

Pruett Takes First 2023 National Win at Norwalk, Drives Dodge Direct Connection Dragster to Victory

- Leah Pruett, driving the Tony Stewart Racing (TSR) Dodge Direct Connection Top Fuel dragster, wins at Norwalk
- Pruett upsets NHRA Top Fuel point leader Justin Ashley with 3.76-second pass in the final round
- Pruett records second straight No. 1 qualifying position with the Direct Connection dragster
- Matt Hagan drove the TSR Direct Connection Dodge//SRT Hellcat Funny Car to runner-up spot
- Hagan moves back in the No. 1 spot in the NHRA Camping World Funny Car point standings

June 25, 2023, Norwalk, Ohio - The hot and humid conditions always prove to be tricky at an NHRA Camping World Drag Racing Series national event, but Leah Pruett and her Tony Stewart Racing (TSR) Dodge Direct Connection team were the masters of that environment Sunday by capturing the Top Fuel division win in the Summit Racing Equipment Nationals at Summit Motorsports Park in Norwalk, Ohio.

Pruett drove her TSR Direct Connection dragster past current NHRA Top Fuel point leader Justin Ashley in the final round with a 3.761-second pass at 326.79 mph to score her first 2023 NHRA win, jumping into the top three in the Top Fuel current standings entering the next event on July 14-16 at the Dodge Power Brokers NHRA Mile-High Nationals in Morrison, Colorado. Pruett is the defending champion at her primary sponsor's upcoming event.

The Arizona driver opened the Ohio racing weekend by qualifying her Top Fueler in the No. 1 position for the second straight event, advancing past Kyle Wurtzel in the first round. Pruett then defeated Mike Salinas in round two and young Austin Prock in the semifinals. Ashley had lane choice in the final against Pruett, but smoked the tires at half-track as Pruett drove to the win light.

The win for Pruett is her second with TSR (Denver in 2022) and 11th career victory in Top Fuel. Pruett's victory was the fourth win for the TSR team in 2023.

Pruett's TSR teammate, Matt Hagan, winner of three 2023 NHRA national events in Funny Car, advanced to the final Sunday in his TSR Direct Connection Dodge//SRT Hellcat after defeating Dale Creasy Jr., Robert Hight and J.R. Todd in the opening three rounds.

Unfortunately, Hagan couldn't complete the TSR double-win weekend when he was beaten by Blake Alexander with a 3.935 run to Hagan's 3.991. Despite the loss in the final round, the Virginia racer regained the NHRA Camping World Funny Car point lead, 679 to Ron Capps' 675.

"You always love coming into race day from the No. 1 qualifying position," said Pruett. "Going into the final round, we thought we had all of the systems going well. However, we had new issues that we hadn't seen before. And we had 30 minutes to address the problem. Neal (Strausbaugh, crew chief) and the guys kinda rolled the dice and it worked great. It was a full team effort going against Justin Ashley. My favorite thing about racing is celebrating with the crew after a win. They worked so hard to give us a great race car. I had a good feeling about today's race.

"It's great to have Matt (Hagan) get to the final today too. As a team, we work together, and we actually get emotional as we win rounds. You get emotional because there are so many ups and downs in this sport. It's a great camaraderie with both teams (TSR Top Fuel and Funny Car) and Tony (Stewart, team owner) has been a very consistent leader. He doesn't play favorites. There is no A team or B team. We have the same mindset with the team and that is what we enjoy.

"It's so great to win here and then we move to the Dodge Power Brokers Mile-High Nationals where I'm the defending champion. Bandimere Speedway is my favorite track dating back to my start in Junior Dragsters at age 8. We are anxious to go to Denver for Dodge, Mopar, Bandimere Speedway and the Bandimere family. That place means so much to me."

Stewart was very emotional after Sunday's win for Pruet and Hagan's final round appearance.

"I'm excited about the whole weekend," said Stewart. "Both teams performed really well. For Leah to be low ET in qualifying and finish it off with the win today is spectacular. I'm super proud of the fact that both of our teams made the final. It shows the depth of our program and how hard everyone works. We were really close to a double-up and something historic for our organization, but for Matt (Hagan) to make the final, you can't ask for much more than that."

Strausbaugh explained how the hot and humid conditions were difficult for his TSR Top Fuel squad and the work that was involved for Sunday's victory.

"From the outside going into the final, it looked like we were taking a knife to a gun fight with (Justin) Ashley," he said. "We have had a good race car all weekend and it hasn't been the quickest car. We fought a few things on Saturday in qualifying. We knew we could step up our setup if we needed to. But the track temperature jumped up to 122 (degrees) for the final. It was 111 to 113 in the semi-finals, so we felt pretty confident about the changes we made going to the final round. We ran the same engine all day. It is just a tune-up each round. So, overall, it's just extremely hard to win one of these NHRA national events, especially in Top Fuel right now. It's very difficult to put four runs together on a weekend. I'm very happy for our TSR team and Matt to the final as well," said Strausbaugh.

Hagan was pleased with his TSR Direct Connection Dodge//SRT Hellcat Funny Car's performance throughout the weekend and excited to retain the NHRA Funny Car point lead.

"It was good day for us in the points," Hagan said. "We made seven solid runs here in hot and humid conditions. Overall, we are moving in the right direction in the Direct Connection Dodge Hellcat. Wow, Blake (Alexander) cut .028 light and we would have had to run a 3.88 there. It's one of those days and you can't win them all. I'm happy for Blake. He has been a friend for a long time."

"The car and crew did a great job this weekend with Dickie and guys. I'm super excited for Leah to win today in Top Fuel. It's a great feeling here with TSR with what Tony, Leah, Dodge and both teams have put together. She is doing a great job behind the wheel. TSR walks away with a huge win in Top Fuel and the points lead in Funny Car. We will keep digging and we go to Denver for the last race of the Dodge Power Brokers Mile-High Nationals. It's emotion because Dodge has been there for over 30 years and now it's the last one. I think this is our first time with both cars to the final with TSR. We hoping to do a double win event for TSR very soon."

The NHRA Camping World Drag Racing series heads to the Western tour with the upcoming Dodge Power Brokers Mile-High Nationals on July 14-16, followed by the Flav-R-Pac NHRA Northwest Nationals on July 21-23 and the DENSO Sonoma Nationals on July 28-30.

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Dodge Charger will also offer performance choices via multi-energy powertrain options, including the 550-horsepower Dodge Charger SIXPACK H.O., powered by the 3.0L Twin Turbo Hurricane High Output engine.

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.

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).

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. Dodge is part of the portfolio of brands offered by leading global automaker and mobility provider [Stellantis](#) (NYSE: STLA).

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