

TODD AND M. SMITH SECURE WORLD CHAMPIONSHIP TITLES; TORRENCE, TODD, GRAY AND M. SMITH WINNERS AT SEASON ENDING AUTO CLUB NHRA FINALS

POMONA, Calif. – J.R. Todd clinched his first career NHRA Mello Yello Drag Racing Series Funny Car world championship title during the first round of eliminations Sunday at the Auto Club NHRA Finals at Auto Club Raceway at Pomona.

Matt Smith also won his third Pro Stock Motorcycle world championship at the final 2018 NHRA Mello Yello Drag Racing Series event during eliminations on Sunday.

The race winners at Auto Club Raceway at Pomona were Steve Torrence (Top Fuel), Todd (Funny Car), Tanner Gray (Pro Stock) and M. Smith (Pro Stock Motorcycle). For the first time in NHRA history, all of the event winners were also the world champions in their respective categories.

Robert Hight, the defending category champion, was second in points in the category and smoked the tires against Bob Tasca III during the opening round of eliminations which guaranteed the title crown to Todd.

“People kept asking, ‘what do you need to do to clinch?’” Todd stated. “I’m like, we need to win the race. We need to not worry about what we need to clinch it. Seeing Robert smoke the tires first round was instant relief. My crew was racing smart and the Yella Fellas do an awesome job preparing the thing today. They stayed focused all day long because there were a lot of distractions around our pit area and they did their job. The other teams at Kalitta Motorsports came over to help and I can’t thank them enough. It’s a huge family over there and we’ve all got each other’s backs and it’s awesome to have that kind of support.”

Todd went on to dominate the season ending event with a run of 3.872 at 329.10 taking down the defending two-time event champion Tommy Johnson Jr.’s Make-A-Wish Dodge Charger R/T. He finishes the season with six race wins, the first coming at the DENSO Spark Plugs NHRA Four-Wide Nationals in Las Vegas. Todd also won the prestigious Chevrolet Performance U.S. Nationals for the second year in a row and three events in the NHRA Mello Yello Drag Racing Series Countdown to the Championship, two runner-up finishes and a solo No. 1 qualifier.

M. Smith secured his third NHRA Mello Yello Drag Racing Series Pro Stock Motorcycle world championship in the final round of eliminations. He powered his Elite Motorsports DENSO Auto Parts EBR to a 6.765 at 201.22 national speed record pass to defeat defending world champion Eddie Krawiec, who was the nearest championship contender. M. Smith defeated Angie Smith, Hector Arana and LE Tonglet en route to the finals to secure the championship and event title. This is his first world championship title since 2013.

“Man, we went through a lot today,” M. Smith said. “With the airline breaking in the first round and in the second round the transmission broke on us going through the lights. My guys did their job and we fixed all of the stuff that broke and ended up putting up three 200 mph runs today. We are having the time of our life right now though.”

M. Smith’s championship season had four race victories with three wins during the NHRA Mello Yello Drag Racing Series Countdown to the Championship. He secured five No. 1 qualifiers and had a single runner-up finish.

In Top Fuel, Torrence made NHRA history by sweeping all six playoff races during the NHRA Mello Yello Drag Racing Series Countdown to the Championship. He raced his Capco Contractors/Torrence Racing dragster to a holeshot win of 3.702 at 330.07 against NHRA’s win-



ningest Top Fuel driver Tony Schumacher’s run of 3.700 at 331.61 in the final round. This Torrence’s 11th win of the season, 27th of his career and first at Auto Club Raceway at Pomona.

“It has truly been unbelievable,” Torrence stated. “To go out and do what those Capco Boys have accomplished is solely by the grace of the good Lord. We’ve won some rounds that we probably should not have won. We are truly blessed to be able to do what we’re doing. We’re going to be in the history books. Nobody can beat us; they can only tie us. That’s a pretty cool stat to put behind your name.”

Torrence’s path to victory included wins Cameron Ferre, teammate and father Billy Torrence and 2017 world champion Brittany Force. Schumacher took out Scott Palmer, Bill Litton and Blake Alexander before falling to Torrence in the finals.

Gray won the Pro Stock portion of the race in his Gray Motorsports Valvoline Chevrolet Camaro with a run of 6.519 at 211.86 to defeat Drew Skillman’s pass of 6.524

at 211.03. The 2018 world champion notched his eighth victory of the season, 13th of his two-year career and first at the Auto Club NHRA Finals.

“This was probably the most relaxed Sunday I’ve had ever,” Gray said. “For me, I just wanted to enjoy the moment. That was the last time I was going to race with a lot of those guys. We wrapped up the championship during qualifying and I just wanted to enjoy it. We had already won seven races and that’s really good and obviously I wanted to win more but at the same time I wanted to enjoy the time I had with the guys and make the most out of it.”

Gray drove past his father Shane Gray, Erica Enders and Jason Line before entering his second consecutive final round appearance at the event. Skillman defeated Alan Prusiensky, veteran Greg Anderson and No. 1 qualifier Jeg Coughlin Jr. before falling in the finals.

The 2019 NHRA Mello Yello Drag Racing Series season will kick off with the Lucas Oil NHRA Winternationals Feb. 7-10 at Auto Club Raceway at Pomona.

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