

NHRA SONOMA NATIONALS



CELEBRATE 50 YEARS OF DRAG RACING IN SONOMA





BE HERE FOR A LEGENDARY WEEKEND

JULY 26-28 SONOMA RACEWAY



2019 RACING SEASON

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NHRA Sonoma Nationals Thunder Back to Wine Country

he NHRA California Nationals first roared into Sonoma in 1988, and the hills of wine country have been shaking with nitro ever since. The inaugural race was won by Joe Amato (Top Fuel), Mark Oswald (Funny Car) and Harry Scribner (Pro Stock), but the history-making action was just getting started.

In the 32 years since NHRA's first national event in Sonoma, drag racing

fans have witnessed 339+-mph national record passes, John Force charge to eight Funny Car wins — the most of any driver in Sonoma, the quickest Pro Stock Motorcycle field in NHRA history and so much more.

History will continue to be made as the NHRA Sonoma Nationals return to Sonoma Raceway, July 26-28, featuring 11,000 horsepower Top Fuel dragsters and Funny Cars. The likes of Force, JR Todd, Ron Capps, Antron Brown and Robert Hight will look to have their names etched in the Sonoma record books alongside the likes of Don Prudhomme, Ed "The Ace" McCulloch and Warren Johnson.

The weekend will also feature racing in the Pro Stock and Pro Stock Motorcycle divisions along with several divisional classes.

Fans are invited to celebrate Sonoma Raceway's 50th anniversary at the NHRA Sonoma Nationals with legends of the sport and a walk down memory lane at the Nostalgia Get-Together. Reserved seats for the NHRA Sonoma Nationals sell out fast, so get your tickets today! The weekend will feature two rounds of qualifying on Friday and Saturday, with final eliminations firing up on Sunday morning. You've got to feel it to believe it!





Photos by Mike Finnegan





Photos by Oz Lang

What: NHRA Sonoma Nationals Where: Sonoma Raceway

When: July 26-28

Tickets and Info: SonomaRaceway.com or

800-870-7223

Schedule: Two rounds of qualifying at 4 p.m. and 7 p.m. on Friday, July 26, and the final two rounds of qualifying on Saturday, July 27, at 1:20 and 4:20 p.m. Final eliminations are slated to begin at 11 a.m. on Sunday.



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NHRA SONOMA NATIONALS

EVENT SCHEDULE JULY 26-28, 2019







Friday, July 26	
Sportsman Qualifying	9:30 A.M.
Spectator Gates Open	
Vendor Midway Open	
Mello Yello Guided Walking Tour (Mello Yello Display)	
Pro Stock Motorcycle (PSM) School (Mickey Thompson display)	
PSM Autograph Session (Mickey Thompson display)	
Pro Stock Qualifying Session (PSM-PSC)	3:15 P.M.
Nitro Qualifying Session (FC-TF)	
Sportsman Qualifying	
Pro Stock Qualifying Session (PSM-PSC)	
Nitro Qualifying Session (FC-TF)	
Nitro Qualifying Session (i O-11)	/ F.W.
Saturday, July 27	
Spectator Gates Open	8 A.M.
Sportsman Eliminations	8:15 A.M.
Vendor Midway Open	
Mello Yello Guided Walking Tour	10:30 A.M.
Nitro School	11:15 A.M.
Mello Yello Autograph Session	Noon
Mickey Thompson Pro Bike Battle Rider Intro	12:45 P.M.
Mickey Thompson Pro Bike Battle - Round 1	1:15 P.M.
Pro Stock Qualifying Session (PSM-PSC)	
Nitro Qualifying Session (TF-FC)	
Sportsman Eliminations	
Mickey Thompson Pro Bike Battle - Round 2	
Pro Stock Qualifying Session (PSM-PSC)	
Nitro Qualifying Session (TF)	
Mickey Thompson Pro Bike Battle – Final	
Nitro Qualifying Session (FC)	
Ourseless July 00	
Sunday, July 28 Spectator Gates Open	8 A M
Vendor Midway Open	
Mello Yello Guided Walking Tour	
NHRA Today, SealMaster® Track Walk, Pre-Race Ceremonies.	
Nitro Eliminations – Round 1	
Pro Stock Eliminations – Round 1	
Sportsman Eliminations	
Nitro Eliminations – Round 2	
Pro Stock Eliminations – Round 2	
Sportsman Eliminations – Semi-Finals	
Nitro Eliminations – Semi-Finals	
Pro Stock Eliminations – Semi-Finals	
Sportsman Eliminations – Finals	
Sportsman Parade of Champions	
Pro Stock Eliminations - Finals	
Nitro Eliminations - Finals	3:40 P.M.

Ticket Information

TICKETS

Ticket prices:	FKI	SAT	SUN	3-DAY
Advance	\$55-60	\$55-60	\$60-65	\$135-145
Kids (12 & Under)	\$25	\$25	\$25	\$75
General Parking*	FREE	FREE	FREE	FREE
Preferred parking	\$15	\$15	\$15	

PACKAGES

Blast on the Grass Car Show

Register your classic car today and receive reserved lawn parking on the Piccinini Plaza, a reserved seat ticket, show pass plus a commemorative Blast on the Grass dash plaque. Show space is limited.

Single-day: \$80-\$90: Weekend pass:

Single-day: \$80-\$90; Weekend pass: \$195-\$205

95-\$205
*Prices include admission tickets

Nitro Club

Catered meals and snacks with unlimited soda and water, two beer/wine tickets per day in an air-conditioned suite, plus VIP parking. Your suite is located just steps away from the starting line!

Friday: \$360; Saturday: \$320; Sunday: \$360; 3-Day: \$825

Camping

Five days and four nights of nitropowered fun. Our campgrounds sell out in advance, so call today. Camping spaces start at \$449.20 and include a minimum of two weekend passes.

Family RV

Want to rent an RV for the weekend?

Special camping spots throughout the raceway have been reserved for Family RV customers.

Simply call the raceway to select from a variety of RV and trailer camping packages ensure a seamless camping experience.

UPGRADES*

Team DSR Hospitality

This is your opportunity to go behind the scenes for a hospitality



experience with Don Schumacher Racing hospitality!

Package includes: Access to DSR hauler hospitality, team-chef-prepared meal and snacks, appearances and autograph session with Team DSR drivers

session with Team DSR drivers Friday, July 26: \$90 per person

Thunder Alley

Located directly in front of the main grandstand and gives you all day trackside access getting you up close to the NHRA action!

Friday or Saturday \$10; Sunday \$20 (Includes Sunday Starting Line Party access)

Starting Line Party

Be part of the Starting Line Party and walk the drag strip! Includes Thunder Alley access, pre-race Q&A



**Schedule subject to change without notice.

Photo by Nate Jacobson

and Sunday Morning Track Walk on the drag strip.

Sunday only: \$20!

Preferred Parking

Single-day reserved parking is located in Lot 1 (\$15 each day) or Lot 3 (\$40 each day).

*Upgrades do not include gate admission

BEST DEAL

O'Reilly Auto Parts Flex Pass

Head to your nearest O'Reilly Auto Parts to purchase a \$49 Flex Pass, good for admission on Friday, Saturday or Sunday at the NHRA Sonoma Nationals (reserved seating subject to availability).

13th annual Eric Medlen Nitro Night Charity Dinner to Honor Jack Beckman, July 25



onoma Raceway and the Sonoma chapter of Speedway Children's Charities (SCC) will continue to honor the spirit of the late Eric Medlen at the 13th annual Eric Medlen Nitro Night Charity Dinner on Thursday, July 25.

This memorable evening has kicked off the NHRA Sonoma Nationals drag racing weekend and honored Medlen's memory since 2007.

Beginning in 2018, the annual event has honored someone within the drag racing community who embodies Medlen's spirit and has shown support of charitable efforts. Last year's inaugural recipient of the SCC Eric

Medlen Award was 2016 NHRA Funny Car Champion Ron Capps.

The 2019 recipient of the Eric Medlen Award is 2012 NHRA Funny Car Champion Jack Beckman. Beckman is a long-time supporter of the Sonoma Chapter of SCC, including attending almost every NHRA Tour de Charity karting event and Eric Medlen Nitro Night; Beckman even emceed Nitro Night for the past several years. Beckman's charitable efforts also extend to his car's sponsor, Infinite Hero, which supports military members and their families.

Medlen, a native of Oakdale in the San Joaquin Valley, won the Funny Car championship for John Force Racing at his home track in Sonoma in 2006. In 2007, he succumbed to injuries sustained from a testing accident. He is fondly remembered by friends and family

for his joyous spirit and outgoing personality, as well as his love for fun and supporting

children.

In honor of his recognition, Beckman will turn over hosting duties to long-time NHRA announcer Bob Frey, who hosted the first several years of the event. Frey will return to Sonoma Raceway as part of the track's 50th anniversary celebration, including hosting Nitro Night. In addition to Frey, other NHRA drivers are also expected to attend, including Capps, Pro Stock Motorcycle rider Scott Pollacheck and three-time Sonoma champion, J.R. Todd.

The evening at nearby Viansa Sonoma will feature a reception, sponsored by McDonald's and Costa Organization, delicious wine country dinner, a charity drawing and special tributes to Medlen



Photo by Mike Finnegan

and Beckman. The scenic winery offers unparalleled views of the Sonoma Valley, and the raceway will offer a free shuttle between the raceway and Viansa Sonoma.

Tickets for the evening are \$150 per person or \$1,500 per table and include wine/beer and dinner. All proceeds benefit qualified youth groups in Sonoma County in Medlen's name through SCC.

Nitro Night also serves as a kick-off to the NHRA Sonoma Nationals at Sonoma Raceway. For more information or to purchase tickets to the Eric Medlen Nitro Night Dinner, visit SonomaRaceway.com or contact Cheri Plattner at 707-933-3950, cplattner@sonomaraceway.com.

WEEKEND HIGHLIGHTS

13TH ANNUAL ERIC MEDLEN **NITRO NIGHT**

Race fans are invited to the 13th annual Eric Medlen Nitro Night Charity Dinner on Thursday, July 25. This memorable evening kicks off race weekend and honors the memory of the late Eric Medlen. This year's recipient of the Eric Medlen Spirit Award is 2012 NHRA Funny Car Champion "Fast Jack" Beckman. Tickets are \$150 each, contact Cheri at (707) 933-3950.

10TH ANNUAL NOSTALGIA GET TOGETHER

Step back in time with an incredible collection of vintage dragsters, hot rods and more at the Nostalgia Get Together in the main paddock garages.

9TH ANNUAL BLAST ON THE GRASS

Show off your hot rod, muscle car, rat rod or exotic in front of admiring crowds or just enjoy a great car show on the Piccinini Plaza lawn behind the staging lines.

RED BUCKET BRIGADE, **SPONSORED BY FIRST** REPUBLIC BANK

Watch for our 'Red Bucket Brigade' on Friday night during the second round of qualifying. Speedway Children's Charities (SCC) volunteers wearing 'Red Bucket Brigade' shirts will pass buckets through the Main Grandstand for fans to make donations to help children in need. Look for our volunteers and donate it's for the kids!

FRIDAY NIGHT PRIME TIME QUALIFYING

Don't miss Primetime Nitro qualifying starting at 7 p.m. on Friday night! Fans will enjoy a spectacular nitro session under the lights, including the pulse-pounding, nitro-fueled flames, plus pyrotechnics, a live DJ, driver introductions and a nostalgia Cacklefest. You've got to feel it to believe it!

NOSTALGIA CACKLEFEST

For the fifth consecutive year, a collection of nostalgia dragsters will



Blast on the Grass Car Show. Photo by Joe Jacobson



NHRA driver autograph session. Photo by Oz Lang



Friday night Cacklefest in front of the main grandstand. Photo by Oz Lang

light up the sky on Friday evening, as they fire up their engines in front of the main grandstand for a can't-miss demonstration.

TRACK TALK

The stars of NHRA answer your questions in Sunoco Victory Lane! Check the posted board for times and drivers.

STARTING LINE PARTY

Enjoy the ultimate on-track access during pre-race ceremonies on Sunday morning by taking part in the Starting

Line Party and SealMaster Track Walk. Plus attend a special pre-race driver Q&A and walk the track with some of your favorite racers and NHRA legends.

13TH ANNUAL ERIC MEDLEN ICE CREAM SOCIAL

Join us as we honor late Funny Car driver Eric Medlen after final eliminations on Sunday. Fans are invited onto the road course for a free scoop of ice cream and to make a suggested donation to Speedway Children's Charities.

TOP THE COPS™

Watch high school students drag race against local law enforcement officers, who compete in full uniform in their official vehicles, during the Top the Cops demonstration. The Top the Cops program gives teens the rare chance to drag race area law enforcement officers on the Sonoma Raceway drag strip as part of the raceway's weekly Wednesday Night Drags.

*Schedule subject to change

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Julie Becker









NHRA Historical Highlights



arch 8-9, 1969: The San Francisco National Open marks the first NHRA-sanctioned drag race in Sonoma.

July 31, 1988: Joe Amato (Top Fuel), Mark Oswald (Funny Car) and Harry Scribner (Pro Stock) win the first NHRA Nationals event at then-Sears Point Raceway.

July 29, 1990: John Force posts his first of eight Funny Car wins in Sonoma (the most of any NHRA racer). He goes on to win in 1990-92, 1994, 2000, 2002, 2007, 2016.

Aug. 2, 1992: Don Prudhomme becomes the first driver to win in two different professional classes in Sonoma -Funny Car (1989) and Top Fuel (1992).

1996: The track is purchased by O. Bruton Smith and Speedway Motorsports,

Aug. 7, 1999: Warren Johnson runs the first 200-mph plus for Pro Stock in Sears Point history, covering the course at 200.77 mph.

Aug. 5, 2001: Phase two of the raceway's modernization officially kicks off at the conclusion of the NHRA FRAM Autolite Nationals when drag racers John Force and Gary Scelzi ripped up portions of the drag strip while piloting Caterpillar bulldozers.

March 27, 2002: NHRA stars Gary Scelzi and Kenny Bernstein take the ceremonial first pass down the completely refurbished quarter-mile drag strip, which features a 660-foot concrete launch pad and has been separated from the road course. The strip was moved 200 feet to the north so that it is directly in front of a new permanent grandstand.



1970 NHRA Nationals. Photo by Alfred Arn

2002: The Pro Stock Motorcycle

2004: Angelle Sampey becomes

the first female NHRA Nationals win-

ner in Sonoma capturing her first Pro

July 31, 2005: Legendary racer

Warren Johnson becomes the first drag

racer to be inducted into the raceway's

July 31, 2005: Doug Kalitta posts his

July 2, 2008: NHRA announces that

race to 1,000 feet instead of the traditional

the Top Fuel and Funny Car classes will

Stock Bike win at Infineon Raceway and

resetting the elapsed-time record (7.048

event in Sonoma.

Wall of Fame.

fifth Sonoma Top Fuel win.

1,320 feet or one-quarter mile.

category is added to the NHRA Nationals



Gotelli Speed Shop dragster at Sonoma 1969. Photo by Cliff Mills

July 26, 2009: Antron Brown sweeps western swing with Sonoma win in Top Fuel

July 18, 2010: Ron Capps snaps a 13year winless drought (1997) in Sonoma with his win in Funny Car. He went on to win in the category again in 2011.

July 27, 2014: Courtney Force becomes the winningest female driver in Funny Car history after defeating her father, John Force, in the final round in Sonoma. Courtney topped the record previously held by her sister,

Aug. 2, 2015: All four No. 1 qualifiers went on to win their respective categories for the first time in NHRA history.

Aug. 2, 2015: Top Fueler Antron Brown joined Funny Car driver Ron Capps as a four-time Sonoma winner.





Drag racing at Sears Point Raceway in 1971. Photo by Cliff Mills

Five-time Sonoma winners include Dough Kalitta (Top Fuel) and Greg Anderson (Pro Stock).

July 31, 2016: John Force adds to his record for most NHRA career victories in Sonoma, with eight in the Funny Car class (1990-92, 1994, 2000, 2002, 2007, 2016).

July 29, 2017: Robert Hight sets the NHRA national Funny Car speed record at

July 30, 2017: J.R. Todd secured his first career Funny Car victory making him the first African-American to win in the NHRA Funny Car category and also the second driver in NHRA history to win at Sonoma Raceway in both nitro categories (Top Fuel, 2006 and 2016); the first was Don Prudhomme (Funny Car, 1989 and Top Fuel, 1992).







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NHRA Sonoma Nationals Pit Notes

The following are some points of interest regarding previous NHRA drag racing events in Sonoma:

• Two track records were set in 2018: Top Fuel driver Clay Millican's speed of 332.75 mph and Hector Arana Jr.'s record speed of 200.35 mph in Pro Stock Motorcycle.

• Robert Hight set the NHRA Funny Car National speed record at 339.87 mph at Sonoma Raceway in 2017.

• Doug Kalitta, John Force and LE Tonglet are tied for the most consecutive wins at Sonoma in their respective classes with three; Kalitta (Top Fuel, 1998-2000); Force (Funny Car, 1990-'92); Tonglet (Pro Stock Motorcycle, 2016-'18).

• John Force holds the record for most NHRA career victories in Sonoma, with eight in the Funny Car class (1990-92, 1994, 2000, 2002, 2007, 2016).

• With his 2015 Top Fuel victory, Antron Brown joined Funny Car driver Ron Capps as a four-time Sonoma winner. Five-time Sonoma winners include Dough Kalitta (Top Fuel) and Greg Anderson (Pro Stock).

• Eddie Krawiec and LE Tonglet are the only three-time Pro Stock Motorcycle winners in Sonoma – Tonglet (2011, '16, '17); Krawiec (2012, '14, '15).

• Top Fuel Dragsters accelerate from 0-100 mph in 0.8 of a second and travel more than the length of three football fields in less than four seconds.

• From a standing start, NHRA Top Fuel dragsters accelerate quicker than a jumbo jet, a fighter jet and a Formula One race car.

• A Top Fuel dragster leaves the starting line with a force nearly five times that of gravity, the same force of the space shuttle when it leaves the launch pad at Cape Canaveral.



Hector Arana Jr. broke the Pro Stock Motorcycle track record last year with a 200.35 mph run. Photo by Randy Jones

Past NHRA Winners in Sonoma: 1988-2018

Top Fuel

2018: Blake Alexander

2017: Steve Torrence

2016: J.R. Todd

2015: Antron Brown 2014: Kahlid alBalooshi

2013: Shawn Langdon

2012: Antron Brown

2011: Antron Brown

2010: Larry Dixon

2009: Antron Brown

2008: Tony Schumacher

2007: Tony Schumacher

2006: J.R. Todd

2005: Doug Kalitta

2004: Doug Kalitta

2003: Larry Dixon 2002: Doug Herbert

2001: Kenny Bernstein

2000: Doug Kalitta

1999: Doug Kalitta

1998: Doug Kalitta

1997: Cory McClenathan

1996: Blaine Johnson

1995: Mike Dunn

1994: Scott Kalitta 1993: Eddie Hill

1992: Don Prudhomme

1991: Joe Amato

1990: Gary Ormsby

1989: Frank Bradley

1988: Joe Amato



Funny Car

2018: Robert Hight

2017: J.R. Todd

2016: John Force

2015: Jack Beckman 2014: Courtney Force

2013: Ron Capps

2012: Johnny Gray

2011: Ron Capps

2010: Ron Capps 2009: Tim Wilkerson 2008: Robert Hight

2007: John Force

2006: Eric Medlen 2005: Gary Scelzi

2004: Tim Wilkerson

2003: Gary Scelzi

2002: John Force

2001: Del Worsham 2000: John Force

1999: Whit Bazemore 1998: Cruz Pedregon

1997: Ron Capps

1996: Cruz Pedregon

1995: Al Hofmann

1994: John Force

1993: Tom Hoover 1992: John Force

1991: John Force

1990: John Force

1989: Don Prudhomme

1988: Mark Oswald



John Force boasts eight Funny Car wins in Sonoma, the most of any driver. Photo by Oz Lang

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SONOMA

NHRA Division 7 Drag Races, presented by Korbel

July 17-21



he NHRA Division 7 Drag
Races, presented by Korbel,
sets the stage for back-to-back
weekends of drag racing in Sonoma,
July 17-21. The NHRA Lucas Oil Drag
Racing Series returns to Sonoma for
its first-ever double-header event,
featuring both a regional and divisional event for sportsman racers in

More than 500 drag racers will compete at two separate events; the first will span Thursday-Friday, with the

second event on Saturday and Sunday. In addition, Top Alcohol Dragster and Funny Car classes will return to Sonoma for the first time in over a decade.

The NHRA's Pacific Division will feature drag racing in eleven categories and will run in conjunction with the Pacific Division Top Sportsman Series, Top Dragster Series and Sportsman Motorcycle Series.

TICKET INFO

Wednesday - \$10 Thursday - \$10 Friday - \$10 (qualifying) Saturday - \$20 (eliminations) Sunday - \$20 (eliminations) Weekend - \$45

ALL WEEKEND

Kids 12 & Under – FREE Parking - FREE



Photo by Mike Finnegan

Drag Racing Made Simple

he pulse-pounding sport of drag racing is an acceleration contest between two vehicles racing from a standing start over a straight course. Top Fuel dragsters and Funny Cars compete to a race distance of 1,000 feet; Pro Stock and Pro Stock Motorcycle compete to a race distance of 1,320 feet.

An NHRA Mello Yello 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 limit 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, commonly 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 line before the green, the red light illuminates to signal a foul. The offending driver is disqualified.

Sometimes 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-burning Top Fuel dragsters are the quickest-accelerating machines on earth, going from a still position to 100 mph in



Robert Hight (pictured) set the NHRA national funny car speed record in 2017 with a pass of 339.87 mph. Photo by Randy Jones

less than one second. They are powered by supercharged, custom-built, 500-cubicinch 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-wheelbased 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.

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

The Pro Stock Motorcycle category is reserved for 1998 or newer stock-appearing, carbureted or electronic fuel injection, gasoline-burning machines.





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NHRA Mello Yello Record Holders in Sonoma

OP FUEL (1,000 feet)
Elapsed Time: Leah Pritchett,
3.669 seconds, July 2017
Speed: Doug Kalitta, 332.75 mph,
July 2018

FUNNY CAR (1,000 feet)

Elapsed Time: Robert Hight, 3.807 seconds, July 2017

Speed: Robert Hight, 339.87 mph, July 2017

PRO STOCK (Quarter-mile)

Elapsed Time: Chris McGaha, 6.499 seconds, Aug. 2015

Speed: Shane Gray, 213.00 mph, Aug. 2015

PRO STOCK MOTORCYCLE (Quarter-mile)

Elapsed Time: Angelle Sampey, 6.730 seconds, July, 2016

Speed: Hector Arana Jr., 200.35 mph,



Off Any Repair or Service



A day at the drags: Come early, stay late, and be prepared for fun



he NHRA Mello Yello Series tour passes through 21 cities in all regions of the United States, bringing its excitement to millions each year. The events are multi-day spectacles of color and speed, chrome and flash, ingenuity and engineering.

For the uninitiated, here is what to expect when you head out for a day at the drags.

IN GENERAL

Unlike a typical three-hour football game or two-hour concert, NHRA drag racing is an all-day affair. The best advice for you as fans might well be the same advice given to the teams you're coming to watch: Come early, stay late, and be prepared.

As you would for a ball game or a rock concert, plan ahead, beginning with your tickets. NHRA recommends that fans buy their tickets in advance. Buying ahead gives you a better choice of reserved seats, and most tracks offer advance-ticket discounts ranging in amount and available at a variety of locations.

OK, you've got your tickets and your car is loaded with the essentials — a hat,

sunglasses, earplugs, and a blanket (to sit on or bundle up with depending on the weather) — now what? Race-day attendance can be massive, so it's a good idea to be early. The first round of Top Fuel, Funny Car, and Pro Stock eliminations on Sunday comprises 24 heats: the remainder of elimination rounds consists of 21. And that's not counting the Pro Stock Motorcycle rounds. Miss the first round, and you've missed half the show.

At the end of the day, don't make a headlong rush for the gates the instant the last nitro car runs. While the majority of the crowd heads for the parking lot, hit the pits, where the teams are relaxing after a long day and likely to be more than accommodating to autograph requests or the opportunity to talk about racing. You can also get up close to the day's winners at the Mello Yello Winner's Circle.

IN THE STANDS

Everyone knows that the action on Sunday determines who wins and who loses, but if you attend only the final day, you'll miss the spectacle and variety of qualifying. Qualifying on Friday and the final two qualifying sessions on Saturday set the 16-car fields in each pro category for Sunday.

Qualifying is your chance to see all of the cars run, not just the quickest 16. You'll get

to see some of the local cars that run only once or twice a year and are attempting to make the competitive fields in their respective categories. Saturday, you'll witness the high drama of final qualifying, where drivers have a last chance to fight their way into or are bumped from the field. Track and weather conditions can change from session to session and affect performance, so to get a better idea of how the drivers rate, compare runs made within a single session, not across sessions. Also, during each session of qualifying, teams are fighting hard to earn valuable qualifying bonus points. The top three quickest times in each qualifying session are awarded points on a 3-2-1 scale.

Try watching the races from different spots in the stands. Seeing a race unfold from a finish-line vantage point is a world apart from watching it from the starting line. The difference in the sights and sounds will amaze you.

IN THE PITS

Drag racing is unique among motorsports because fans have direct access to the teams, watching from as close as five to 10 feet away as the highly skilled mechanics service their race cars. Hot tip: Some of the most frantic action takes place in the first 30 minutes after a car returns to the pits. If you want a front-row seat to watch the teams



Photo by Oz Lang

at their best, head for the pits a little early. If there's a major engine meltdown on the track and you don't mind missing the rest of the action, you can secure a great vantage point in the pit area to watch the hectic engine rebuilding process and probably won't have to fight as hard for elbowroom.

If you want to get a real feel for the power of a fuel-burning engine, hang out until a team test-fires its engine, generally 45 minutes to an hour before it expects to run. (For run times, see your event schedule.) You'll get a nose full of nitro fumes and a genuine body-shaking thrill whenever the driver taps the throttle.

Every drag strip and every drag race is different. Take the time to scout the track layout, talk to other fans who have attended the race before, and listen to the buzz in the pits. You may well discover your own secrets for taking in an NHRA Mello Yello Series event.

Wednesday Night Drags and Sonoma Drift, Powered by UTI



The raceway's popular Wednesday Night Drags program enters its 31st season this year. Wednesday Night Drags allows you to race your car on the Sonoma Raceway quarter-mile drag strip most Wednesday evenings through Nov.13. Gates open at 3:30 p.m. with final eliminations from 6:30-10 p.m. Visit SonomaRaceway.com/WND for more information.

TOP THE COPSTM

High school students are invited to participate in the Top the CopsTM program, which gives teens the chance to drag race against local law enforcement officers, who compete in full uniform in their official vehicles on the drag strip. Top the Cops runs in conjunction with Wednesday Night Drags from through August. Gates open at 3:30 p.m., with practice runs starting at 4 p.m.

SONOMA DRIFT

Sonoma Drift returns for another thrilling season of sideways drifting and tire-melting action. Sonoma Drift runs most Wednesday evenings through Nov.



Wednesday Night Drags. Photo by Mike Doran

13. Vehicle entry is \$40 (pre-register) or \$50 (at the gate); spectators are \$10 (kids 12 and under are FREE). Drifting begins at 4 p.m. each night. For more information or to pre-register for Sonoma Drift, visit SonomaRaceway.com/SonomaDrift.

Winter Jam

Northern California's largest drifting festival returns to Sonoma Raceway for two full days of high-speed action at Winter Jam, Dec. 21-22. Internationally acclaimed drifting professionals and local amateurs will battle for points during individual and tandem car competitions on six different courses throughout the facility.

Bracket Drag Racing Series

Sonoma Raceway will host 12 Summit ET Bracket Drag Racing Series events in 2019. Racing is featured in five different categories. Visit SonomaRaceway.com/bracketdrags.

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