

Hickory Motor Speedway Sets the Stage for Another Great Season of Racing Action

By Adrian Sanders

ASandersRYRE@carolina.rr.com

Blow off the dust, uncover the cars and fire those engines because another great season of NASCAR Dodge Weekly Racing Series action is set to get underway at Hickory Motor Speedway in less than two weeks. If you think Hickory hosted some great racing action in 2005, then hang on to your hats because 2006 is shaping up to be a record breaking year with higher car counts, larger crowds and awesome wheel to wheel action.

Sherry Clifton is entering her 5th year as the Hickory Motor Speedway Track Promoter and she is very excited about what's in store for 2006. "The fans can expect a great show in 2006", says Clifton. "We have improved some of our facilities, there will definitely be better racing and on top of that, we will be hosting four fireworks shows in 2006". And it's not only the fans that will see improvements, the drivers will notice some changes as well. In 2005, late model drivers were only allowed to buy two tires a week for a regular 50 lap event and four tires for 100 lap events. That tire rule is still in effect, but this season drivers will be allowed to purchase four new tires again after the 100 lap events. Clifton feels this will help them get a fresh start and get back on a good tire schedule for the regular 50 lap shows. "We are trying to make some cost cutting efforts for the teams by still having the 2 tire rule", says Clifton. "We have also made some slight engine adjustments in the rules to allow more cars to come out and compete". By making such changes, more cars from surrounding tracks will be able to come to Hickory and race without having to make major changes to their engine package.

One thing Clifton is sure of, this year she is expecting one of the highest car counts that Hickory has seen in many years. "We have a stellar line up going into the 2006 season", says Clifton. "We have the highest car counts in every division that we have had the whole 5 years I've been here". The higher car counts mean a lot to the fans, but to the drivers it means more national points. The NASCAR Dodge Weekly Racing Series point schedule is based partly on how many cars are in the starting field. And from the looks of it, Clifton is expecting one of the highest car counts in the nation. This can mean a lot for drivers such as last year's Late Model Series Champion Keith Bumgarner, who not only took the track title, but also finished 4th in NASCAR Dodge Weekly Racing Series Division III standings.

Among all the familiar faces, Hickory Motor Speedway will also play host to some new drivers in 2006. One of those is Chris Lewis, driver of the #35 Image First Design Late Model. Lewis is not necessarily a new face at Hickory Motor Speedway because he has competed in some truck races in seasons past. However, in 2005 due to the lack of finances, he was forced to stay parked for the full season. Things have finally come together for Lewis and his team as they plan to run a full season of Late Model racing in 2006. "We plan to come out here and do our best to win some races", said Lewis as he prepared his car for pre-season practice. "I feel we have a shot at the Late Model Championship, but I also know that if we go out and win races, the points will take care of themselves". Lewis knows that he is up against some of the best drivers in the business and that's partly why he decided to race at Hickory. "The competition is going to be a lot stiffer than it was last year", said Lewis. "It will probably be the most competitive field in the NASCAR Dodge Weekly Racing Series".

So as the clock ticks down towards the season opening race on March 25th a lot of excitement fills the air around "The World's Most Famous Short Track". Clifton is making final preparations to ensure the success that the track management has planned for in 2006. She has even come up with a new motto, "Pursue Excellence, Achieve Success". If you want to see the definition of excellence and success at a local short track, come on out to Hickory Motor Speedway in 2006. You won't be disappointed....except when the races are over for the night. But hey, there's always next week!

ROWE HOPS TO EASTER BUNNY 150 VICTORY

By Mike Twist and Amy Hayes

Mainer Goes Into Record Books as First PASS South Winner

NEWTON, NC - When Mike Rowe walked into the gates of the Hickory Motor Speedway for the WFMX Easter Bunny 150 Pro All Stars Series inaugural South race, he was in awe. The Maine racing veteran took a good look around, gathered his thoughts and remarked about how humbled he was to get the chance to finally race at the historic facility for the first time in his career.

When the PASS said that they were coming to Hickory, with the history of the people who have been here, I said Man, I want to go down there, said Rowe. So did Seth Holbrook, my crew chief, so we did it. The track is old, but theres still good racing here.

It was a natural choice for Rowe to make his first Hickory start in the Easter Bunny 150. Rowe is a strong supporter of the original flavor of PASS, which is still going strong in New England, and he wanted to endorse their new Southern tour. Rows SP2 Motorsports team wanted to see how they stacked up against the best Super Late Model jockeys in the country and when youve won the biggest races in the Northeast throughout your career, you quite honestly just run out of new victory lanes to visit unless you are willing to travel.

Rowes formula to win at Hickory was pretty straight forward. He timed second in qualifying, beat Travis Kittleson in a thrilling heat race to earn the pole

position, hung around the top five all night and made his way into the lead with only a few laps to go in the 150-lap main event.

Did the best car win? At first glance, it might appear not. The story of the night was several of the guys who were out front fell by the wayside one by one. But then again, Rowe has a habit of waiting around the top five all race long and making a charge late in the going. That was no different at Hickory. The outcome of the race might have been the exact same even if the storyline and players were a little bit different.

Travis Kittleson and Cassius Clark ran away and hid from him in the opening laps before they both were eliminated by mechanical gremlins. Mid-race leader Jason Hogan got into one of those deals with Scott Mulkern and ended up in the wall. Mulkern was quick too, but had to settle for fourth at the end. Corey Williams had a weekend of speed cut short with a DNF. Former All-American 400 winner Chuck Barnes was in Rows mirror at the end of the race, but couldnt get by. J.R. Norris got stuck in the pits and lost a lap early. 2005 PASS Most Popular Driver Travis Benjamin was quick, but had an ignition problem in qualifying and a suspension part break in the race while running in the

top five. The list goes on and on. All were potential winners.

That wasnt lost on Rowe at all.

To beat Jason Hogan, Travis Kittleson and all those guys, I know that he had some bad luck, but they were fast. We beat Freddie Query (Super Late Model legend in the south) and guys like them and that means a lot. To be in the class of guys like that is awesome. To come down here with the history of this track and bring that Easter Bunny 150 trophy home to Maine is awesome.

Barnes held on to finish second and the Kentucky driver just wished that there had been a couple dozen fewer laps.

The race was too long, laughed Barnes, who approached the race with the same strategy as Rowe did. Everybody was driving around and knocking the crap out of each other and I just kind of rode around. Mike Rowe got knocked out of the way, and fell back and I was feeling pretty good; he was the main guy I was racing against. I saw him fall back in the mirror and I kind of picked them off and worked my way up.

When I got the lead, it was where I wanted to be because everyone else was getting knocked around,€ continued Barnes, who lost power steering on his 55-machine later in the event. missed a shift on one of the restarts, and we just had to fight our way back to the front. When Mike got up to me, I knew I had my hands full. I pitted next to him all weekend and those guys of his were like, a tough old man, so I just raced him as hard as I could and I just couldnt beat him.

USAR Pro Cup Southern Division point leader Clay Rogers was third. guess we kind of represented the south down here, said the North Carolina driver. We were the first from the South to finish and I guess I have a lot of laps down here so I am supposed

to do that. The crowd was great for showing up tonight, and there was good competition and I got to meet a lot of new people and see a lot of new faces.

Scott Mulkern, Ryan Lawler, Ted Musgrave Jr., Clay Jones, Dean Clattenburg, Wade Day and Dennis Schoenfeld rounded out the top-ten finishers.

PASS South will return to action on May 27th at Southern National Speedway in Kenly, North Carolina as part of the 11-race schedule for the first year tour

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