

The Racing Reporter

Blunt has racing fuel in his veins

HAMPTON, Ga. - Chad Blount of Plymouth, Indiana entered a new ARCA REMAX series track qualifying record of 188.854 mph, Friday, March 10 at Atlanta Motor Speedway.

He lost the next day's race, "Pork, The Other White Meat 400," by just one-thousandths of a second.

Blount is a fourth-generation racer. His great-grandfather, Harold Blount owned cars. His grandfather, Jim Blount raced for 43 years. And his father, Bob Blount continues to run local tracks plus several small series in and around Indiana.

Chad began his racing career in the sportsman class at Plymouth Motor Speedway. Before Saturday's qualifying effort, he had only run six ARCA events. In addition to his lack of experience on a major touring series, the 22-year-old driver has several things going against him.

First, he drives the only Dodge in the ARCA REMAX Series. And second, the young Indiana driver had just six ARCA races under his belt. And third, the team is unsupported.

Those are three big strikes, but Chad and the team of his No. 77 Braun Auto Group Dodge Intrepid appear to have enough confidence to overcome whatever handicaps might seem visible to outside observers.

"Mr. Braun has told potential sponsors that if we don't finish the season within the top-five, he will give them all the money back they invested in the team," said Chad.

That would be a big statement coming from anyone, but when you have a rookie driver behind the wheel, it looks even larger. But after winning the Atlanta Old Milwaukee Pole, many observers were left wondering just how good the team really is.

"We had a decent run," said Blount after qualifying. "We got a little loose. I think the sun affected me a little. This pole is big for this team. It was great for the guys in the shop. Everybody worked real hard and with this Ernie Elliott powered engine, what else can I say? Overall, I was pretty happy. I got a little loose midway off both corners, but I was smooth for the majority of the run."

Chad's opportunity to move up began last year.

"I met a fellow named Todd Braun in my home town and went to work for him on his local stuff," continued

at his rehab to get back on the track as soon as possible."

The NASCAR Busch Series races were held on Saturday at Las Vegas Motor Speedway after hitting the wall on lap 117 of the Sam's Town 300 when his No. 5 GMAC Chevrolet encountered oil on the track. The car slid for over 500 feet after impact, coming to a stop in turn two.

NASCAR veteran Ron Hornaday will replace Hendrick until he is able to return.

"We are doing our very best to turn a negative into a positive and use this time to learn from Ron as much as we can," said McGrew. "Ricky wants to go to every race that his rehab schedule will allow. He wants to be at the track and be more of a crewmember, doing everything he normally does without getting in the car. We are treating this as an opportunity to make us all better as a team."

Other Results:

Lusk wins Atlanta ARCA race
HAMPTON, Ga. - In the closest one to finish in ARCA REMAX series history, Damon Lusk edged out Chad Blount by one-thousandths of a second to win the Pork The Other White Meat 400.

Finishing order: 1. Damon Lusk, 2. Chad Blount, 3. Michael Verges, 4. Cam Strader, 5. Jason Jarrett, 6. Andy Bell, 7. Billy Venturi, 8. Tina Gordon, 9. Shelby Howard, 10. Doug Howard, 11. Keith Hurt, 12. Ron Cox, 13. Kevin Conway.

Darrell Basham, 15. Wally Fowler, 16. Chuck Weber, 17. Rick Thomes, 18. Andy Hillenburger, 19. Dicky Williamson, 20. Larry Holliman, 21. Todd Bowsher, 22. Mike Buckley, 23. Brent Sherman, 24. Kevin Belmont, 25. Norm Benning, 26. Kevin McGuire, 27. Bob Aiello, 28. Justin Labonte, 29. Robert Burroughs, 30. Tim Turner, 31. Tim Mitchell, 32. Tim Steele, 33. Sunny Hobbs, 34. Chase Montgomery, 35. Frank Kimmel, 36. Robbie Cowart, 37. Greg Sarff, 38. Mark Gibson, 39. David Elliott, 40. Brad Smith.

Weekend Racing: All three of NASCAR's major touring series will be at Darlington Raceway this weekend. Friday, March 15, NASCAR Craftsman Truck Series, Craftsman Anniversary 200, event 2 of 24 events; Starting time: Taped delay starting time: 4:30 p.m. (EST); TV: ESPN2; Distance: 200 miles/147 laps; Defending champion: Bobby Hamilton; Dodge: Saturday, March 16, NASCAR Busch Series DARLINGTON RACEWAY.COM 200, event 4 of 34 events; Starting time: 12:30 p.m. (EST); TV: FX Channel; Distance: 200 miles/147 laps; Defending champion: Jeff Green; Ford: Sunday, March 17, NASCAR Winston-Cup Carolina Dodge Dealers 400, event 4 of 36 events; Starting time: 12:30 p.m. (EST); TV: Fox; Distance: 400 miles/293 laps; Defending champion: Kevin Harvick.

Darlington Raceway track information: 1.366-mile oval. Banking in turns: 1-2: 25 degrees; 3-4: 23 degrees; straights: 2 degrees; Length of front/backstretch: 1.229 feet; Grandstand capacity: 75,000.

Racing Trivia Question: Jack Sprague is a rookie Busch Series driver. What series did he race in before moving to Busch?

Answer: To Last Week's Question: Darrell Waltrip, the three-time Winston Cup champion, called it quits after the 2000 season.

Fan Comments from Sunday's race

"R. R. Misslinburg, Pa. "Why does Jeff Gordon get away with nudging others, when other drivers can't?"

D. H., Camden, N.Y. "It was refreshing to see a pretty good race without all the controversy."

SOUND OFF: If you have an opinion about NASCAR or Sunday's Winston Cup racing and want to be heard, call us within one hour after the end of the race at 1-800-726-7022. The call is free, and if we use your comments in our next column, we will send you a photo of your favorite driver. Gerald Hodges, The Racing Reporter is a syndicated NASCAR columnist. If you have a racing question that you would like answered send it to The Racing Reporter, P.O. Box 160711, Mobile, AL 36616, or e-mail it to: 110335.405@compuserve.com

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By Gerald Hodges

The Racing Reporter
Stewart gets first wife of season
HAMPTON, Ga. - Tony Stewart held off Dale Earnhardt Jr. over the final lap to win his first race of the season as he turned in a dominating performance in a Winston Cup MIRA America 500 at Atlanta Motor Speedway.

Stewart led by far the most laps-155, in taking his first win and rebounding from what had been a disastrous season's start.

Stewart had the lead on Lap 280 when Brett Bodine No 11 Hooters Ford lost an engine bringing out a yellow flag. All the leaders, some of whom had been worried about making it to the end of the race on fuel, pined.

Daytona 500 winner Ward Burton, meanwhile, took only two tires and came out first ahead of Stewart, Terry Labonte, who also took two tires, Earnhardt Jr. and rookie Jimmie Johnson.

As these drivers battled up front, a multicar crash between John Andretti and Johnny Benson occurred off Turn 2 on Lap 289, bringing out another yellow flag. Ward Burton won the race back to the yellow flag and was still in the lead on the restart on Lap 295, with 31 laps to go.

Stewart worked his way inside of Burton's Dodge coming off Turn 4 on Lap 301 and pulled in front into Turn 1 on Lap 302. He held on from there to win for the first time this season and for the first time in his Winston Cup career at Atlanta.

"We just had an awesome car," said Stewart. "It was clean in traffic, but once we got it in clean air, it was awesome."

Stewart's teammate, Bobby Labonte's Pontiac had engine trouble

and finished 37th.

Dale Earnhardt Jr. settled for second, with rookie Johnson third and Kenseth battling back for fourth.

Finishing order: 1. Tony Stewart, 2. Dale Earnhardt Jr., 3. Jimmie Johnson, 4. Matt Kenseth, 5. Ricky Craven, 6. Rusty Wallace, 7. Ward Burton, 8. Mark Martin, 9. Sterling Marlin, 10. Ryan Newman, 11. Kurt Busch, 12. Buckshot Jones, 13. Dale Jarrett, 14. Terry Labonte, 15. Kyle Petty, 16. Jeff Gordon, 17. Dave Blaney, 18. Robby Gordon, 19. Elliott Sadler, 20. Ricky Rudd, 21. Jeff Burton, 22. Kenny Wallace, 23. Jeremy Mayfield, 24. Ken Schrader, 25. Joe Nemechek, 26. Jimmy Spencer, 27. Johnny Benson, 28. Mike Skinner, 29. Bobby Hamilton, 30. Terry Haddock, 31. Stacy Compton, 32. Casey Atwood, 33. Rick Mast, 34. Casey Robinson, 35. Bill Elliott, 36. John Andretti, 37. Bobby Labonte, 38. Brett Bodine, 39. Kevin Harvick, 40. Michael Waltrip, 41. Jeff Green, 42. Dick Trickle, 43. Hut Stricklin.

Top-10 Winston Cup points leaders after 4 of 36 events: 1. Martin, 645; 2. Newman, 571; 3. W. Burton, 545; 4. Martin, 537; 5. Stewart, 544; 6. Kenseth, 540; 7. Busch, 535; 8. Wallace, 531; 9. J. Hamilton, 518; Johnson, 517.

Hendrick released from hospital
CHARLOTTE, N.C. - Hendrick Motorsports driver Ricky Hendrick was released from Carolinas Medical Center Friday after surgery to repair ligament damage in his right shoulder. The 21-year-old is resting comfortably at the home of his father, HMS founder Rick Hendrick.

"Ricky is in very good spirits," said Lance McGrew, Hendrick's crew chief. "He is going to work very hard



Photo from the Photo by Melissa Givens-Bell

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Chad. "He was running ARCA Trucks at the time, and he shot me a deal. He said, 'Being that every one is jelling right now, why don't we get an ARCA car and put together a team?'"

"That's the way it worked out. We ran five races last year. Our best finish was second at Berlin (Raceway), and our worst finish was 11th. We had a Dodge, she was running really good, and we wound up seventh."

"We're unresponsive, but we're going to do the whole ARCA deal this year. It would be nice if we could get a sponsor to come onboard. The team is clicking right now, and if we do land a sponsor, man what we couldn't do."

With racing blood from three former racers, Chad Blount's success is not a surprise, especially since he has such a knack for adapting and learning quickly at whatever track he's racing on.

"I love waking up in the morning," laughed Chad. "I love what I do, because it's all I ever wanted to do."

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