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## **Stewart Misses by Inches in Quarterfinals at NHRA New England Nationals, Hagan's Funny Car Winning Streak in Dodge//SRT Hellcat Ends at Epping**

- Tony Stewart knows racing is a game of inches as the racing Hall of Famer found out the hard way Sunday in the NHRA New England Nationals with his TSR Rinnai Dodge//SRT dragster
- Stewart, a rookie Top Fuel driver, gave 2023 World Champion Doug Kalitta all he could handle in the quarterfinals but lost by just two inches (0.002 seconds) to the eventual race winner
- Stewart defeated Chicago winner Antron Brown in the first round before a sellout crowd and left the starting line quicker than Kalitta in the next round, but Kalitta's 3.841 nipped Stewart's 3.848
- Matt Hagan, Stewart's TSR Dodge//SRT teammate and the reigning NHRA World Funny Car Champion, was seeking his third consecutive NHRA Mission Drag Racing Series win Sunday
- Competing against former World Champion Ron Capps, Hagan's Rush Truck Services Dodge//SRT Hellcat lost traction just past the halfway point in the first-round matchup
- Hagan entered the New England Nationals event after Funny Car victories at Charlotte and Chicago in the past two NHRA Mission races and was going for a record fifth Epping win
- Hagan currently ranks third in the NHRA Mission Funny Car point standings as the national tour heads to Bristol, Tennessee, next weekend (June 7-9) for the NHRA Thunder Valley Nationals
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June 3, 2024, Auburn Hills, Mich. - It was a game of inches for Tony Stewart in front of a sellout crowd Sunday at the NHRA New England Nationals drag races, as the racing Hall of Fame driver looked to be on his way to a big upset over reigning Top Fuel World Champion Doug Kalitta.

Stewart, in just the eighth Top Fuel competition of his legendary motorsports career, defeated Chicago winner Antron Brown in the first round of action and took on Kalitta, the top qualifier, in the quarterfinals as the former NASCAR, IndyCar and USAC champion seeks his first NHRA Top Fuel national win.

The Indiana racer jumped to the lead against Kalitta with a faster reaction time off the starting line and held the advantage at half track in the contest, before Kalitta's car nipped the Tony Stewart Racing (TSR) Rinnai Dodge//SRT dragster by just two inches (0.002 seconds) at the finish. Kalitta ran a 3.841 to Stewart's 3.848.

Stewart, who finished second last year in his initial NHRA competition in the Alcohol Dragster class, has been feeling more comfortable in the 335-mile-per-hour, nitro-burning machine and currently ranks ninth in the NHRA Mission Top Fuel points standings.

"On Friday for the first qualifying session, Neal (Strausbaugh, TSR crew chief) and Leah (Pruett, Stewart's wife and past TSR driver) had talked to me about the past three events at this track where they blew the tires off on the first hit," said Stewart. "We were able to make two solid runs on Saturday. In Q3, we were the fourth-quickest car of the round. In Q4, we were the third-quickest car. We made four solid runs on both days of qualifying on Friday and Saturday.

"Today, we spun the tires pretty far out against Antron Brown. He had problems too. Then we lined up against the reigning world champion, Doug Kalitta. The deck was stacked against us that run and we were within two inches of beating him. I left on him, having an .055 (seconds) light to his .060. I hate losing just as much, if not more, than anybody, but at the same time, it leaves me feeling really good about where we are with the Top Fuel team. I feel like

we had a successful weekend that shows our team is gaining momentum and strength. We have a lot of positives at the end of the day.”

Stewart’s TSR teammate, Matt Hagan, came to the NHRA New England Nationals in search of his third straight NHRA Mission Funny Car win after triumphs at Charlotte and Chicago with his Dodge//SRT Hellcat. In addition, Hagan was attempting to record a record fifth Epping Funny Car victory this weekend.

After qualifying fifth in the 16-car field, Hagan, the four-time and reigning NHRA Mission World Funny Car Champion, matched up against former World titleholder Ron Capps in the opening round of competition Sunday under sunny skies.

Hagan was quicker on reaction time against Capps, but the Rush Truck Services Dodge//SRT Hellcat lost traction just past half track and Capps advanced to the quarterfinals. Despite the first-round loss, Hagan remains third in the NHRA Mission Funny Car point standings as the national tour heads to Bristol, Tennessee., next weekend (June 7-9) for the Super Grip NHRA Thunder Valley Nationals.

“We obviously didn’t want to go out the first round, but that is drag racing,” said Hagan. “We’re coming into the heat of the season now. We’re trying some new things with the race car, and they aren’t working quite like we want them to. Anytime you change one thing, it changes another six things. It’ll be part of the learning curve for the next couple races coming up. But this TSR team is very smart, and they’ll figure it out. I just need to keep doing my job and the car will come around. I’m anxious for the Bristol race now.”

Stewart, Hagan and the TSR Dodge//SRT teams will be back in action this Friday (June 7) when nitro qualifying gets underway at the NHRA Thunder Valley Nationals with 5:30 p.m. and 8 p.m. EDT rounds. Two more qualifying sessions are scheduled for Saturday at 1:30 p.m. and 4.15 p.m. EDT, while final eliminations are set for Sunday at 12 p.m. EDT.

Television coverage of the NHRA Thunder Valley Nationals finals will take place on Sunday at 7 p.m. EDT on Fox Sports 1. Friday qualifying also will be televised at 7 p.m. EDT on Fox Sports 1.

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Dodge also keeps its foot on the gas as a pure performance brand with the 710-horsepower Dodge Durango SRT Hellcat, the most powerful gas engine SUV ever, and best-in-class standard performance in the compact-utility vehicle segment with the Dodge Hornet.

Fans can follow all the NHRA action this season at [DodgeGarage](#), the one-stop portal for Dodge//SRT and Mopar drag-racing news, including daily updates and access to an online racing HQ, news, events, galleries, available downloads and merchandise.

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