

Contact: Tom Blattler
Kristin Starnes
Darren Jacobs

Stewart Takes 50th Anniversary Direct Connection Top Fuel Dragster to Semis at U.S. Nationals, Joins Hagan in Securing Berth in NHRA Playoffs

- Racing legend Tony Stewart continues to be a major factor in his Top Fuel rookie season with an impressive performance this weekend at 70th annual NHRA U.S. Nationals
- Driving a special livery celebrating 50 years of the Direct Connection performance parts brand, Stewart posted the No. 2 qualifying time and recorded a semifinals finish
- The NASCAR Hall of Fame driver qualified his Tony Stewart Racing (TSR) Direct Connection Dodge//SRT Top Fuel dragster with a stellar 3.707 at 331.04 mph
- Stewart bested Doug Foley at a 3.723 in round one and Justin Ashley at a 3.747 in round two before his 11,000-horsepower car lost traction against Steve Torrence in the semifinals
- The Top Fuel semifinals finish clinched a position for Stewart in the final six-race "Countdown" playoffs for the NHRA Mission Drag Racing Series championship
- Reigning NHRA Funny Car World Champion Matt Hagan qualified eighth in his TSR Direct Connection Dodge//SRT Hellcat but had an early exit Monday when his car lost traction
- The four-time NHRA champion remains third in the NHRA Mission Series point standings entering the six-race "Countdown" set to start at Reading, Pennsylvania, Sept. 13-15
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September 3, 2024, Auburn Hills, Mich. - Tony Stewart has become a major factor in his "rookie" NHRA Top Fuel season, notching another impressive performance at the 70th annual NHRA U.S. Nationals at Lucas Oil Indianapolis Raceway Park on September 2, 2024. Sporting special 50th anniversary Direct Connection graphics on his Top Fuel dragster, Stewart recorded his second consecutive No. 2 qualifying position in a tough 19-car field and advanced to the semifinals amid a star-studded lineup that included five former NHRA world champions.

Stewart and his Tony Stewart Racing (TSR) Direct Connection Dodge//SRT dragster jumped to the top of the Top Fuel qualifying charts with a sensational 3.707 and 331.04 mile per hour run before Brittany Force nipped his time for the pole with a 3.693. The Indiana driver came back in hot conditions (130-degree track surface) to post a 3.79 run in qualifying.

In final eliminations on Monday, Stewart continued his strong on-track showings with a 3.723 in defeating Doug Foley in the first round and posted a 3.747 in taking out Justin Ashley in round two. His 3.747 run just missed gaining lane choice for the semifinals against former world champion Steve Torrence. In the U.S. Nationals semifinals, Stewart and Torrence left the starting line together but Stewart's dragster lost traction down the track and Torrence advanced to the final round.

With his semifinals showing, Stewart clinched his position in the final six-race NHRA Mission Drag Racing Series "Countdown" playoffs, as the man nicknamed "Smoke" now ranks seventh in the standings. Stewart's next NHRA Mission competition, the opening of the six-race NHRA "Countdown" playoffs, is set for the NHRA Pep Boys Nationals at Maple Grove Raceway in Reading, Pennsylvania., on Sept. 13-15.

"I'm still encouraged by the weekend, even with the semis loss," said Stewart. "I don't know what we have to do to win one of these races. That's two races in a row in which we qualified second. We are in the game now. We have a

car that is capable of finishing off one of these events with a win. We just need a little luck on our side. We have to create our own luck, too. It was nice to not have to sweat it after the second round of qualifying when we jumped to No. 2. I think we have a lot of confidence leaving this race, even though it didn't go how we wanted at the end. We have a lot to look forward to with this final stretch in the 'Countdown'."

Stewart's teammate, the reigning Funny Car champion Matt Hagan, suffered through a short day when his TSR Direct Connection Dodge//SRT Hellcat Funny Car lost traction in the opening of eliminations Monday. Hagan, winner of two NHRA national events in 2024, was on a strong pass when his 11,000-horsepower machine smoked the tires at half track and opponent Alexis DeJoria advanced to the quarterfinals. While the first-round loss was disappointing for Hagan, the Virginia driver ranks third heading into the NHRA "Countdown" playoffs

"We were trying to run hard in the first round with the cooler air (66 degrees), and I let the car get inside a little too much in the lane," said Hagan, who also carried 50th anniversary graphics on his race in celebration of 50 years of the Dodge Direct Connection performance parts brand.. "I smoked the tires. For me, I felt a light rattle with the tires, and I got in the marbles a bit. That one is on me. We looked at it on video, and we have learned info from that run. We always learn with every run. The faster you run, the harder these cars are to drive. The car was on a good pass, maybe 3.86 or so.

"We are ready for the 'Countdown' now, and we had a good performance last year with wins at St. Louis and Dallas taking us to a championship. You have to win races in the 'Countdown' to win a championship. This TSR Direct Connection team is experienced, and they know how to win titles too. We just have to keep our heads down and the wins will come to us. We know we can do it."

Sweden's Ida Zetterström, in just her second NHRA national event, drove her JCM Racing/Dodge Top Fuel dragster to the upset win in the first round Monday over the No. 3 qualifier with a strong 3.759 pass in her U.S. Nationals debut. Zetterström, the 2023 FIA Top Fuel Champion, lost a close second round battle against Steve Torrence with a 3.797 to Torrence's 3.742.

"I'm very proud of the team and what we are showing here," Zetterström said. "Going into Indy is hard for everyone. We saw some really heavy hitters on the outside (in qualifying). Usually when you go into a race, you have the mindset that qualifying is where you try things out, you set the field, and you go into race day. But Indy is different. It feels like every day is race day because it's so hard to just get into the show. That's been new to me, to have that feeling of being under pressure constantly for four days in a row. Being able to qualify was a great feeling in itself."

The NHRA Pep Boys Nationals, the opening round of the six-race NHRA Mission "Countdown", gets underway Friday, Sept. 13, with nitro qualifying scheduled for 3:30 p.m. EDT and 6 p.m. EDT followed by Saturday, Sept. 14, qualifying at 1 p.m. EDT and 3:30 p.m. EDT. Final eliminations are set for 10:30 a.m. EDT on Sunday, Sept. 15.

Fox television coverage for the NHRA Pep Boys Nationals will be televised on Friday, Sept. 13, at 7 p.m. EDT on Fox Sports 1 with the final eliminations on FOX Network at 2 p.m. EDT and 4:30 p.m. EDT on Sunday, Sept. 15.

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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 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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