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A FORCE FIRST

BRITTANY'S FIRST TOP FUEL WIN CAPS FIRST JFR DOUBLE

IN-HOUSE CHASSIS BUILDING

WHY THE TOP PRO TEAMS HAVE TAKEN MATTERS INTO THEIR OWN HANDS



NOTES FROM THE PRO MOD REPORTER'S NOTEBOOK

BY JIM LUIKENS

As usual, the Amalie Motor Oil NHRA Gatornationals hosted the season-opening event in the NHRA J&A Service Pro Mod Drag Racing Series. Twenty-eight cars were on hand, and once again the field exhibited the power-adder parity that the series is famous for.

All of the usual suspects were in attendance, along with a couple of pleasant surprises. **Von Smith** made his return to NHRA Pro Mod competition with the all-new AAP '16 Corvette. He was out of the series last season but said it was an unexpected blessing in disguise. His father passed away last year, and without the pressure of racing, Smith was able to tend to all of the necessary matters in a timely manner. Top Alcohol Funny Car legend Frank Manzo is the tuner for the AAP team, but surprisingly the car failed to qualify with a 23rd-best 6.153.

Ruben Tetsoshevili, in his '70 Camaro, made his first NHRA Pro Mod appearance. Tetsoshevili, of West Chapel, Fla., did not qualify either with a 22nd-best 6.140, but his bright-green Camaro is an eye-catcher, and I expect to see quicker times from it as the 2016 season rolls on.

Last year, Pro Mod racers had "the session" at the Bristol event when late-night qualifying conditions led to near-record performances by every competitor. This year,



Ruben Tetsoshevili

we had "the round" when weather pushed the first round of competition to late Saturday night. In that first round, nearly every competitor made successively quicker runs.

Going into eliminations, **Sidnei Frigo** sat on the qualifying pole with an elapsed time of 5.839 seconds; however, in the third pair **Bob Rahaim** went 5.835 to eclipse low elapsed time of the meet. That was followed by winning runs of 5.810 by Frigo, 5.784 by **Rickie Smith**, and 5.751 by newcomer **Jonathan Gray** in Harry Hruska's Precision Turbo entry. Along the way, **Troy Coughlin Sr.** recorded a losing 5.822 that stood as low e.t. of the event up to that point.

Gray backed up his record run of 5.751 seconds, and it now stands as the new e.t. national record. His elapsed time bettered the old record of 5.77, which was set in 2011. Even

more impressive is the fact that the 5.77 record was established during a time of more liberal rules.

Washington's **Shane Molinari** had a forgettable weekend. A confirmed Pontiac enthusiast, Molinari debuted on the NHRA tour last year driving an interim '70 Camaro. For this season, he had RH Racecars in British Columbia build him a beautiful '68 Pontiac Firebird. Molinari's runs in preseason testing were impressive, but his time at the

Gatornationals didn't go as well. In the second round of qualifying, the center tore out of his right front wheel, sending the new car hard into the left retaining wall. His Tim McAmis Firebird body received the majority of the damage, and Molinari planned to head to Missouri immediately after the event to have it repaired.

Dan Stevenson had even less luck than Molinari. The Illinois racer had a large fire in his '13 Camaro during qualifying that burned for quite a while before the Safety Safari was able to extinguish it. Luckily, Stevenson had only a little smoke inhalation to show for his experience. He originally proclaimed on social media that it might be time for him to consider retiring from competition, but only two days later, he posted a picture on Facebook of a new turbo-powered '15 Camaro that he purchased. Just as with Molinari, Stevenson expects to be racing in Houston with a new paint job on his new car.



Shane Molinari

PRO MOD

1. Sidnei Frigo, Ball Ground, Ga. ('15 Corvette) **5.839, 252.24**
2. Robert Patrick Jr., Fredericksburg, Va. ('14 Mustang) **5.850, 242.58**
3. Jonathan Gray, Artesia, N.M. ('14 Camaro) **5.851, 255.48**
4. Rickie Smith, King, N.C. ('15 Camaro) **5.851, 248.93**
5. Mike Castellana, Muttontown, N.Y. ('15 Corvette) **5.854, 246.48**
6. Bob Rahaim, Grosse Pointe, Mich. ('15 Corvette) **5.860, 245.76**
7. Troy Coughlin, Columbus, Ohio ('15 Corvette) **5.870, 255.24**
8. Pete Farber, Baldwinville, Mass. ('69 Daytona) **5.876, 247.43**
9. Chip King, Semora, N.C. ('69 Daytona) **5.878, 243.41**
10. Steve Matusek, Olathe, Kan. ('68 Camaro) **5.884, 248.11**
11. Michael Biehle, North Vernon, Ind. ('67 Mustang) **5.885, 252.43**
12. Mike Janis, Lancaster, N.Y. ('13 Camaro) **5.915, 237.80**
13. Steven Whiteley, Grand Junction, Colo. ('14 CTS-V) **5.922, 246.57**
14. Kenny Lang, Grande Pointe, Man. ('69 Camaro) **5.926, 245.63**
15. Danny Rowe, Laguna Hills, Calif. ('15 Corvette) **5.963, 245.27**
16. Kevin Fiscus, Jacksonville, Fla. ('12 Mustang) **5.982, 246.44**

ALTERNATES: Bill Glidden - 6.009, 235.56; Eric Latino - 6.029, 241.80; Doug Winters - 6.048, 244.65; Jim Whiteley - 6.051, 241.54; Gerry Capano - 6.068, 230.21; Ruben Tetsoshevili - 6.140, 223.47; Von Smith - 6.153, 200.77; Clint Satterfield - 6.275, 241.80; Jim Bell - 6.670, 191.97; Shane Molinari - 7.067, 158.28; Dan Stevenson - 7.227, 130.63; Chuck Little - 7.728, 127.14.

