

Martin Truex Jr. wins at Pocono Raceway

By Seth Livingstone
NASCAR Wire Service

Martin Truex Jr. knew that his third career victory would come – eventually.

Enjoying easily the finest season of his NASCAR career, Truex raced to a convincing win in Sunday's Axalta "We Paint Winners" 400, leading 97 of 160 laps, including the final 27 at Pocono Raceway.

His victory marked the third consecutive Sprint Cup race in which Truex led the most laps. He'd led 131 laps at both Charlotte and Dover, only to come home fifth and sixth in the last two weeks.

"We finally got it," said Truex, who had registered top-10 finishes in 12 of the first 13 races this season. "We've had a great season. We have had everything it has taken to win races (and) we just hadn't got it done.

"This team deserves to win and I've known that all year long. Throughout my career I've kind of gotten used to disappointment, honestly, and I've learned to deal with those days where it didn't go your way, even though you didn't do anything wrong."

The victory ended Truex's 69-race winless skid. A long time coming, it was popular in the garage – even with his fiercest rivals – for multiple reasons.

Truex drives for Furniture Row Racing, a bit of an outlier in the racing world as a single-car team based in Denver. Sunday's Sprint Cup victory was the second ever for Furniture Row and owner Barney Visser, who also won at Darlington with driver Regan Smith in the 2011 Southern 500.

After winning consecutive NASCAR XFINITY Series titles, Truex, 34, had bounced around, from Dale Earnhardt Inc. to Michael Waltrip Racing, where

it looked like he might have found a home. Then came the second Richmond race of 2013 in which Truex had seemingly raced his way into the Chase – only to have his team penalized out of the picture. He then lost his ride when MWR was compelled to consolidate.

Prior to Sunday, he'd managed only two Sprint Cup victories -- at Dover in 2007 and Sonoma in 2013.

But even his on-track travails paled in comparison to those of his long-time girlfriend Sherry Pollex, who battled cancer in 2014 – a year in which Truex managed to lead only one lap all season. If that wasn't enough, Truex lost his grandmother this week.

It was Sherry who told Truex to have faith and dig deep after the frustration of 2013 and that everything would work out.

"I kind of believed her," Truex said. "I just knew it was going to take a lot of work. I knew it was going to be a tough road. ... I felt really fortunate that there was a great ride open with the (Furniture Row) 78 ... Then Sherry's situation happened and it was like: All right, this is when you show people what you're made of. She showed me what she was made of and it was like, wow, if she can do that, I can do this.

"It never gets any better than this. It takes time to heal things, especially with what Sherry and I went through. This just kind of makes you forget all about it. I just feel super-blessed to be with this group of guys. I'm just proud to drive cars for them and proud that Sherry is here, healthy. She is as excited as I am and everything is going well for her."

Kevin Harvick, who finished second on Sunday, said he was "really happy" for Truex.

"If you're going to lose to somebody today, that's a great person to lose to,"



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Martin Truex Jr., driver of the #78 Furniture Row/Visser Precision Chevrolet, affixes the winners decal to his car in Victory Lane after winning the NASCAR Sprint Cup Series Axalta 'We Paint Winners' 400 at Pocono Raceway on June 7, 2015 in Long Pond, Pennsylvania.

Harvick said. "You look at everything, personally and professionally Martin and Sherry have dealt with and you have to be super-happy for them. To see them have that bright spot is something I think the whole garage will support and be happy with."

Dale Earnhardt Jr., a long-time friend of Truex, who finished 11th, concurred. "I'm just happy for him," Earnhardt said. "I know he's been through a lot of stuff, both inside the car and outside the car the last several years. He's been able to get into a good opportunity with good people. He's got a team that believes in him. They've come a long way over the last several years."

Harvick, fastest in all three practice sessions this weekend, had nothing for Truex, who opened a 2.75-second lead with 12 laps to go.

If Truex had a true advantage against Harvick, it was on restarts, of which there were four in the final 40 laps. Truex avoided the need to hold off

Harvick one last time when Danica Patrick (whose crash brought out a caution on Lap 135) went spinning for a second time, but this time right through the entry of pit lane. This time, the race stayed green.

"The difference was the one real good (restart)," Truex said. "Joey (Logano) was behind me and gave me a good shot. I just tried to mix it up so the (guys behind me) weren't sure what I was going to do next. I think we picked the right gear ratio for restarts here and that is critical."

Truex's triumph was also the first for crew chief Cole Pearn.

"We've got a really good, tight-knit group of guys," Pearn said. "That makes it a lot of fun being out there (in Denver). We've all made similar commitments in our lives. We hang out together and that just makes it a ton of fun when you can succeed with a group like that."



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