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## **Matt Hagan Takes Direct Connection Dodge Charger SRT Hellcat to Back-to-Back NHRA Amalie Gatornationals Funny Car Titles**

- Matt Hagan, the three-time NHRA Camping World Funny Car champion, captured his second consecutive National Hot Rod Association Amalie Motor Oil Gatornationals Funny Car event title Sunday in the all-new Sublime Green Direct Connection Dodge Charger SRT Hellcat machine with the Dickie Venables-led Tony Stewart Racing (TSR) crew
- Hagan scored his 44th career NHRA Funny Car victory in the 2023 NHRA Camping World Drag Racing Series in the 54th edition of the famed Florida drag-racing classic at the legendary Gainesville Raceway. Hagan trails only John Force, Ron Capps and Robert Hight in career Funny Car wins in NHRA competition
- Hagan defeated J.R. Todd in the Funny Car final Sunday coming from his fifth starting position in the 16-car field
- Hagan's TSR teammate Leah Pruett drove her Direct Connection Top Fuel dragster to a semifinal finish against eventual race winner Mike Salinas after a strong fourth qualifying spot
- In the Flexjet Factory Stock Showdown action, veteran Joe Welch piloted his Dodge Challenger Drag Pack to the Gatornationals title Sunday at Gainesville

March 12, 2023, Auburn Hills, Mich. - Three-time NHRA Camping World Funny Car Champion Matt Hagan of Christiansburg, Virginia, scored his second straight NHRA Amalie Motor Oil Gatornationals drag-racing title Sunday by driving his Tony Stewart Racing (TSR) Direct Connection Dodge Charger SRT Hellcat Funny Car to victory at the legendary Gainesville Raceway in the 2023 NHRA season-opening national event.

Hagan, who qualified fifth Saturday in the 16-car field, defeated former NHRA World Champion J.R. Todd in the Funny Car final with a 3.926 at 329.34 mph to claim his 44th career NHRA Funny Car crown, moving him to fourth all-time in NHRA Funny Car victories. In an exciting Funny Car finale, Hagan and Todd battled side-by-side through half track before Todd's car smoked the tires and Matt went on to take the win light.

Earlier in eliminations, Hagan defeated Tim Wilkerson, Bob Tasca and Alexis DeJoria to advance to the final round against Todd.

Hagan gave credit for the victory to his Dickie Venable-led TSR crew, as the team debuted a new chassis and engine parts in the season opener.

"It's super special to win the Gatornationals again," said Hagan. "I tried my whole career to win here, and we just got the first one last year. Can't say enough about Dickie Venables (crew chief) and the crew today. It's Dickie's birthday and this win is a present for him. We had the entire crew come back this year, which is rare in motorsports. We have a new chassis that I had to get accustomed to with a different steering setup and clutch position in the new car, but testing helped me get used to it. We thought we had a good car after testing and it says a lot with Dickie's experience and the crew's effort.

"I knew J.R. (Todd) was going to be tough in the final, and he poked his nose out ahead a bit early and then we drove around him for the win. I can't thank Dodge and Mopar enough for their assistance with our TSR squad. The Direct Connection Dodge SRT Charger Hellcat ran awesome today. It was great to win Tony's first Wally here last year and this one is very special too. It's different to start the whole season at Gainesville after decades starting at

Pomona. Winning my 44th NHRA national event is very special when you have legends like John Force, Ron Capps and Robert Hight in front of me. Now, with this win, it is a super way to start the 2023 season. We hope to continue it next race at Phoenix.”

Hagan’s TSR Direct Connection teammate Leah Pruett recorded a strong Top Fuel performance, as the Arizona driver advanced to the semi-finals Sunday before losing to eventual race winner Mike Salinas. Pruett, who qualified fourth in the Top Fuel 16-car field, took out Doug Foley in the first round and Austin Prock in round two with impressive runs of 3.686 and 3.731. An extensive winter testing program assisted Pruett and her team in gathering solid information for the 2023 season-opening race.

“This weekend was quite a turnaround for our Direct Connection TSR Top Fuel team after not competing last year here,” said Pruett. “It’s a testament to where we left off in 2022. We actually ran 24 test passes this winter. We took a hybrid of all of our test runs to come into this weekend. There wasn’t one run of the 24 that we thought was the perfect setting. The TSR crew did a great job putting a setup together for our car. The track was very unique this weekend. It was good after the starting line, but the line was very tricky. Because we were able to go through those types of challenges in testing, that really helped us this weekend. I couldn’t be more proud of the Direct Connection team. This event was good for momentum going to Phoenix, the site of my first NHRA Top Fuel win. These Sublime Green machines are so cool looking and fast too.”

Team owner Tony Stewart was elated with his Direct Connection team’s performance this weekend at the Gatornationals and had big smile in the NHRA winner’s circle Sunday.

“This was an awesome weekend for us in Gainesville at the Gatornationals,” said Stewart. “Matt’s win is the anniversary of our very first team win in the nitro division, so what an awesome weekend. We couldn’t ask for more. Dickie Venables’ birthday is today, so what an awesome way to celebrate. We have two other team members with birthdays this week. We’re really big on birthdays and we’re one team, all team. You can’t win them all if you don’t win the first one, so we got the first one in the books. Leah and her team did an awesome job making it to the semifinals. What a transformation from a year ago when we missed the show. What a difference a year makes. I’m really proud of everyone at TSR.”

The Dodge and Mopar contingent recorded another NHRA Gatornationals title Sunday with Joe Welch of Longboat Key, Fla., driving his Dodge Challenger Drag Pak to victory in the FlexJet Factory Stock Showdown over Aaron Stanfield. Welch collected \$10,000 from the Direct Connection Drag Pak contingency program for his win.

In other Gatornationals competition, Dodge SRT Funny Cars drivers Cruz Pedregon and Alex Laughlin were defeated in the first round of eliminations Sunday.

The Dodge//SRT Direct Connection racers compete in two weeks (March 24-26) at Wild Horse Pass Motorsports Park in Chandler, Ariz., for the NHRA Arizona Nationals.

#### **@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 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.

#### **DodgeGarage: Digital Hub for Drag Racing News**

Fans can follow all the NHRA 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](http://www.dodgegarage.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 a lineup that delivers unrivaled performance in each of the segments where they compete.

Dodge drives forward as a pure performance brand, offering SRT Hellcat versions of the Dodge Challenger, Dodge Charger and Dodge Durango, as well as an R/T performance hybrid version of the all-new Dodge Hornet, representing the brand's first-ever electrified performance vehicle. Dodge delivers the dragstrip dominating 807-horsepower Dodge Challenger SRT Super Stock; the 797-horsepower Dodge Charger SRT Redeye, the most powerful and fastest mass-produced sedan in the world; and the 710-horsepower Dodge Durango SRT Hellcat, the most powerful SUV ever; and best-in-class standard performance in the compact utility vehicle segment with the Dodge Hornet. Combined, these four muscle vehicles make Dodge the industry's most powerful brand, offering more horsepower than any other American brand across its entire lineup.

In 2022, the Dodge brand ranked No. 1 in the [J.D. Power APEAL Study](#) (mass market), making it the only domestic brand ever to do so three years in a row. 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).

Dodge is part of the portfolio of brands offered by leading global automaker and mobility provider Stellantis. For more information regarding Stellantis (NYSE: STLA), visit [www.stellantis.com](http://www.stellantis.com).

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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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