

37th Annual Lucas Oil NHRA Southern Nationals at Atlanta Dragway

Story & photos: Phillip Prichard

The winners of the 37th annual Lucas Oil NHRA Southern Nationals at Atlanta Dragway were almost a repeat of the ZMax 4-wide results except for Pro Stock. Ron Capps raced his NAPA Auto Parts Dodge Charger R/T to his third consecutive Funny Car victory this season.

Steve Torrence (Top Fuel), Bo Butner (Pro Stock), and LE Tonglet (Pro Stock Motorcycle) were also winners in their respective categories in the seventh event of 24 on the NHRA Mello Yello Drag Racing series schedule.

Defending world champion Capps raced a 3.991-second pass at 317.79 mph to defeat Tim Wilkerson in his Levi, Ray & Shoup Ford Shelby Mustang. This is Capps' second victory at Atlanta Dragway and 52nd of his Funny Car career.

"It's a pinch-me moment," Capps stated. "The car speaks for itself lately. This was probably one of the more difficult racetracks to navigate. You really had to be ready for two or three different sets of bumps. It makes for an exciting run, but you're just hoping, at the same time, that your car stays in the groove. Funny Car is just getting tougher and tougher."

Capps sailed passed J.R. Todd, 16-time world champion John Force, and Robert Hight, who set the track elapsed time record with his 3.880 pass in the semifinals, enroute to the victory. Wilkerson faced rookie Jonnie Lindberg, Jack Beckman, and Matt Hagan before seeing Capps in his first final-round appearance of the season.

Torrence piloted his Capco Contractors dragster to the winner's circle back-to-back races after a 3.745 pass at 320.81 to defeat U.S. Army driver Tony Schumacher. This is Torrence's third consecutive

final-round appearance.

"The race car I have right now is the best race car that I've ever had in my life," Torrence said. "My driving is showing that I'm confident in it. The continuity of my team has what it takes to win championships. We've got a chip on our shoulder and a point to prove."

Torrence pushed past Smax Smith, Shawn Langdon, and points leader Leah Pritchett before facing Schumacher in the final. Schumacher defeated Brittany Force, Bob Vandergriff Jr., and Doug Kalitta before falling to Torrence.

During eliminations, Lea Pritchett set the elapsed time track record with a pass of 3.699, while her teammate Antron Brown set the track speed record of 329.91 mph.

Butner, who made his Pro Stock debut in Atlanta in 2015, powered his Jim Butner's Auto Chevy Camaro to the second victory of his career after a 6.569 pass at 211.26 that bettered two-time world champion Erica Enders. Enders raced her Elite Motorsports Chevy Camaro to a 6.593 pass at 210.97 in her first final-round appearance since

Butner defeated Wally Stroupe, Vincent Nobile, and Jeg Coughlin Jr. before facing Enders in the final. Enders lined up against Alan Prusiensky, defending world champion Jason Line, and Tanner Gray en route to her final-round appearance.

In Pro Stock Motorcycle, Tonglet raced to back-to-back wins this season after he rode his Nitro Fish Racing Suzuki to a 6.843 pass at 194.35, defeating teammate and defending world champion Jerry Savoie. This is Tonglet's 12th career win and second at Atlanta Dragway.

Tonglet raced past Cory Reed, Andrew Hines, and Scotty Pollacheck before



TORRENCE PUTS DOWN TEAM MATE SCHUMACHER



BUNTNER GETS THE JUMP ON WAY TO WIN

entering the final round. Savoie defeated Matt Smith, Hector Arana Jr., and No.1 qualifier Eddie Krawiec on his way to the final.

For the second consecutive year, NHRA officials announced a sellout for Saturday's racing. Mother nature rained out most of the qualifying on Friday. On Saturday only two rounds of qualifying set the field for Sunday. Courtney Force picked up her fourth straight No. 1 start in



LE TONGLET ON HIS WAY FOR 2ND WIN IN A ROW

Funny Car with a track-record 3.89. Tony Schumacher (Top Fuel), Bo Butner (Pro Stock), and Eddie Krawiec (Pro Stock Motorcycle) are also low qualifiers in Atlanta.

The 2017 NHRA Mello Yello Drag Racing Series season continues at the 29th annual Menards NHRA Heartland Nationals presented by Minties May 19-21 at Heartland Park Topeka. Check out www.nhra.com.



CAPPS WON 3RD IN A ROW (NHRA PHOTO)



WINNERS