

A Force of her own: Monster Energy driver Brittany Force storms to Pomona victory

Monster Energy driver Brittany Force made history Sunday at famed Auto Club Raceway, storming to the Top Fuel championship by winning the Auto Club NHRA Finals.

In doing so, she became the first daughter of the legendary John Force to win a championship, following her dad's 16 Funny Car titles with one of her own.

She became just the second female to win a championship in the nitro categories and the first since Shirley Muldowney won the Top Fuel title in 1982.

"That's pretty incredible," Force said. "I'm still trying to wrap my head around a Pomona win. I've always wanted to win here – it's my home track, and we have the championship. All of it, it's still doesn't seem real. The only reason it is real is because of all the support around me."

That not only includes her family, but also her Monster Energy team. In her fifth season as a professional driver, Force has her first championship.

"It's huge," Force said. "I've watched my dad for years. I really have to give it up to him and thank him and my mom for all their support. They've always had

my back every tough weekend. I've been beaten on holeshots countless times – and red lights, those are tough to come back from.

"But I really believed that that would make me a better driver in the end. Today is pretty great, seeing it all come back full circle."

Force was solid all day, cutting good lights and eventually beating Shawn Langdon in the final for her fourth victory of the season and seventh of her career.

But the most important round win was in the second round, when she knocked off Richie Crampton moments after points leader Steve Torrence lost to Antron Brown. Force was first off the Christmas Tree and then made a pass of 3.679 seconds at 328.22 mph to beat Crampton and clinch the championship.

"I've been carrying a gut-ache for two weeks because I've been wanting to get here to today," Force said. "I thought, 'Just get me to Sunday, get me in my race car, and let's see what our team can do.' I know my team, my crew chiefs, and I know they bring everything to the line. Then it's my job to finish it, and we did that all day long."



In the final, she made another terrific run, 3.667 seconds at 330.07 mph to earn her third victory in the six-race Countdown to the Championship. Force and her John Force Racing team were terrific in the NHRA playoffs, winning three times, posting one runner-up finish and one semifinal finish. She began the Countdown in sixth place in points but scored the most points in the Countdown to vault to second behind Torrence.

Then came Sunday, when Force took control.

"We've had an incredible day," Force said. "I still haven't wrapped my head around what happened. It's a dream. I don't know if I ever thought we'd be here. To lock everything up the way we did is pretty incredible, and I have to thank Alan Johnson, Brian Husen and my entire Monster Energy team for that."

Story & Photo courtesy of NHRA Media

Championship Hights: Auto Club of Southern California driver Robert Hight earns second Funny Car title

Auto Club of Southern California driver Robert Hight ran the gamut of emotions during the Auto Club NHRA Finals this weekend at Auto Club Raceway at Pomona.

In the end, it was pure elation, as Hight captured the 2017 Funny Car championship.

The right adjustments were made, and



Hight sped to a first-round win over Tim Wilkerson that eliminated John Force Racing teammate Courtney Force from title contention. Then, Del Worsham knocked off second-place Ron Capps, and Hight had the second championship of his career – this one coming eight years after his first.

"Del Worsham came over to me before first round and said, 'I don't think I can outrun him, but I'm not going to give it to him. I'm going to make sure my car goes down the track,'" Hight said. "Del Worsham did the right thing by making it go down the track. It's pretty cool; it's been 10 years since Chevrolet has won a championship in Funny Car, and we're back."

Hight came into the final race of the 2017 season leading by 20 points over Capps, but struggled in qualifying dropped that to eight before race day. Hight and his team struggled to get down the track in qualifying, and Hight had to pedal his Chevrolet Camaro SS in the final session to get in the 16-car field at No. 15.

But Prock and Cunningham tuned Hight to an incredible pass of 3.839 seconds at 332.51 mph in the first round Sunday, and qualifying was forgotten. Hight made another stellar run in the second and third rounds, beating Courtney Force in the semifinals to reach his seventh final of

the season.

After getting the win light, though, the engine in Hight's Auto Club car exploded, and the Camaro darted from left from the right lane.

Force, fortunately, had slowed from tire smoke and wasn't close to Hight as he bounced off the wall in the left lane. The concussion from the explosion knocked the parachute handle out of Hight's reach, but he was busy trying to control the car and slow it down.

Eventually, it reached the gravel pit past top end and ran into the nets. Hight was unhurt, but the car was too damaged to continue. The team brought out a backup chassis and a third body; the first, sporting a special California Highway Patrol paint scheme, was damaged in Q4.

The third body was built for Brittany Force's Funny Car, and the JFR team had to swap decals for the final round.

There, Hight went up in smoke against Tommy Johnson Jr. and couldn't get the race win, but the championship trophy was his.

But that was typical of JFR this season. John Force brought Prock and Cunningham to the team, and eventually moved them to lead Hight's group. Hight responded with four victories – and two in the Countdown to the Championship – and national records in elapsed time (3.793 seconds) and speed (339.87 mph).

"We did a lot of work over the winter to put John Force Racing back together," Hight said. "This was kind of a building year. It's crazy how this building year turned into a dream. We could've never dreamed that we'd win two championships."

"Everybody worked their tail off and was quiet and knew they had a job to do. This is just huge for John Force Racing. For a couple of years, we have struggled but it is such a great group. We signed a long-term deal with Auto Club and they deserve better than what we were giving them. Jimmy Prock, Chris Cunningham they got us back in the game. It's been a long time and you want it so bad."

And Hight joined legends like John Force, Kenny Bernstein, Don Prudhomme, Raymond Beadle, Matt Hagan, Frank Hawley, Cruz Pedregon and Tony Pedregon as a two-time Funny Car champion.

"Not many guys can say they are a two-time champion," Hight said. "There are only a handful of guys who are a two-time Funny Car champ."

But Hight was quick to credit his team at the race track – and the guys back at John Force Racing in Brownsburg, Ind.

"We have a bunch of people back in Indianapolis at Force American Made who we need to really thank."

Story & Photo courtesy of NHRA Media