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Stewart Advances to Top Fuel Semifinals at NHRA Arizona Nationals, Hagan Takes Dodge//SRT Hellcat Funny Car to Winternationals Runner-up Spot

- Top Fuel “rookie” and NASCAR Hall of Fame driver Tony Stewart advanced to the Top Fuel semifinals Sunday in the Tony Stewart Racing (TSR) Direct Connection Dodge//SRT car
- Competing in his third NHRA national event, the NHRA Arizona Nationals in Chandler, Ariz., Stewart defeated Brittany Force and Billy Torrence to score his first Top Fuel round wins
- In a close semifinals race, Stewart lost to race finalist Justin Ashley with a 3.885, 316.45 to Ashley's 3.844, 323.74 at Firebird Motorsports Park, south of Phoenix
- NHRA Mission World Champion Matt Hagan, completing the rain delayed Winternationals Funny Car final, was runner-up in the TSR Direct Connection Dodge//SRT Hellcat
- Hagan had victories over Buddy Hull, Jeff Diehl and J.R. Todd before rain postponed the final round on March 24 and lost a very close final to John Force Saturday at Firebird
- Hagan, the four-time World Champion just missed out advancing to the quarterfinals in Sunday's Arizona Nationals eliminations in a close race with Daniel Wilkerson
- Stewart and Hagan, who won their respective classes last year at Las Vegas, now compete in the popular Four-Wide Nationals on April 12-14 at the Strip at Las Vegas Motor Speedway
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April 8, 2024, Auburn Hills, Mich. - Hall of Fame racer Tony Stewart has won races in various forms of motorsports including paved ovals, dirt ovals, road courses and drag strips during his famed racing career and the Top Fuel “rookie” added to his winning total Sunday at the NHRA Arizona Nationals when he captured two Top Fuel rounds in the Tony Stewart Racing (TSR) Direct Connection Dodge//SRT car.

Known throughout the racing community as “Smoke,” Stewart had actually lived up to his nickname in qualifying rounds at Firebird Motorsports Park with his Top Fueler losing traction in very tough track conditions, but his TSR Dodge//SRT squad, led by Neal Strausbaugh and Mike Domagala, adjusted the car's settings for Sunday's eliminations and Stewart won two rounds of competition.

The first-round victory over former World Champion Brittany Force was Stewart's initial Top Fuel round win after making an impressive performance last year in the Alcohol Dragster division, which included two NHRA national event wins. Stewart replaced his wife, Leah, as the driver in the TSR Direct Connection Dodge//SRT Top Fuel dragster at the Gatornationals last month.

In the second round at the NHRA Arizona Nationals, Stewart ousted Billy Torrance to advance to the semifinals against Justin Ashley, whom he faced at the Gatornationals. Unfortunately, Stewart lost in a close race to Ashley, 3.844 to 3.885.

“The struggles continued Friday and Saturday which we went through at Gainesville and Pomona,” said Stewart. “There were just difficult track conditions on Friday. Saturday wasn't much better and was still a little frustrating for the team. On raceday Sunday, we had to go up against the number two qualifier (Brittany Force). We pedaled the throttle down to the finish line and got to the next round. Honestly, it's kind of the break this TSR Dodge//SRT Direct Connection team needed. It doesn't sound like a lot just winning one round. But having that opportunity to keep working on this car on a tricky racetrack meant a lot.

“We’ve had three very challenging racetracks this year because of weather, different conditions and different variables. The encouraging thing is we’re going to Vegas next week and we’re all very confident the track is going to be in great shape. I never thought just winning one round would take such a weight off your shoulders. It’s kind of like when we made the first run at Gainesville. I kind of relaxed and settled in. We’ll just keep digging. I’m looking forward to next week in Las Vegas.”

Stewart’s TSR Direct Connection Dodge//SRT teammate, Matt Hagan, competed in two NHRA events this weekend when he drove the team’s Dodge//SRT Hellcat Funny Car to the rain delayed Winternationals runner-up title on Saturday against John Force in a very close Funny Car final.

In Sunday’s eliminations, the four-time NHRA Mission World Champion was seeking to move into the quarterfinals when young Daniel Wilkerson posted a 3.949 run against Hagan’s 4.043.

“It was a tough weekend for us with three qualifying runs and a tricky racetrack,” said Hagan. “Our setup and combination didn’t really work well all weekend. We just got outran out there. I don’t know that we were going to run a 3.94 against Wilkerson, but we definitely weren’t trying to run 4.04. At the end of the day, we learned how to go down a hot racetrack, and we can apply that to some races coming up in the middle of the summer. We had hotter weather conditions than we’re used to here in Phoenix, so unfortunately it was a short day for us. But we will apply what we learned to move forward. I want to put this Dodge//SRT Hellcat back in the winner’s circle soon.”

Stewart and Hagan now move to Las Vegas for the popular NHRA Four-Wide Nationals at the Las Vegas Motor Speedway’s Strip, as both drivers look to return to the Strip’s victory lane after 2023 wins. Stewart won the Alcohol Dragster class and Hagan took top honors in Funny Car. It was Hagan’s fifth triumph (2017, 2019, 2020, 2022 and 2023) at the Strip in his famed drag racing career.

Nitro qualifying rounds at the NHRA Four-Wide Nationals are scheduled on Friday, April 12, at 12 p.m. and 2:30 p.m. PDT with two more qualifying rounds set for Saturday, April 13, at 12 p.m. and 2:30 p.m. PDT. Sunday’s Four-Wide Nationals final eliminations at the Strip get underway at 12 p.m. PDT.

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