

# STEWART WINS!! Tony Stewart Victorious at Sonoma

To the victor go the spoils.

After winning Sunday's Save Mart 350k at Sonoma (Calif.) Raceway, that adage is one Tony Stewart intends to fulfill to the tune of a berth in the 2016 Chase for the NASCAR Championship.

Driving the No. 14 Code 3 Associates/Mobil 1 Chevrolet SS for Stewart-Haas Racing (SHR), Stewart took the lead with 22 laps to go and sparred with Denny Hamlin on the last lap to score his 49th career Sprint Cup Series win, his third at Sonoma and his first since winning at Dover (Del.) International Speedway on June 2, 2013. This was also Stewart's eighth Sprint Cup win on a road course, as he has five victories at Watkins Glen (N.Y.) International.

"All of these wins are meaningful – it doesn't matter where you get them," said Stewart, now a three-time winner at Sonoma (2001, 2005 and 2016). "We ran close to those guys up front all day. It's pretty ironic that the last win we got was in a Code 3 Associates car, and I'm proud to do it again. I'm really proud for all of our sponsors – Mobil 1, Bass Pro Shops and everybody.

"I'm excited for Mike (Bugarewicz, crew chief) to get his first win and proud that I could get him a win before the end of the year," Stewart added. "I'm excited for this team. My guys have been through this whole disastrous roller coaster the last three or four years and never backed down. They've never quit on me. There have been days I quit on myself, and they are the guys that send you text messages and call you when you get home like, 'Hey, this isn't over.' I'm proud for them, and it meant more for me to get it for them than for myself."

Stewart missed the first eight races of the season after injuring his back in a Jan. 31 all-terrain vehicle accident, but NASCAR granted him a medical waiver



that made Stewart eligible for the 2016 Chase for the NASCAR Sprint Cup. To compete for the series championship, Stewart had to win at least one race and secure a position within the top-30 of the championship standings by the 26th race of the season Sept. 10 at Richmond (Va.) International Raceway. With the victory at Sonoma, Stewart checks one box on his way toward eligibility and seems likely to satisfy the other requirement, as he is only nine points behind 30th-place Brian Scott.

Stewart was fast throughout the race weekend, posting top-10 lap times in both practices Friday, then qualifying 10th on Saturday. It marked his third consecutive top-10 qualifying effort.

Once the green flag waved, Stewart wasted no time in showing his road-racing skills as he drove from 10th to seventh in

the opening laps and executed a daring three-wide pass in the turn 11 hairpin.

The No. 14 struggled in race traffic on the restart, and Stewart was only able to make it to 14th by the time he pitted again on lap 70 of the 110-lap race. With 40 laps remaining, the crew told Stewart to "go get them for now" but warned that if the race went caution-free, they might need Stewart to save fuel.

Stewart couldn't gain much ground, so the team pitted once more with 25 to go. Although he dropped to 32nd, the team gambled that a caution in the final laps would enable Stewart to take advantage of track position and fresher tires. As it turns out, that's just what happened one lap later when NASCAR threw the yellow for a spring rubber in turn seven.

The caution brought most of the field

to pit lane on lap 88, allowing Stewart to move to fourth. As the laps wound down the tension increased for drivers that wrestled their 3,300-pound cars on the 11-turn track in 90-degree temperatures, resting only during three brief cautions in the first 100 laps.

"I can't ask for any better position than what I am in," Stewart said before restarting the race in the lead with 20 laps remaining. "I'm going to take what I can get out of this."

During the final laps, Stewart put on a display of what has made him a power on the NASCAR road courses, holding off hard charges by both Martin Truex Jr. and Hamlin, trading the lead with the latter just once before coming to the checkered flag.

**Motorsport  
america**

**Subscribe to MSA!**

\$40 per year. Send order form and check to:

1618 Olde Oak Drive • Lithia Springs, GA 30122

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Mailing Address: \_\_\_\_\_

City : \_\_\_\_\_ State: \_\_\_\_\_ Zip: \_\_\_\_\_