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Single Point Separates Capps and Hagan Dodge Charger SRT Hellcat Funny Cars in NHRA World Championship Battle Following Thunder Valley Nationals Performances

- Don Schumacher Racing (DSR) driver Ron Capps and his Dodge Charger SRT Hellcat Funny Car take the lead in the National Hot Rod Association (NHRA) "Countdown to the Championship" after a semifinal appearance at the Thunder Valley Nationals at Bristol Dragway
- Capps earned the No. 2 qualifier position and won his 800th career elimination round on the way to a semifinal appearance to move him into the Funny Car championship lead by one point over his DSR teammate Matt Hagan
- Defending world champion Hagan qualified No. 3 by resetting Bristol Dragway's speed record with the first 330-mph Funny Car pass in the facility's history but dropped to second in the battle for the category crown after an early eliminations exit
- No. 7 qualifier Cruz Pedregon drove to quarterfinal battle against Capps; Snap-On Tools Dodge Charger SRT Hellcat remains in hunt for third Funny Car championship
- Leah Pruett earned a No. 6 starting position by driving her Mopar Dodge//SRT Top Fuel dragster with the second-quickest run of the second qualifying session before being early round setback eliminated her from contention with two playoff events remaining

October 17, 2021, Bristol, Tennessee - A single point separates two Don Schumacher Racing Dodge Charger SRT Hellcat Funny Cars in the National Hot Rod Association (NHRA) "Countdown to the Championship" playoff battle after Ron Capps took the lead from stablemate Matt Hagan by qualifying No. 2 at Bristol Dragway, scoring his 800th career round win and then driving to a semifinal appearance at the Thunder Valley Nationals.

Fresh off a winning performance last weekend at Texas Motorplex, Capps arrived at Bristol Dragway second in the championship battle with a 33-point deficit and as the winningest Funny Car driver at the venue with five career wins (2001, 2006, 2012, 2017, 2018). He proceeded to qualify his HEMI®-powered machine second on the timing sheets with a 3.945-second run at 325.61 mph and earn two valuable bonus points.

The opening round of eliminations saw the 2016 Funny Car champ dispose of No. 13 seed Blake Alexander while No. 3 qualifier and points leader Hagan was upset by No. 12 seed J.R. Todd, signaling the start of a shift atop the championship standings.

Capps' quarterfinal match-up was with fellow HEMI-powered driver and third place championship contender, Cruz Pedregon. The two competitors battled closely the entire length of the track with a solid 3.919-second run at 329.83 mph by Capps to beat Pedregon's 3.920 sec./326.63 mph pass, collect his 800th career elimination round victory and, for a tenth time this season, advance to the semifinals.

With championship implications in play among the top-five contenders, Capps lined up his Dodge Charger SRT Hellcat against Todd, who was looking to improve on his fifth place standing and tighten up the points race. As he did against his previous two adversaries, Capps was quicker off the starting line but found himself fighting to keep his racecar in the lane. By mid-track it drifted to the centerline where it made contact with a timing block and nullified his run. An automatic five-point penalty was deducted from the DSR driver's total and the win awarded to his opponent, but despite the setback Capps moved past Hagan to take the lead in the Funny Car championship by a single point with just two playoff series events remaining.

The Cruz Pedregon Racing Snap-on Tools Dodge Charger SRT Hellcat began its race day from the No. 7 spot after a

3.975 sec./ 320.13 mph qualifying effort to pair up with No. 8 seed Dave Richards for the opening round. Pedregon lead early, never trailed and recorded his quickest pass of the weekend, 3.964 seconds at 294.11 mph, en route to his 12th first round win of the year, the most for him since 2015 (15). Following the solid side-by-side battle against Capps that resulted in a quarterfinal loss, Pedregon, who is chasing his third Funny Car championship title, drop a spot and into a tie for fourth place in the standings with John Force.

Defending NHRA world champ Matt Hagan began his drive at the Thunder Valley Nationals with the Funny Car points lead and qualified his DSR Johnson's Horsepowered Garage Mopar Dodge Charger SRT Hellcat No. 3 for eliminations with a best run of 3.958 seconds at 330.31 mph to reset Bristol Dragway's speed record with its first 330 mph Funny Car pass. Hagan collected a total of four important bonus points for setting the quickest run of the second qualifying session and putting himself third on the timing sheets in the final session.

With two playoff wins and a runner-up finish last weekend at Texas Motorplex, Hagan's DSR HEMI-powered machine was lined up for the opening round with lane choice over Todd and its driver looking to turn on win lights and maintain the lead in the points battle. The three-time Funny Car champ drove it straight down the lane for a quick 3.958-second elapsed time run, the exact same as his best qualifying effort, but unfortunately his opponent's winning 3.924-second pass ended any hopes of advancing further on this race day. Hagan sits in second place behind Capps in the "Countdown to the Championship" and all top-five contenders (Todd, Pedregon and Force) within 100 points of each other heading to the Dodge//SRT Nationals presented by Pennzoil at The Strip at Las Vegas Motor Speedway for the penultimate race of the 2021 NHRA season.

DSR Top Fuel pilot Leah Pruett powered her Sparkling Ice Spiked Mopar Dodge//SRT dragster to the second-quickest run of the second qualifying session to collect two bonus points and secured a spot in the top half of the eliminations ladder. Her No. 6 seeded position paired her up for an opening round contest against No. 9 seed Spencer Massey. With the move to holding the Thunder Valley Nationals in autumn came cooler track conditions that made race day setups more of a challenge than usual for all competitors.

As the DSR 11-thousand HEMI horsepower dragster launched, Pruett immediately worked to find traction and keep her ride off the wall while her opponent headed for the finish and, despite a fiery explosion in the closing feet, turned on the win light. While the first round loss effectively eliminated the team's Top Fuel championship hopes, Pruett remains sixth in the rankings and expects to close out the season with strong results in the final two playoff events beginning with the Dodge//SRT NHRA Nationals Presented by Pennzoil October 29-31 in Las Vegas.

ADDITIONAL NOTES and QUOTES

FUNNY CAR:

Matt Hagan, DSR Johnson's Horsepowered Garage Mopar Dodge Charger SRT Hellcat

(No. 3 Qualifier – 3.958 seconds at 330.31 mph)

Round 1: (0.084-second reaction time, 3.958 seconds at 326.16 mph) loss No. 12 J.R. Todd (0.069/3.924/324.90)

"It's a tough one but J.R. Todd and that team, they did their homework and outran us and he left on us. That's drag racing. I hate to lose and I'm trying to put a smile on right now, but it burns you up inside. We've got to go to these last two races and really make them count. That's why we race them on Sunday because you never know what's going to happen. I've got all of the confidence in (crew chief) Dickie Venables, and we'll regroup and give it all we've got in Vegas."

Ron Capps, DSR NAPA AUTO PARTS Dodge Charger SRT Hellcat

(No. 2 Qualifier – 3.945 seconds at 325.61 mph)

Round 1: (0.081-second reaction time, 3.945 seconds at 328.38 mph) defeats No.13 Blake Alexander (0.097/7.575/78.95)

Round 2: (0.077/3.919/329.83) defeats No. 7 Cruz Pedregon (0.098/3.920/326.63)

Round 3: vs No. 12 J.R. Todd

"This is an all-out battle. We talk about the Countdown to the Championship and talk about how much tighter it seems this year. A lot of press people and media were saying it's just Matt Hagan and me still in the hunt, and I'm quick to caution everyone because there are so many other cars who can step up and run great and we've seen that

today with J.R. Todd and that DHL team and Alexis DeJoria. J.R. beat Matt first round and knocked us out in the semis. By no means, especially with Pomona (Calif.) being points-and-a-half, is this thing over. We wanted to grab more points while we were here at Bristol this weekend. The good thing is, we lead the points going into Vegas. It's almost even. We're having so much fun and we still have such a great NAPA hot rod and we showed that with qualifying second and making three solid, consistent laps. I'm excited about going to Vegas."

Cruz Pedregon, Cruz Pedregon Racing Snap-on® Tools Dodge Charger SRT Hellcat

(No. 7 Qualifier – 3.975 seconds at 320.13 mph)

Round 1: (0.085-second reaction time, 3.964 seconds at 294.11 mph) defeats No. 8 Dave Richards (0.129/4.023/311.63)

Round 2: (0.098/3.920/326.63) loss to No.2 Ron Capps (0.077/3.919/329.83)

"Bristol is a little tricky with a few bumps which always gives the track personality, it adds to the racing, and adds to the challenge of the race. We had a warm track but then it turned cold so it was really a matter of crew chiefs adjusting. (Crew chief) JC (John Collins) and the team did a great job of giving me a good car for qualifying. We lost one of the runs (Friday) due to the clocks malfunctioning early on the very first run. We estimated that we would have qualified in the top five there, but didn't get an elapsed time. We recovered and got a good (seconds) qualifying time which put us in the seventh spot. We went out there in the first round and good solid run with a 3.96 seconds against Dave Richards. I had to actually shut off ear drifting over on me a little bit towards the center line but we made a great run."

"Seems like we're racing Ron Capps every week and lost another close nail biter with a 3.92 to 3.96 that could have gone either way. We just lost by a fender there at the finish line but overall a good race for us. Our goal is to always go to the semis and we came up one short, but still a quarterfinal is not a bad outcome. These are the final countdown races and everybody's giving you their best shot. We have plenty of life. We're still leaving here in the top four in points, but we're within striking distance of the championship. (Ma Hagan went out relatively early, Capps went out in the semis, so yeah, we're ready for the last two. The Dodge/SRT Las Vegas Nationals is going to be a great race. There are more cars in the hunt now so I think that make for closer racing and then Pomona is a points-and-a-half race. It'll make the champion really earn it they close the deal."

TOP FUEL:

Leah Pruett, DSR Okuma Mopar Dodge//SRT Dragster

(No. 6 Qualifier – 3.691 seconds at 327.11 mph)

Round 1: (0.076-second reaction time, 7.565 seconds at 81.47 mph) loss to No. 9 Spencer Massey (0.056/3.745/328.46)

"Drag racing does not disappoint on the roller coaster of emotions. We had a great qualifying effort, making that run in the 3.60s and had a lot of confidence going into race day. But man, the navigation of this track is pretty tricky. This is probably one of the bumpiest tracks on the circuit but that's its characteristic, and all race tracks are different and we just didn't have a hold of it today. Had a real hard shake and ended up into smoke early. It's interesting how fast things happen, of course. Priority No. 1 is that Spencer (Massey) is safe after his explosion. I got to see it firsthand ahead of me. At one moment there was nothing, and the next moment I'm driving through a range of parts raining down from the atmosphere, dodging and weaving trying to avoid driving over anything. Everyone is safe; unfortunately for us, that first round loss pretty much takes us out of any championship contention but we will continue to be on the massive offense to finish out the season in the highest point standing we possibly can, hurt some feelings along the way, and continue pushing forward as this Mopar team does. I really did think our Sparkling Ice Spiked car was in good position to bring home a Wally trophy this weekend but we will continue to shine and shatter expectations."

NHRA Championship Points Standings:

Following the NHRA Thunder Valley Nationals at Bristol Dragway

FUNNY CAR (season wins in parentheses)

1. Ron Capps (Dodge Charger SRT Hellcat) – 2,490 (2)

2. Matt Hagan (Dodge Charger SRT Hellcat) – 2,489 (3/1-TJ Johnson Jr.)

3. J.R. Todd – 2,407 (1)

4. Cruz Pedregon (Dodge Charger SRT Hellcat) – 2,389 (1)

4. John Force – 2,389 (3)

6. Bob Tasca III – 2,343 (2)

7. Robert Hight – 2,337 (2)

8. Alexis DeJoria – 2,319 (1)

9. Tim Wilkerson – 2,249 (1)

10. Blake Alexander – 2,184

TOP FUEL (season wins in parentheses)

1. Steve Torrance – 2,575 (9)

2. Brittany Force – 2,503 (1)

3. Justin Ashley – 2,428 (2)

4. Mike Salinas – 2,425 (1)

5. Billy Torrence – 2,357 (2)

6. Leah Pruett (Mopar Dodge//SRT) – 2,291 (1)

7. Clay Millican – 2,265

8. Antron Brown – 2,252 (1)

9. Shawn Langdon – 2,228

10. Doug Kalitta – 2,180

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.

@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.

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Mopar (a simple contraction of the words MOtor and PARts) offers exceptional service, parts and customer care. Born in 1937 as the name of a line of antifreeze products, the Mopar brand has evolved over more than 80 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, 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.

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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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