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Little Bristol Needs to Embrace Big NHRA Show



By Allen Gregory



The Super Grip NHRA Thunder Valley Nationals at Bristol Dragway represents big business, major league competition and civic pride.

From June 7-9, little Bristol will again be under a national spotlight as the top stars and cars in drag racing work their magic among the green hills of Northeast Tennessee.

While some area business and civic types have yet to grasp the lucrative big picture, fans and competitors know all about the rich history for stock cars, motocross, dirt tracks, kart racing and drag racing across the Mountain Empire.

Consider the comments of National Hot Rod Association Funny Car veteran Ron Capps from Carlsbad,

California.

"When you get off the plane in Bristol, the whole town is all about the race," Capps said. "You go to a restaurant, or a store, everybody knows you're in town."

"The newspaper, the front page of sports is about the race. I feed off that."

Capps knows the secret to success at the legendary Bristol Dragway layout. He holds the track record for Funny Cars victories with six, including two straight victories in the Super Grip Nationals.

Naturally, Capps is eager for another blast in Bristol.

"The Bristol fans are really into it," Capps said. "It's just a fun time, some of the best times I've had."

"It's like a good rock band showing up in a town and

“When you get off the plane in Bristol, the whole town is all about the race,” Capps said. “You go to a restaurant, or a store, everybody knows you’re in town.”

the fans are waiting outside the tour bus. You're going to put on a good show."

The success story of Bristol Motor Speedway has been well documented across the

region and nation, but the tales of Bristol Dragway are just as fascinating.

When the facility opened in 1965, it was cutting edge in all aspects.

Before the 1965 Spring Nationals at Thunder Valley, many drag races were staged on airport runways with bleacher seating.

Thanks to the bold vision of track founders Larry Carrier and Carl Moore, Bristol Dragway was a purpose-built masterpiece with expansive parking, massive concrete grandstands and a wide, smooth racing surface.

Carrier and Moore even constructed a four-story tower for officials, media and guests.

From radical rides to earth-shaking sounds and colorful characters, the first

NHRA national event held in the Southeast soon became a must-see experience.

The names have changed over the years, but the appeal of Thunder Valley is just as intoxicating.

Here's hoping every business owner in the surrounding Bristol area offers some sort of welcome message, banner or salute to NHRA and Bristol Dragway this week.

We're talking about major exposure here. Just imagine the cost of a national television, radio or print campaign showcasing images of the city and region.

Welcome to Bristol, NHRA. Little Bristol is ready for another big show. ♦

NHRA Thunder Valley Nationals Return to Bristol

Justin Ashley (Top Fuel), Ron Capps (Funny Car), Erica Enders (Pro Stock) and Steve Johnson (Pro Stock Motorcycle) claimed titles in 2023 at Bristol Dragway and those drivers will again be under the spotlight for the 23rd annual Super Grip NHRA Thunder Valley Nationals.

Capps claimed his second consecutive Super Grip NHRA Thunder Valley Nationals crown last season when he defeated Alexis DeJoria in the final round.

If he wants to go three in a row, Capps must defeat the likes of early season points leader Austin Prock, Gainesville winner J.R. Todd, reigning series champ Matt Hagan, Bob Tasca and John Force.

With six victories, Capps is the winningest Funny Car driver at Bristol Dragway.

Ashley enjoyed a weekend to remember in Bristol last year.

When the rain-delayed

NHRA New England Nationals had to be contested in Bristol, Ashley not only claimed the Epping title on Saturday, but he also went on to win the Bristol race.

Ashley won two races early this season. His competition includes defending series champion Doug Kalitta, two-time 2024 winner Shawn Langdon, and the Capco duo of Steve and Billy Torrence. Fans can also watch NASCAR legend Tony Stewart make his Bristol Top Fuel debut.

Enders, the reigning Pro Stock world champ, was winless until her Bristol breakthrough last season. The Super Grip NHRA Thunder Valley Nationals title was the turning point in her season, as she went on to win her sixth Pro Stock title.

Boosted by an early-season win in Gainesville, Enders is in the hunt again. The Pro Stock mix also includes early-season points leader and Enders' longtime rival



Justin Ashley celebrates with his team inside the winners circle after capturing the Top Fuel division at Bristol Dragway last season.

Greg Anderson along with Dallas Glenn, veteran driver Jeg Coughlin Jr., Aaron Stanfield and Cristian Cuadra.

Johnson, a veteran within the Pro Stock Motorcycle class, was one of only four race winners in 2023. He claimed his Bristol triumph over Gaige Herrera, who went in the final round.

Herrera, who won 11

events last year, went on to claim the title in dominant fashion. He was just as dominant early this season.

Johnson is only the third motorcycle rider to win at Bristol Dragway, as the class was added to the Super Grip NHRA Thunder Valley Nationals in 2021. Other contenders include six-time champion Matt Smith,

former champ LE Tonglet, John Hall, Hector Arana Jr. and Angie Smith.

The fan-favorite Mission #2Fast2Tasty NHRA Challenge is scheduled for Saturday. Semifinalists from the NHRA New England Nationals, will meet up in Bristol for a specialty race rematch with the winners taking home bonus points and

a bonus purse.

The Super Grip NHRA Thunder Valley Nationals will also feature competition in the NHRA Lucas Oil Drag Racing Series, featuring some of the top racers in the country, as well as the Congruity NHRA Pro Mod Drag Racing Series presented by LearnEV+, Flexjet NHRA Factory Stock Showdown and Johnson's Horse-powered Garage Mountain Motor Pro Stock.

The weekend features an appearance from the Legends Nostalgia Nitro Funny Cars as well.

Fans will be invited to the Nitro Alley Stage all weekend, which features Nitro School, meet and greets, music and more. The festivities feature special pre-race ceremonies that celebrate each of the drivers racing for the Wally on Sunday and includes the fan favorite SealMaster Track Walk.

After final qualifying on Saturday, fans will be treated to an autograph

session and fanfest at the Bristol Dragway welcome tent midway.

As always, fans also get an exclusive pit pass where they can watch teams service their hot rods between rounds and get autographs from their favorite drivers.

Fans can also visit NHRA's popular Nitro Alley and Manufacturers Midway, where sponsors and race vendors have interactive displays, simulated competitions, merchandise and food.

NHRA Mission Foods Drag Racing Series qualifying will feature two rounds at 4 and 6:45 p.m. on Friday, June 7, and the final two rounds of qualifying on Saturday, June 8 at 12:30 and 3:15 p.m.

Eliminations will begin at 12 p.m. on Sunday, June 9.

Television coverage includes qualifying action at 7 p.m. on Friday and

12:30 p.m. on Sunday on FS1, leading into eliminations coverage at 7 p.m. on Sunday. ♦



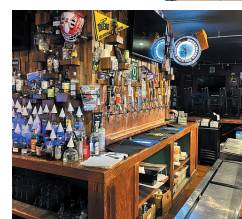
Pro Stock driver Erica Enders celebrates with her team after capturing victory in the Thunder Valley Nationals on Sunday at Bristol Dragway.



Ron Capps captured the Funny Car division in the Thunder Valley Nationals last year at Bristol Dragway.

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NHRA Pro Stock Motorcycle Rider Steve Johnson Eager for the World Title

Feel the Force

John Force Returns to Bristol Dragway



Funny Car John Force and Tim Wilkerson prepare to leave the start line at Bristol Dragway last June.

Motorsports fans of all types have a golden opportunity to witness history from June 7-9 at Bristol Dragway.

That's when the winningest driver in NHRA history makes another stop in Bristol for the Super Grip NHRA Thunder Valley Nationals.

Feel the Force.

Over the past four decades, John Force has delighted crowds with his magnetic personality, courage and uncanny skill.

At age 75, Force has ad-

mitted in recent interviews that his time is running short after 16 NHRA Funny Car world titles.

"I'm just facing the truth in life. I'm trying to hang on," Force said.

That narrative changed on April 7 when Forced powered to his 156th career NHRA victory and first in two years at Arizona's Firebird Motorsports Park in the completion of the postponed Lucas Oil NHRA Winternationals.

"All of sudden you win and

your personality just changes. Things went right, and I got the win, so I'm excited," Force said.

Force has won four times at Bristol Dragway, with the last triumph coming in 2013.

Win or lose, fans come out in droves to support their battle-tested superhero.

With Force on the marquee, there is no need for flashy television commercials or a screaming carnival barker to sell tickets or move merchandise.

From his trademark smoky

burnouts to his animated interviews, this former truck driver and high school quarterback from Yorba Linda, California, is a one-man marketing machine.

While four-time series champion Matt Hagan and young gun Austin Prock have led the Funny Car standings early this season, Force has remained in the mix.

Several times during his remarkable career, Force has been written off and counted out.

The secret power in this story is sheer willpower.

Through gruesome crashes, horrific injuries and financial setbacks, Force has been able to storm back off the canvas and re-invent himself better than any Transformer action figure.

The Force is strong and look for him to work more magic inside Thunder Valley.

Hagan Claims 50th NHRA Victory

DAMIEN SORDELETT
The Roanoke Times

Matt Hagan spent the first four races of the NHRA season getting "back to where we feel comfortable" after what he described were "wholesale changes" with the motor and bellhousing in his Tony Stewart Racing Funny Car.

The Christiansburg native hadn't tasted victory in those events despite reaching a pair of finals.

The fifth time was the charm for the four-time world champion.

Hagan, an Auburn High School graduate, recorded his 50th career victory Sunday when he outdueled three Funny Car drivers in the final of the 14th annual Four-Wide Nationals at zMAX Dragway.

"It honestly is incredible. I never dreamed I'd be out here this long doing this for a living and being successful at it," Hagan said Monday in



a phone interview. "You always kind of start it off as, oh, this is going to be fun and we'll ride the wave as long as it'll last. Man, it's been close to 15 years now that I've been in a Funny Car. To have 50 wins, it's incred-

ible."

He joined John Force, Ron Capps and Robert Hight as the only drivers to reach the 50-win mark exclusively in a Funny Car. Hagan became the 24th driver in NHRA history to reach 50 career

victories and the 16th to do so in pro classes.

Hagan won his fourth Funny Car world championship last year to join Force, Kenny Bernstein and Don Prudhomme as the only drivers to win that many titles.

"To do that in today's age with the rules and just the regulations and the way they are, it's honestly incredible," Hagan said. "It's a huge testament to the team that's around me because they're such driven

individuals.

"I would love to sit here and tell you it's because I'm a great driver, but it's truly been about the guys that I put myself around and how smart they are and how driven and motivated they are and how

“It's been an amazing career. If it ended tomorrow, to have 50 wins is incredible. To be in the ... ranks of Force and Don Prudhomme and Kenny Bernstein, that blows my mind”

hard they work. I've just been kind of been riding their coattails.

"It's been an amazing career. If it ended tomorrow, to have 50 wins is incredible. To be in the ... ranks of Force and Don Prudhomme and Kenny Bernstein, that blows my mind."

The reigning Funny Car world champ beat Force, J.R. Todd and Daniel Wilkerson in the four-car final Sunday, turning in a time of 3.946 seconds at 332.34 mph in his 11,000-horsepower TSR Direct Connection Dodge/SRT Hellcat. Wilkerson was second.

"It puts a special little feather in your cap just

knowing that you got to race the guy and beat one of the greatest that ever lived," Hagan said of beating Force, a 16-time Funny Car world champion.

Force edged Hagan to win the Winternationals. It was Force's record 156th NHRA victory.

"I've been able to battle it out with him for championships," Hagan said of Force. "... I have a lot of respect for him."

Hagan moved up to third in the Funny Car points standings with his first victory of the season. He is 32 points behind leader Austin Prock and 15 points behind Todd.

Hagan had three wins at this point one year ago, but his team made changes in the motor and bellhousing over the offseason. He said Monday that different things — such as weather- and track-related issues — prevented the team from getting the necessary number of test runs to iron out the kinks.

"Sometimes it takes some races to iron that stuff out," he said. "One thing about it, my guys are super smart, so they do a good job of ironing those combos out. We've got some of the best boys working on this thing that I wouldn't trade them for anybody. There's just nobody out there that I think are finer guys to wrench on these cars."

Hagan had speed in the first four races. He reached the quarterfinals at the season-opening Gatornationals, lost to Force in the final at the

Winternationals, advanced to the Round of 16 at the Arizona Nationals, and finished fourth in the final of the Four-Wide Nationals at The Strip at Las Vegas Motor Speedway.

The other winners Sunday were Justin Ashley (Top Fuel), Greg Anderson (Pro Stock), and Gaige Herrera (Pro Stock Motorcycle) ♦



Matt Hagan is surrounded by 53 trophies (49 race wins and four championships) during a December event in Christiansburg celebrating his fourth NHRA Funny Car world championship. Hagan added his 50th career victory Sunday in the Four-Wide Nationals at zMAX Dragway in Concord, North Carolina.

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Antron Brown Looking for a Win at Bristol Dragway

Antron Brown has earned three NHRA Top Fuel world titles and recently pushed his career victory total to 75.

One piece of that resume remains missing.

The former Pro Stock Motorcycle racer has won at least one race at every NHRA facility except Bristol Dragway.

"That's a problem," Brown said. "I've always loved this track and I've always wanted to win here."

Brown was in Bristol recently to promote the 23rd annual Super Grip NHRA Thunder Valley Nationals.

During a wide-ranging chat, Brown shared details of his many adventures on the unpredictable Thunder Valley layout.

"I have never cried in this sport, but I did cry here one year," Brown said.

The culprit was the infamous bump in the track surface located just before the finish line.

"I was beating Larry Dixon in the final round when I looked over at



Bristol Herald Courier file photos

Antron Brown finished second to Justin Ashley in the Top Fuel division in 2023 at Bristol Dragway.

Larry and hit that bump," Brown said. "I ended up hitting the parachute button by mistake and lost the race by two-thousandth of a second. Thank goodness, the track got new asphalt after that."

Brown experienced a highlight on May 19 in the NHRA Route 66 Nationals at Route 66 Raceway in Joliet, Illinois.

In an all-Toyota final round between two past

world champions, Brown delivered a 3.838-second charge at 324.75 in his Matco Tools dragster to finish ahead of Shawn Langdon.

In his post-race interview, Brown was presented with a large banner that signified his 75th victory.

"That made me feel old," Brown said. "It's one of those deals where you don't think about what you're accomplishing

because you are always looking ahead to the next race."

At age 48, Brown is one of the most dynamic and driven drivers in the sport.

Where does he find that spark week after week?

"I tell people all the time that I'm 21 with 27 years of experience," Brown said. "We have a lot of fun doing what we do."

Brown dedicated the

Route 66 triumph to his former team owner and mentor Don Schumacher, who died in December following a cancer battle.

Following the path of Schumacher, Brown formed his own single-car AB Motorsports operation three years ago.

"I had been winning a lot of races for teams and I got tired of seeing all the changes in terms of crew chiefs and crew members," Brown said. "I wanted a more stable foundation, so I took a chance and went out of my own. It's been a lot of hard work, but it's been rewarding."

The victory total for Brown includes 16 victories in Pro Stock Motorcycle.

"I stay humble, and I'm always hungry for the next win," Brown said.

Next stop, Thunder Valley.

"I've qualified number one here numerous times, but I've never won a race," Brown said. "We're gonna try to make that happen this year."



2024 Schedule

March 7-10:	55th annual NHRA Gatornationals, Gainesville Raceway, Gainesville, Fla. The race will also include the Pep Boys NHRA Top Fuel All-Star Callout.
March 21-24:	64th annual Lucas Oil NHRA Winternationals, In-N-Out Burger Pomona Dragstrip, Pomona, Calif.
April 5-7:	39th annual NHRA Arizona Nationals, Phoenix
April 12-14:	24th annual NHRA Four-Wide Nationals, The Strip at Las Vegas Motor Speedway, Las Vegas
April 26-28:	14th annual Circle K NHRA Four-Wide Nationals, zMAX Dragway, Charlotte
May 17-19:	24th annual Gerber Collision & Glass Route 66 NHRA Nationals presented by PEAK Performance, Route 66 Raceway, Chicago
May 31-June 2:	11th annual NHRA New England Nationals, New England Dragway, Epping, N.H.
June 7-9:	23rd annual Super Grip NHRA Thunder Valley Nationals, Bristol Dragway, Bristol, Tenn.
June 21-23:	Virginia NHRA Nationals, Virginia Motorsports Park, North Dinwiddie, Virginia
June 27-30:	18th annual Summit Racing Equipment NHRA Nationals, Summit Motorsports Park, Norwalk, Ohio
July 19-21:	35th annual Flav-R-Pac NHRA Northwest Nationals, Pacific Raceways, Seattle
July 26-28:	36th annual DENSO NHRA Sonoma Nationals, Sonoma Raceway, Sonoma, Calif.
Aug. 15-18:	42nd annual Lucas Oil NHRA Nationals, Brainerd International Raceway, Brainerd, Minn.
Aug. 28-Sept. 2:	70th annual Dodge Power Brokers NHRA U.S. Nationals, Lucas Oil Indianapolis Raceway Park, Indianapolis. The race will also include the Pep Boys NHRA Funny Car All-Star Callout.

NHRA COUNTDOWN TO THE CHAMPIONSHIP

Sept. 12-15:	39th annual Pep Boys NHRA Nationals, Maple Grove Raceway, Reading, Pa.
Sept. 20-22:	16th annual Betway NHRA Carolina Nationals, zMAX Dragway, Charlotte.
Sept. 27-29:	13th annual NHRA Midwest Nationals, World Wide Technology Raceway, St. Louis
Oct. 10-13:	39th annual Texas NHRA Fall Nationals, Texas Motorplex, Dallas
Oct. 31-Nov. 3:	24th annual NHRA Nevada Nationals, The Strip at Las Vegas Motor Speedway, Las Vegas
Nov. 14-17:	59th annual In-N-Out Burger NHRA Finals, In-N-Out Burger Pomona Dragstrip, Pomona, Calif.



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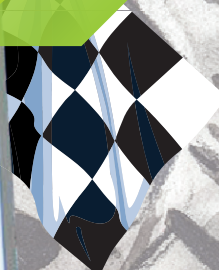
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Driver Changes for 2024

The NHRA Mission Foods Drag Racing Series features a new mix of stars and teams for the 2024 season.

Following is a glance at some of top drivers and their plans:

➤ **Tony Stewart**, Top Fuel: The legendary has made his debut in Top Fuel, as his wife, Leah Pruett, stepped out of the seat and the couple plans to start a family. The former NASCAR and IndyCar world champ was successful in the Top Alcohol Dragster ranks last year and is set for another huge move in 2024.

➤ **Shawn Reed**, Top Fuel: Reed returned to the Top Fuel ranks after several years away. He'll be a full-time driver as the owner/driver of Shawn Reed Racing, but it's not the only big step in his career. Reed

will also have a technical and advancement alliance with three-time world champ Antron Brown, giving Reed a strong path to success next year.

➤ **Ida Zetterstrom**, Top Fuel: The European Top Fuel champ has moved to NHRA as a part of JCM Racing. The Finnish standout plans to run a limited schedule - with the aim to go full-time in 2025 - and she brings a huge amount of fanfare and excitement with the announcement. Zetterstrom is already a popular name in the racing world, bringing plenty of anticipation for her 2024 debut in the NHRA ranks.

➤ **Jacob McNeal**, Top Fuel: McNeal made his Top Fuel debut in 2023, racing four times with Scott Palmer Racing, but he took it a step further this off-season. McNeal

is now a Top Fuel team owner and is set to compete in eight races. He purchased the Top Fuel operation of Buddy Hull and will work with crew chief Mike Guger in a move he called a dream come true.

➤ **Jasmine Salinas**, Top Fuel: A successful driver in the Top Alcohol Dragster ranks, Salinas will follow her father, Mike, in a talent-heavy Top Fuel category, with her sister, Jianna, a standout in Pro Stock Motorcycle.

➤ **Travis Shumake**, Top Fuel: Shumake took a number of big steps in his career last year earning his Top Fuel license, taking delivering of his truck and hauler, and moving into a race shop in Indy.

➤ **Buddy Hull**, Funny Car: After starting his

NHRA career in Top Fuel, Hull has made the switch to Funny Car. The energetic and fan-favorite driver was named the new driver for Jim Dunn Racing, as Hull will race a full season for the first time.

➤ **Jeg Coughlin, Jr.**, Pro Stock: The legendary driver and five-time Pro Stock world champion is back again, has come out of retirement to run a full season in Pro Stock with Elite Motorsports. It's one of several changes for the highly successful team, as Bo Butner will also move from Pro Stock to the Johnson's Horsepower Garage Mountain Motor Pro Stock category.

➤ **Sienna Wildgust**, Pro Stock: A new driver for KB Titan Racing, Wildgust turns 18 in 2024.

➤ **Chris Bostick**, Pro Stock Motorcycle: Bostick has joined crew chief Tim Kulungian and the White Alligator Racing team, a group that also includes 2023 NHRA Rookie of the Year Chase Van Sant.

➤ **Mike Stavrinis**, NHRA Pro Mod: Stavrinis has planned a big step up in his burgeoning career, racing for Mike Janis Racing on the NHRA Pro Mod circuit. It's the biggest opportunity in Stavrinis' career and he joins one of the strongest teams in the loaded NHRA Pro Mod ranks.

➤ **Lyle Burnett**, NHRA Pro Mod: The popular driver, who won the prestigious NHRA U.S. Nationals in 2022, has returned to the NHRA Pro Mod after a year away as part of Scott Tidwell Racing.

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50 Years Ago at Thunder Valley: Funk a record-smashing winner in Top Fuel



Dale Funk in the Kentucky Moonshiner.



Robert Frakes and Dale Funk

It was the weekend of June 14-16, 1974, when then-Bristol International Dragway hosted its tenth annual Spring Nationals. The race was the fourth at Thunder Valley under the International Hot Rod Association banner and it proved to be one of the largest, loudest and most unpredictable events in the track's colorful history.

Post-event media coverage reported that 104,500 people packed into the track that week-

end and -- while that number may be inflated -- the race remains one of the most talked about in Bristol's 59-year history.

In part for the way that Dale Funk captured Top Fuel eliminator.

While the true attendance may forever be unknown, photographs of the event prove the place was packed and crowds were standing room only both Saturday and Sunday. Impressive since it came on the heels of a national en-

ergy crisis where gasoline was both expensive and in short supply.

By comparison, that season's Daytona 500 attendance was reported as 85,000, Charlotte's World 600 reported 84,000 attendees and Bristol's two NASCAR races combined to attract an estimated 38,000 people.

Funk, of Radcliff, Ky., hadn't planned to run the Bristol event, despite winning the season-opening IHRA Southern

“We could have idled through but I looked at Robert (Frakes), shrugged my shoulders and asked ‘What do you want to do?’ Robert said, ‘Run the hell out of it.’ So, we ran low E.T., top speed and new national records on a single run. The crowd loved it.”

Nationals held on pit road of Charlotte Motor Speedway in mid-April. That win came behind the wheel of Richard Holcomb's borrowed car because Funk, car owner Bill English and crew chief Robert Frakes had just taken delivery of a new Stebbins Engineering-built rear engine dragster which didn't yet have an engine.

However, when fellow racer John “Tarzan” Austin made a last minute offer to loan the team

one of his engines, they quickly buttoned up the car – finishing Saturday morning, loaded it into the trailer and hit the road for Bristol – some six hours away.

Arriving on Saturday evening they hurriedly unloaded and headed to the staging lanes with just enough time to make one qualifying pass.

On its maiden voyage down the Bristol quarter-mile, the new machine with its still unpainted, unlettered aluminum body panels ran 6.404 seconds to qualify 13th in the 16-car field, which would become the quickest in Bristol's ten-year history at the time.

Among those who failed to make the cut and 6.43-second bump spot was star driver "T.V." Tommy Ivo.

Atop the field, Clayton Harris was the number one qualifier with a new track record 6.09-second elapsed time followed by "Big Daddy" Don Garlits, who also needed some late Saturday heroics to run 6.22 at 225 mph and squeeze into the second spot.

Race day offered up overcast skies, the threat of rain accompanied by high humidity but a pleasant high temperature of 81 degrees. With an estimated 50,000 looking on, the tricky weather conditions combined to produce a rash of upsets including both Garlits and Harris bowing out in the opening round.

A fresh tuneup saw Funk produce a first round 6.25 that sent

opponent Sam Miller to the trailer. In round two, he used a 6.24 to down Oklahoma TV repairman Marvin "Who" Graham [who would go on to the win the NHRA U.S. Nationals later that year]. Funk's semi-final 6.13 propelled the new machine past the machine of Tim Murphy and crew chief Tim Beebe and into the finals opposite Sarge Arciero, driving the potent "Jade Grenade" dragster.

Arciero's luck ran out when officials made him

wait. "We could have idled through but I looked at Robert [Frakes],

"I have never seen a happier man than Dale Funk," IHRA co-founder and Bristol track owner Larry Carrier said after the winner's circle celebration. "I believe he was more pleased about the 6.04, 238.72 record than he was with winning."

shut the car off on the starting line because his engine developed an oil leak.

"I was supposed to run the 'Jade Grenade' in the final run," Funk recalled in an interview de-

shrugged my shoulders and asked 'What do you want to do?' Robert said, 'Run the hell out of it.' So, we ran low E.T., top speed and new national records on a single run. The crowd loved it."

Funk's final round 6.04 elapsed time allowed him to retake the national record from Don Garlits and his 238.72 mph top-end charge replaced Ivo atop the all-time speed chart.

More than four decades later Funk remembers the massive crowd.

"It was probably my biggest win and my biggest thrill. I've got all the newspaper clippings where they said 104,000 people were there," Funk said. "I think it was the largest crowd they'd ever had at Bristol Dragway. That was back in the beer drinking days and they let the spectators bring beer in, so it was wild."

This coming from a team known as the "Ken-

tucky Moonshiners."

"I have never seen a happier man than Dale Funk," IHRA co-founder and Bristol track owner Larry Carrier said after the winner's circle celebration. "I believe he was more pleased about the 6.04, 238.72 record than he was with winning. The team of English-Frakes-Funk just doesn't believe anyone should hold this record except them."

With his second win of the season in hand, Funk became the odds-on favorite to win IHRA's first Top Fuel national points championship – which he did by season's end – by advancing to the semi-finals of the season's final race, the All-American Nationals at Bristol. ♦





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Top Fuel dragsters and Funny Cars compete in a race distance of 1,000 feet; Pro Stock and Pro Stock Motorcycle compete in a race distance of 1,320 feet.

An NHRA Mission Foods Drag Racing Series event is made up of a series of individual two-vehicle races called eliminations, with competing machines divided into four categories: Top Fuel, Funny Car, Pro Stock, and Pro Stock Motorcycle.

Class eligibility is governed by criteria that limits engine size, type of fuel, vehicle weight, allowable modifications and aerodynamics. The object is to get to the finish line first, which may not necessarily be the vehicle with the quickest time or fastest speed.

Sound confusing? It really isn't. A set of lights, called a Christmas Tree, is used at the starting line. There is a 0.4-second difference between the flash of all the amber

lights and the flash of the green light in the pro start system.

Anytime a driver leaves the lines before the green, the red light illuminates to signal a foul. That offending driver is disqualified. A driver can win despite a slower elapsed time and speed than his or her opponent.

That's because the winning driver had a quicker reaction time to the green light at the starting line, and that advantage was greater than his or her opponent's performance advantage on the track. Remember, the elapsed-time clock in each lane doesn't start until the vehicle moves past the starting line.

The 11,000-horsepower, nitromethane[1]burning Top Fuel dragsters are the quickest-accelerating machines on earth, going from a still position to 100 mph in less than one second. They are powered by supercharged, custom-built, 500-cubic-inch engines mounted behind the driver. Two parachutes, which are activated by a hand control inside the cockpit, are the car's primary braking system.

Funny Cars are short-

wheel-based cars with a carbon fiber replica of a production car body. The engines are identical to those that power Top Fuel machines, with one noticeable difference - they are located in front of the driver.

Body styles allowed in competition are model year 2000 or newer two-door sports cars, coupes, or sedan bodies of a type originally mass-produced by an automobile manufacturer, foreign or domestic.

In the 1,000-foot race distance, Top Fuel dragsters and Funny Cars are capable of elapsed times in the high three-second to low-four-second range, at speeds faster than 330 mph. Top Fuel records entering 2024 are 3.623-seconds and 338.94 mph, both set by Brittany Force. She made the fastest run dur-

ing the 2022 season. In Funny Car, the records are 3.793-seconds and 339.87 mph, both set in 2017 by Robert Hight.

While working to retain a close resemblance to their showroom counterparts, Pro Stock cars feature extensive engine modifications, sophisticated chassis and suspension development and a maximum 500-cubic-inch engine displacement.

Pro Stock cars must be 2005 or newer two-door or four-door coupes or sedans. All cars use electronically controlled fuel injection systems and feature an NHRA-controlled 10,500 Rev

Limiter. Entering the 2024 season, six-time world champ Erica Enders owns both ends of the world record, going 6.450 in 2022 in Gainesville and 215.55 mph in 2014.

The Pro Stock Motorcycle category is reserved for 1998 or newer stock-appearing, carbureted or electronic fuel injected, gasoline-burning machines. Gaige Herrera made the quickest run in class history last year, going 6.627 in Dallas, while Matt Smith's 205.04 in Sonoma in 2021 is the fastest run. ♦



2024 SCHEDULE

06/08 06/15 06/22 06/29 07/06



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HOME

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Super Grip NHRA Thunder Valley Nationals at Bristol Dragway Schedule



Friday, June 7

Parking Lots Open, 8:30 a.m.

Gates Open, 9 a.m.

Sportsman Time Runs and Qualifying, 9:30 a.m.

****Sportsman Classes:** Stock, Super Comp, Super Stock, Super Gas, Top Dragster
Midway Opens, 1 p.m.

Pro Mod Qualifying Session, 1:30 p.m.

Legends Nitro Funny Car Qualifying Session, 2:45 p.m.

Pro Mod Qualifying Session, 3:30 p.m.

Pro Stock Qualifying (Motorcycles & Cars), 4:45 p.m.

Nitro Qualifying Session (Funny Car & Top Fuel), 5:45 p.m.

Legends Nitro Funny Car Qualifying Session, 6:45 p.m.

Pro Stock Qualifying (Motorcycles & Cars), 7 p.m.

Nitro Qualifying Session (Funny Car & Top Fuel), 8 p.m.

Saturday, June 8

Parking Lots Open, 8 a.m.

Gates Open, 8:30 a.m.

Sportsman Eliminations, 8:30 a.m.

****Sportsman Classes:** Stock, Super Comp, Super Stock, Super Gas, Top Dragster
Midway Opens, 10:30 a.m.

Pro Mod Qualifying Session, noon

Pro Stock Car Qualifying Session & #2Fast2Tasty Challenge Semi, 12:30 p.m.

Pro Stock Motorcycle Qualifying Session & #2Fast2Tasty Challenge Semi, 1 p.m.

Top Fuel Qualifying Session & #2Fast2Tasty Challenge Semi, 1:30 p.m.

Funny Car Qualifying Session & #2Fast2Tasty Challenge Semi, 2 p.m.

Legends Nitro Funny Car Qualifying Session, 2:40 p.m.

Pro Stock Car Qualifying Session & #2Fast2Tasty Challenge Final, 3:30 p.m.

Pro Stock Motorcycle Qualifying Session & #2Fast2Tasty Challenge Final, 4 p.m.

Top Fuel Qualifying Session & #2Fast2Tasty Challenge Final, 4:30 p.m.

Funny Car Qualifying Session & #2Fast2Tasty Challenge Final, 5 p.m.

Legends Nitro Funny Car Eliminations - Round 1, 5:30 p.m.

Pro Mod Qualifying Session, 6 p.m.

****To follow Sportsman Eliminations**

Sunday, June 9

Parking Lots Open, 9:30 a.m.

Gates & Midway Open, 10 a.m.

Pre-Race Ceremonies, 11 a.m.

Round 1 of Eliminations, noon

****Top Fuel, Funny Car**

Pro Stock Car, 1 p.m.

****Pro Stock Motorcycle, Pro Mod, Legends Nitro Funny Car, Mountain Motor Pro Stock**
Round 2 of Eliminations, 2:15 p.m.

****Top Fuel, Funny Car**

Pro Stock Car, 2:45 p.m.

****Pro Stock Motorcycles, Pro Mod, Mountain Motor Pro Stock, Sportsman Eliminations**
Round 3 of Eliminations, 3:50 p.m.

****Top Fuel, Funny Car**

Pro Stock Car, 4:05 p.m.

****Pro Stock Motorcycle, Pro Mod, Sportsman Finals**

Legends Nitro Funny Car - Final, 4:30 p.m.

Round 4 of Eliminations (Finals), 5 p.m.

****Pro Mod, Pro Stock Motorcycle, Pro Stock Car**
Funny Car, 5:15 p.m.

****Top Fuel**



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Super Grip New Sponsor for NHRA Thunder Valley Nationals

Officials from Bristol Dragway and the NHRA recently announced a multi-year partnership agreement with Super Grip, a Piney Flats, Tennessee, corporation that is a world-wide leader in creating high quality tires for the industrial tire market.

In the agreement, Super Grip will become the entitlement sponsor for the NHRA Thunder Valley Nationals, one of the most prestigious

events in the NHRA Mission Foods Drag Racing Series.

The Super Grip NHRA Thunder Valley Nationals will showcase 330-mile per hour Top Fuel dragsters and Funny Cars, along with high-revving fuel-injected Pro Stock cars, 200-mph Pro Stock Motorcycles, and vintage and late model Pro Modifieds.

The race weekend also will include a variety of Lucas Oil Series sportsman classes,

Legends Nitro Funny Cars, Mountain Motor Pro Stocks and the Factory Stock Showdown.

"We are thrilled to partner with a progressive company like Super Grip to bring the fans in this area, also Super Grip's hometown, the tradition-rich Super Grip NHRA Thunder Valley Nationals," said Jerry Caldwell, president and general manager of Bristol Motor Speedway and Bristol Dragway. "The

Super Grip NHRA Thunder Valley Nationals promises to deliver our guests a sensory experience like no other."

It is the first sponsorship involvement for Bristol Motor Speedway and Super Grip, whose headquarter offices are located less than 10 miles apart.

"The legendary Bristol Dragway creates lasting memories literally every few seconds for their guests, so our business philosophies

mesh together very well and that makes this partnership a perfect fit," said Scott Whitney, CEO and president of Super Grip Corporation.

"We look forward to helping produce an amazing, memorable experience for fans, racers, our employees and everyone in the drag racing industry during the Super Grip NHRA Thunder Valley Nationals." ♦

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Bristol Dragway Busy in 2024



2024 Bristol Dragway Schedule

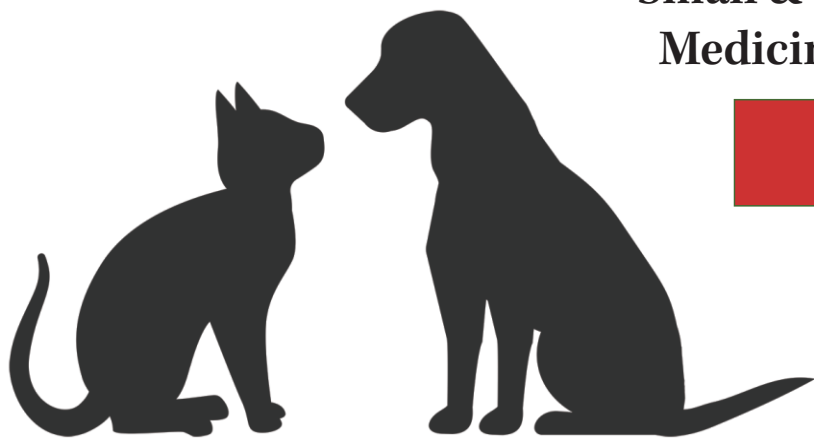
March 23	Thunder Valley Street Fights
April 13	Thunder Valley Street Fights
April 19	21-DER Series
April 27	Thunder Valley Street Fights
May 3-5	Bowtie Nationals
May 11	Thunder Valley Street Fights
May 17-19	DER Series
May 24-26	DER Series
June 7-9	NHRA Thunder Valley Nationals (NHRA Mission Foods Drag Racing Series)
June 15	Thunder Valley Street Fights
June 21	23-DER Series
July 4-7	BTE World Footbrake Challenge
July 12-14	Junior Drag Week: Jr. Dragster Nationals presented by Mike Bos Chassis Craft
July 15-20	Junior Drag Week: NHRA Jr. Eastern Conference Finals
July 26-28	DER Series
Aug. 3	Thunder Valley Street Fights
Aug. 16-18	American Motorcycle Racing Association Thunder Valley Nitro Nationals & Rally
Aug. 22-24	Professional Drag Racers Association Series Thunder Valley Throwdown
Aug. 29-Sept. 1	BTE Labor Day Footbrake Challenge
Sept. 3-7	JEG's Summer Fling presented by Optima Batteries
Sept. 24-28	Rad Torque Fall Fling presented by Optima Batteries



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Returning to Bristol

The BTE World Footbrake Challenge XVIII returns to Bristol Dragway on July 3-7 with the biggest event yet.

The best footbrake racers in the country will slug it out for big checks in this unparalleled bracket race.

Featuring a Triple 20's format, the WFC will hand out \$20,000 to win each of

Friday, Saturday, and Sunday of the event.

In footbrake competition, drivers are not allowed to use electronic equipment to help them achieve a perfect start. For a complete list of rules, please visit www.worldfootbrakechallenge.com/.



Todd McKinney - 2023 World Footbrake Challenge World Champion

Mike Bos Chassis Craft Junior Dragster Nationals



Drag racing's next generation of stars thunder into Bristol Dragway July 12-14 for the Mike Bos Chassis Craft <<http://www.mikeboschassiscraft.com/>>

Jr. Dragster Nationals, followed by the Mike Bos Fun Races on July 16-17.

Leading into Eastern Conference Finals action, the Nationals have become

one of the greatest junior dragster events in the country and provides competitors the opportunity to tune their cars prior to eliminations.

Drivers ranging in age

from six to 17 will participate in several events throughout the weekend including Saturday's index class racing and Sunday's bracket racing. Index races take place in 7.90, 8.90, 11.90 and 13.90 classes (13.90 class is reserved for 6-7-year-old racers).

Competitors participating in bracket races will be divided into one of four age

groups - 6-9, 10-12, 13-14 and 15-17.

Mike Bos Chassis Craft Fun Races are also slated to take place on Tuesday, July 16 and Wednesday, July 17 with the 13-17 age group racing Tuesday and ages 6-12 scheduled the second day.

For more information call 423-BRISTOL. ♦



Motorcycle Racing Comes to Bristol

For the first time on Aug. 16-18, Bristol Dragway will welcome the powerful American V-Twin Motorcycles of the American Motorcycle Racing Association.

The event will feature an assortment of featured classes, including Top Fuel, Nitro Funny Bike, Pro Fuel, Pro Gas, Pro Mod, Modified, Outlaw Street and more.



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Torque Systems Fall Fling Bracket Racing



The 15th annual RAD Torque Systems Fall Fling 500K invades Thunder Valley on Sept. 24-28 with the best big money bracket racers in the country competing for some of the biggest payouts in the sport. The Fall Fling will feature

three auxiliary races, with Thursday and Saturday paying \$30,000 to win. Wednesday will welcome racers with a \$15,000 warm-up race, and the weekend will be headlined by Friday's main event, in which the winner will take home \$500,000. ♦



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Bristol Dragway Stats

BRISTOL DRAGWAY

Track physical address: 151 Speedway Blvd., Bristol, TN 37620

Track opened: 1965

Track surface: concrete/asphalt Concrete launchpad: 700 feet

Track direction: southwest to northeast Elevation: 1,475 feet

above sea level **Radio frequency:** 100.9 FM

DIRECTIONS

The most direct route to Thunder Valley from Interstate 81 north is on Hwy. 11E. Take Virginia Exit 3 and Hwy. 11E will take you directly to Thunder Valley. From Interstate 81 south, take Tennessee Exit 69 and turn south on Hwy. 394. Hwy. 394 will take you to the Bristol Dragway entrance. Turn on Hwy. 11E north to access the north entrance and south entrance to Bristol Motor Speedway.

TRACK HISTORY

Bristol Dragway opened in 1965 under NHRA sanction. NHRA left Bristol in 1967. In 1996, Bruton Smith bought Bristol Dragway and closed the facility after the 1997 season to begin work on the current \$18 million facility.

The facility reopened for the 1999 season and hosted the inaugural NHRA All-Star event that year and again in 2000.

In 2001, Bristol Dragway hosted the NHRA Thunder Valley Nationals, the first NHRA national event held at Bristol Dragway since 1967.

After hosting its annual NHRA event during the early spring months of April and May for several years, the 2010 edition of the NHRA Thunder Valley Nationals moved to Father's Day weekend. The new date proved very popular with race fans and prompted NHRA officials to keep the race on the same mid-June date.

While many drag strips have come and gone, Bristol Dragway has stood the test of time. With its unique surroundings and colorful history, it is one of the ultimate destinations in the world of drag racing.

2023 NHRA THUNDER VALLEY NATIONALS

TOP FUEL

WINNER - Justin Ashley 3.718, 336.49 **RUNNER UP** - Antron Brown 6.148, 109.79 **NO. 1 QUALIFIER** - Leah Pruett 3.745, 322.42 **LOW E.T.** - Steve Torrence 3.691 **TOP SPEED** - Ashley 336.49

FUNNY CAR

WINNER - Ron Capps 3.998, 325.45 **RUNNER UP** - Alexis DeJoria 3.999, 326.48 **NO. 1 QUALIFIER** - Robert Hight 3.938, 321.35 **LOW E.T.** - Hight 3.913 **TOP SPEED** - Matt Hagan 330.23

PRO STOCK

WINNER - Erica Enders 6.680, 204.08 **RUNNER UP** - Deric Kramer 6.727, 197.05 **NO. 1 QUALIFIER** - Enders 6.627, 205.88 **LOW E.T.** -

Enders 6.627 **TOP SPEED** - Enders 206.95

PRO STOCK MOTORCYCLE

WINNER - Steve Johnson 7.174, 158.63 **RUNNER UP** - Gaige Herrera **FOUL NO. 1 QUALIFIER** - Herrera 6.808, 198.61 **LOW E.T.** - Herrera 6.805 **TOP SPEED** - Hector Arana Jr 199.02

TRACK RECORDS

TOP FUEL

3.667 seconds by Steve Torrence, Oct. '21; 336.49 mph by Justin Ashley, June '23.

FUNNY CAR

3.884 seconds by Ron Capps, June '16; 330.31 mph by Matt Hagan, Oct. '21.

PRO STOCK

6.621 seconds by Shane Gray, June '14; 209.26 mph by Bo Butner, June '16.

PRO STOCK MOTORCYCLE

6.760 seconds by Karen Stoffer, Oct. '21; 199.29 mph by Eddie Krawiec, Oct. '21.

PAST WINNERS

TOP FUEL

Driver No. of wins Years

Tony Schumacher 6 2018, 2012, 2010, 2009, 2008, 2004; Doug Kalitta 3 2006, 2005, 2001; Justin Ashley 2 2023, 2022; Brandon Bernstein 2 2007, 2003; Larry Dixon 2 2011, 2002; Shawn Langdon 2 2016, 2014; Mike Salinas 2 2021, 2019; Richie Crampton 1 2015; Clay Millican 1 2017; Steve Torrence 1 2013

FUNNY CAR

Ron Capps 6 2023, 2022, 2018, 2017, 2012, 2006; John Force 4 2013, 2010, 2007, 2004; Tommy Johnson Jr. 2 2016, 2014; Del Worsham 2 2009, 2003; Whit Bazemore 1 2002; Alexis DeJoria 1 2021; Matt Hagan 1 2015; Robert Hight 1 2011; Gary Scelzi 1 2005; Bob Tasca III 1 2019; Melanie Troxel 1 2008

PRO STOCK

Mike Edwards 4 2012, 2011, 2010, 2009; Erica Enders 3 2023, 2015, 2014; Greg Anderson 2 2004, 2001; Jeg Coughlin 2 2018, 2007; Warren Johnson 2 2005, 2002; Jason Line 2 2016, 2006; Rodger Brogdon 1 2013; Dave Connolly 1 2008; Kurt Johnson 1 2003; Alex Laughlin 1 2017; Aaron Stanfield 1 2022

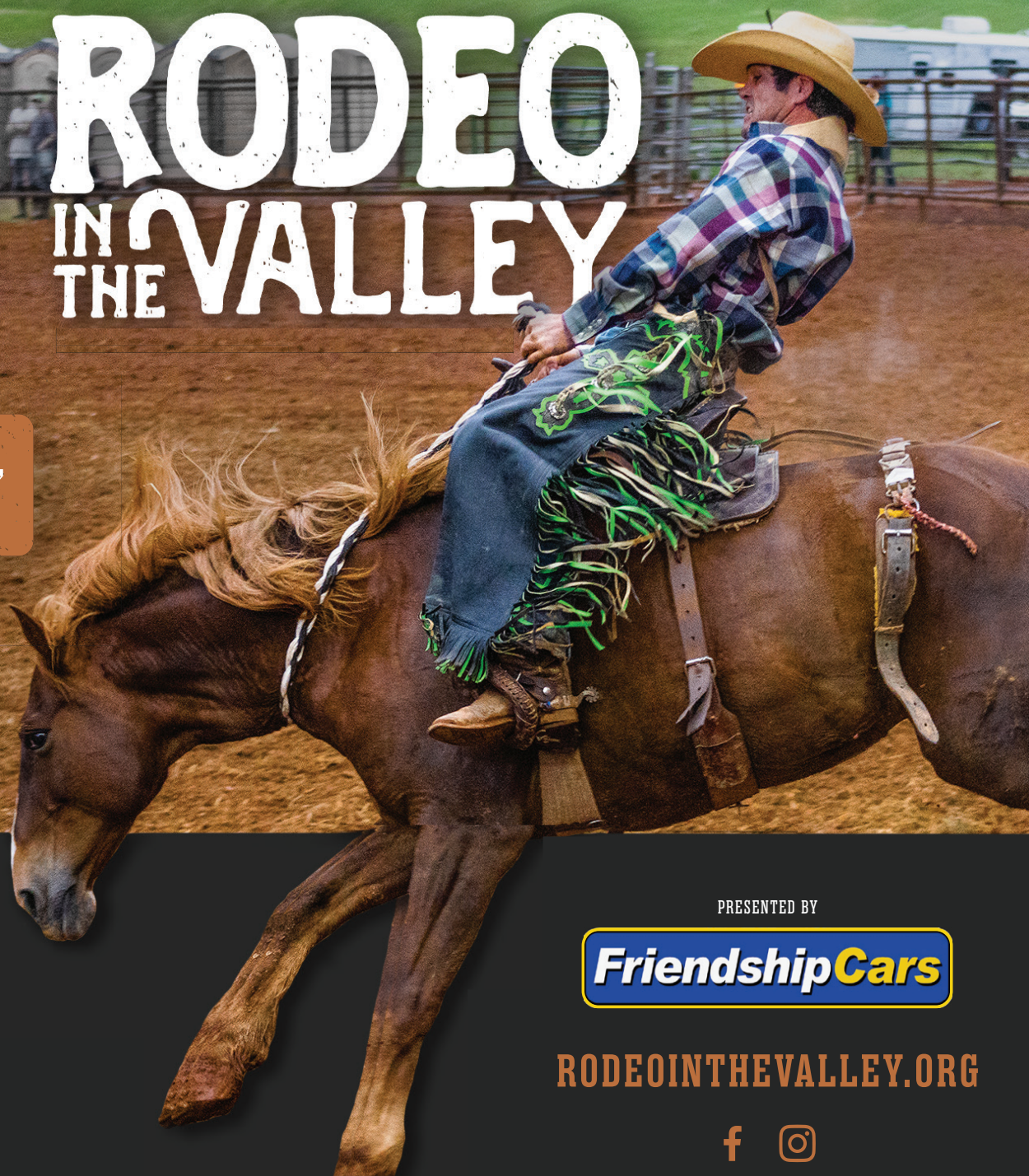
PRO STOCK MOTORCYCLE

Steve Johnson 1 2023; Angelle Sampey 1 2021; Jerry Savoie 1 2022



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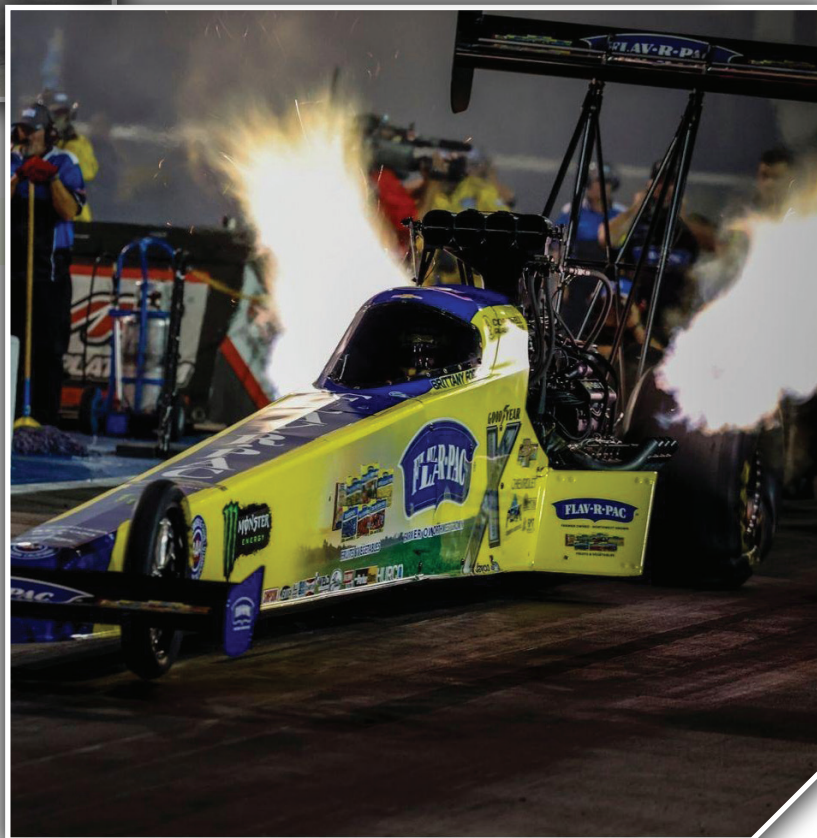
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