



Despite a round 2 loss at the Gatornationals, Eric Latino put his name in the NHRA history books in Florida. PHOTO COURTESY TERESA LONG / NHRA

## LATINO SETS PRO MOD RECORD

PORT PERRY, ONTARIO NATIVE MAKES HISTORIC RUN AT GATORNATIONALS IN FLORIDA

By J. Wally Nesbitt

Port Perry, ON's Eric Latino set an astonishing NHRA Pro Mod standard in mid-March with a world-record setting 5.727 second pass in the season-opening 2017 Gatornationals.

Facing off against Troy Coughlin in the second round on the Gainesville, FL quarter-mile strip, Latino set the fastest recorded Pro Mod elapsed time, crossing the strip at 256.36 mph, but lost the race when Coughlin cut a near-perfect .008-second light.

"Troy is really good at playing games in the staging lane, he left me sitting on the line for a long time," said the 2012 PMRA champion, who got off the line in a time of .086 seconds. "He got the holeshot and the win."

Giving credit for the additional speed to a new clutch system and adjustable shock package installed in his 1968 supercharged Camaro over the winter ("and Al [Billes] found us another 40 horsepower"), Latino has been seriously pounding at the Pro Mod winner's door since late 2016. A final round appearance at Charlotte set up the Green Racing team for a season best ET run on the strip in Las Vegas.

"This winter, Al Billes and I adjusted the blower to shift a bit of the power from the bottom to the top, that gave us a better balance

over the full run," said Latino. "We gave the car a new triple-disc clutch that's normally only used in Funny Cars, and some new, five position, adjustable shocks. We did a test in Orlando, trying some things to shake the tree, and the car seemed to like it all."

Unloading the Team Green Camaro in Gainesville, Latino endured engine management issues in qualifying, but managed to make it to the final 16 with a 5.885-second run.

"We might have qualified better, but we were too lean, the car shut down and we coasted to the line. We were kind of worried, there were still three or four fast cars yet to qualify, but the race angels were on our side that day."

Bettering his time in the first round, a 5.779-second pass earned the just-turned 53-year-old lane choice for the second race where he faced Coughlin. Losing on the holeshot, Latino crossed the timing lights a mere .0509 seconds behind Coughlin, the two setting another mark for the fastest drag race in Pro Mod history.

"The weather conditions were absolutely perfect for that run, I doubt we'll ever see those conditions again. Maybe that will let our speed record stand for a while," said Latino.

Despite his round 2 loss, Latino is optimistic

about the remainder of the season.

"Seeing our numbers on the dyno, and seeing the speed we've got, we're confident we can make some noise this year," said Latino. "It was a pretty good feeling after that record run. A lot of people, even Coughlin, came by to congratulate us and a few even bowed down! We're all feeling pretty good, looking at the rest of the schedule. We'll do the first eight races for sure, then re-evaluate our progress and see if we finish out the full 12 dates."

As a legitimate part-time racing effort competing against some mega-budget squads, members of Team Green Racing recognize the challenges facing them, but are determined to come prepared for the test.

"Rob Spurring, my partner on this team, is one of the reasons that we're able to race at this level, his dedication over the years has put us in this position. Billes has been instrumental in our motor program, but a whole lot of praise needs to go to [crew chief] Paolo D'Alimonte. That guy calls all the shots, he can do anything on car, he's a huge part of our success," concluded Latino.

The next appearance for the Team Green Racing effort will be at the Strip in Las Vegas at the end of March before a trek to the SpringNationals in Texas three weeks later. •

## NATIONAL DRAG RACING ASSOCIATION ANNOUNCES 2017 SCHEDULE:

Three events have been confirmed at Toronto Motorsports Park's Cayuga Dragway: the Victoria Day weekend on May 19-21, the Canadian Nitro Nationals on June 30 to July 2 and the Labour Day Weekend on September 1-3. Series organizers have indicated future dates are also in the works and could still be added to the 2017 schedule. BY JESSIE SHARPE

## RYAN HODGSON VICTORIOUS IN FIRST 2017 NHRA HOT ROD HERITAGE SERIES

**OUTING:** Alberta's Ryan Hodgson is off and running having wasted no time in picking up his first win in the Nostalgia Funny Car class of the 2017 NHRA Hot Rod Heritage Series.

While the series officially started its 2017 campaign in January at Arizona's Wild Horse Pass Motorsports Park, the Good Vibrations March Meet held on the first weekend of March at the Auto Club Famoso Raceway in Bakersfield, CA was the first race of the season for the Top Fuel and Funny Car classes.

With 29 cars vying for one of the 16 spots on the elimination ladder, Hodgson qualified fifth overall. Wins in the first three elimination rounds brought Hodgson to the weather delayed final on Monday where he lined up against the defending class champion, Kris Krabill of Washington State.

In the final, Hodgson's 5.609-second run at 259.91 mph secured the victory against Krabill whose car caught fire at the end of a 6.513-second quarter-mile. Krabill escaped the fire without injury.

## BRITISH COLUMBIA COLLECTOR VEHICLE LICENSE SYSTEM EMBRACES VINTAGE MUSCLE CARS:

Along with the arrival of spring, the end of March 2017 marked the expansion of the collector vehicle license system in British Columbia to include eligible modified vehicles up to 1974. Previously, collector plates, along with a potential reduction in insurance costs, were limited to vehicles that were 25 years or older which were deemed to be in "collectible condition" and in stock form. The same guidelines also allowed for modified vehicles originally manufactured in 1958 or earlier to make application for a collector plate. The new rules have expanded the eligibility for vehicles with updated components, including engines and suspension, to include those from 1974 and earlier. The inclusion of these additional eligible model years for modified vehicles will undoubtedly see an increase in the enrollment of the collector plate system which had 26,000 vehicles registered as of 2016.



The 2017 NDRA season kicks off on the Victoria Day long weekend on May 19-21. PHOTO BY DARWIN KENT

The province's Transportation Minister, Todd Stone, was quoted as saying, "We want to see this specialty vehicle program remain viable, preserve vehicle history and evolve with the times. That's why we are opening up the opportunity to owners of specialty cars within the 'muscle car' era."

More information on the collector vehicle license system in BC, including application forms for the collector and modified collector programs, can be found online by visiting icbc.com.

## ALBERTA'S GRANT DURIE CLAIMS FIRST NHRA NATIONAL WIN:

This February the 2017 NHRA Arizona Nationals held at Chandler Arizona's Wild Horse Pass Motorsports Park provided the backdrop for a milestone in the drag racing career of Grant Durie.

After qualifying 20th in the 31-car Top Dragster field, the resident of Vegreville, AB successfully worked his way through the first four elimination rounds to find himself in an NHRA National event final round for the first time in his career.

Coming to the line for the final elimination round the only thing standing between Durie and the Wally trophy was the No. 12 qualifier, Tom Koenen of Tuscon, AZ. Running against a 6.82-second dial-in, Durie ran a 6.824-second quarter-mile at 194.27 mph.

Despite having one of his worst reaction

times of the event, Durie's 0.037-second light was good enough for the win after Koenen's -0.001-second reaction time turned the bottom bulb red.

## WHEELER DEALER TOP FUEL DRAGSTER DONATED TO ALBERTA MUSEUM:

The Reynolds-Alberta Museum in Wetaskiwin, AB houses examples of some of the most influential motorized vehicles in history. Adding to this collection is the recent donation of one of western Canadian racing legend Terry Capp's Wheeler Dealer top fuel dragsters.

Built in 1973, Capp raced this specific car until 1979 when it was sold to make room for a new dragster. Over the following decades it was modified and raced by a series of owners until Winnipeg dentist and drag racing enthusiast Brian Friesen acquired it 2007. Wanting to return the car to its original format, Friesen hired experienced racecar restorer Shawn Dill who undertook a meticulous rebuild of the dragster that would take until 2012 to complete. The completed restoration was unveiled that year at the NHRA Hot Rod Reunion in Bakersfield, CA. The car remained in Friesen's collection until his decision to donate it to the Reynolds-Alberta Museum.

Details of the Reynolds-Alberta Museum including hours of operation and location can be found online at [history.alberta.ca/reynolds](http://history.alberta.ca/reynolds).

STORIES BY PATRICK LAMBIE