

"That's what I love about this sport – the competition. We had a great qualifying outing but with only three laps you only get one run in one of the two lanes. We wanted to win first round and lost lane choice going into the second round. After watching Robert (Hight) and some of the other cars run, we were very confident with that right lane but it just seemed to chatter a little bit, sort of in the same spot it did on Q3. That's just the way it is. Funny Car is so tough. It was almost a perfect weekend, but still ended up being a really good weekend overall.

"I'm really looking forward to working more with these guys led by Guido (Dean Antonelli) and John Medlen. We're keeping it fun like we did with (my former crew chief Rahn) Tobler. It's great to see so many fans and people being responsible and following protocols to allow us to race. We love the fans coming from all over to support us this weekend. A great opening weekend with GEARWRENCH on the car, and Pennzoil of course."

Leah Pruett, Dodge Charger SRT Hellcat Redeye Top Fuel Dragster

(No. 3 Qualifier – 3.741 seconds at 326.32 mph)

Round 1: (0.060-second reaction time, 3.787 seconds at 314.09 mph) defeats No. 14 Mike Bucher (0.076/7.686/81.27)

Round 2: (0.054/3.887/294.05) loss to No. 6 Shawn Langdon (0.065/3.764/317.79)

"I think there's an overall consensus that the 2021 Gatornationals was a little unconventional for us as we experienced some issues early in qualifying on the first lap and we quickly adapted from and had a very competitive race car for Sunday. Unfortunately, we started off this season with some mechanical gremlins. Our team, with the addition of a few new members, has done a great job meshing quickly. The tuning calls were great but some parts failures plagued us this weekend. After that you shake their hands and say good job and know that we have the heart and ability to get round wins and race wins. Overall, we feel good about the weekend. Walking away from eliminations, there's nothing that we would have done differently. We'll get to the bottom of it and roll on to the next Camping World NHRA race and be ready to win."

Leah Pruett, Mopar Dodge Challenger Mopar Drag Pak – Factory Stock Shootout

(No. 13 Qualifier – 7.892 seconds at 173.49 mph)

Round 1: (0.073-second reaction time, 7.806 seconds at 177.44 mph) loss to No. 8 John Cerbone (0.002/ 7.808 sec./ 174.80 mph)

"The 'shake their hands and walk away' mentality definitely applies to our first round of Factory Stock (Showdown) round one this morning. Just an incredible package and race. John Cerbone had a .002 light and was two thousandths (of a second) slower than us at the stripe and that would have required me to have a .004 reaction time. Right now, for me, those kinds of lights aren't quite in the cards. I need a bit more seat time getting acquainted with this new Dodge SRT Drag Pak Challenger. Hats off to the entire DSR Factory Stock team, Terry (Snyder), Kevin (Helms) and everyone at Dodge and the SRT engineers for getting this great piece of machinery ready for us to debut this weekend at Gainesville. We were able to get this car into competition-form very quickly and I'm looking forward to some more seat time before our next race at Houston in May. We had a very good showing for the debut of the Drag Pak and we're looking forward to maximizing all of its capabilities. What we saw today in round one is a testament to the type of competition this team and Dodge brings. Our competitors know that they have to step up to that level in order to try and beat us. We're going to continue to be on top of our game and pick away at it some more and I'm confident we'll have a very strong season."

Mark Pawuk, Empaco Equipment Mopar Drag Pak– Factory Stock Shootout

(No. 11 Qualifier – 7.873 seconds at 174.12 mph)

Round 1: (0.095-second reaction time, 7.855 seconds at 174.26 mph) defeats to No. 6 Jim Betz (No Time)

Round 2: (0.129/8.038 sec./ 170.17 mph) defeats No. 3 Gardner Stone (no time)

Round 3: (-0.296/14.875/71.82) loss to No. 2 Aaron Stanfield (0.056/7.890/173.99)

"For the way we started out this weekend, Leah (Pruett)'s car ran really good, ours was a little behind but the guys worked really hard. We changed a lot of parts and we were able to make good runs. Maybe we got a couple of lucky breaks but hey, to go to the semis at the first race out this weekend in Gainesville, it's awesome to go some rounds. I'm looking forward to our next race in Houston."

Mopar

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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, the brand expanded to include technical service and customer support. Today, 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 leading global automaker and mobility provider Stellantis. For more information regarding Stellantis (NYSE: STLA), please visit www.stellantis.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-plus-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 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). The Dodge brand also ranked No. 1 in the J.D. Power APEAL Study (mass market). These results are historic because it marks the first time a domestic brand has earned top spots in both J.D. Power studies in the same year.

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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](https://www.instagram.com/dodge_mopar_motorsports/) Instagram channel continues to share content capturing Dodge//SRT Mopar drivers on the track. Fans can see action from the NHRA Camping World 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.

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