

# TONY STEWART

## Zeroed in on Coke Zero 400

ATLANTA (July 1, 2008) – Offsetting the disappointment of going from leading the season-opening Daytona 500 on the final lap to finishing third when the checkered flag dropped was that Tony Stewart had begun his 10<sup>th</sup> year in the NASCAR Sprint Cup Series in strong fashion.

Traditionally a late-season bloomer in regard to contending for wins and tallying victories, Stewart's strong effort in February at Daytona showed that the two-time Sprint Cup champion wouldn't have to wait until the hot summer months to begin his notorious hot streak. For in addition to leading four times for 16 laps in the 500, Stewart finished second in the non-point-paying Budweiser Shootout and Gatorade Duel events and won the NASCAR Nationwide Series race from the pole.

It was Stewart's best start to the season, and in the series' second point-paying race of the year at Auto Club Speedway in Fontana, Calif., a solid seventh-place effort had Stewart third in points, 19 markers arrears championship leader and Joe Gibbs Racing teammate Kyle Busch.

But the first hiccup of Stewart's season came at Las Vegas, where after having led six laps and running solidly in the top-10, a blown right-front tire on lap 107 sent the No. 20 Home Depot Toyota hard into the SAFER Barrier that lines the outside retaining wall in turn four. Stewart left Las Vegas bruised and with a 43<sup>rd</sup>-place finish, which dropped him to 11<sup>th</sup> in the standings, 136 points out of first.

From there, Stewart's season resembled a roller-coaster ride at Six Flags.

- **Finish second at Atlanta.** Climb to eighth in points.
- **Finish 14<sup>th</sup> at Bristol,** but had **led six times for a race-high 267 laps** and was running second on the final lap before a tap by Kevin Harvick sent Stewart spinning in turn one. Climb to seventh in points.
- **Finish fifth at Martinsville,** but only after passing 11 cars in the race's final 107 laps. Climb to sixth in points.
- **Finish seventh at Texas.** Climb to fifth in points.
- **Finish 14<sup>th</sup> at Phoenix** after getting caught on pit road when the caution flag waved on lap 116. Fall to seventh in points.
- **Finish 38<sup>th</sup> at Talladega** after starting on the outside of row one, **leading seven times for a race-high 61 laps**, and even though a cut right-front tire sent his Home Depot Toyota scraping along the outside retaining wall in turns one and two on lap 143, Stewart rallied from 31<sup>st</sup> to again challenge for the win. But the run came undone when Stewart became involved in a multi-car accident on lap 174 that ended his race 14 laps short of the scheduled 188-lap distance. Fall to ninth in points.
- **Finish fourth at Richmond** after overcoming a balky alternator that sapped the amount of electrical power available inside his race car. Climb to eighth in points.
- **Finish 21<sup>st</sup> at Darlington** after a crash with Elliott Sadler on just the third lap of the 367-lap race thwarts what looked to be Stewart's strongest effort yet in a Sprint Cup race at Darlington. Remain eighth in points.
- **Finish 18<sup>th</sup> at Charlotte,** where Stewart had his first Sprint Cup victory of the 2008 season and the 33<sup>rd</sup> of his career in sight as he **led Kasey Kahne by more than five seconds in the waning laps of**

**the Coca-Cola 600.** But when Stewart radioed crew chief Greg Zipadelli that he had a flat right-front tire with less than three laps to go, victory escaped faster than the air from that tire. The subsequent unscheduled pit stop dropped Stewart from first to 18<sup>th</sup> and gift-wrapped the win for Kahne. Remain eighth in points.

- **Finish 41<sup>st</sup> at Dover** after getting involved in a massive pileup off turn two that claimed a total of 10 cars just 17 laps into the 400-lap race. Fall to 11<sup>th</sup> in points.
- **Finish 35<sup>th</sup> at Pocono**, where after **leading 14 laps** and running inside the top-10 for the majority of the race, a pit road speeding penalty on lap 177 of the 200-lap event dropped Stewart off the lead lap. Fall to 12<sup>th</sup> in points, the last spot before the cutoff for the 12-driver Chase for the Championship.
- **Finish fifth at Michigan** thanks to a gutsy call by Zipadelli to take four tires on the their final pit stop on lap 186 while others either stayed out on the race track in an effort to win the race on fuel mileage or took two tires to lessen their time on pit road. The four-tire pit call allowed Stewart to go all-out. He had all the fuel he needed to make it to the finish, and with four fresh Goodyears and a chassis that was the best it had been all day, Stewart was able to wheel the No. 20 Home Depot Toyota from 17<sup>th</sup> and into the top-five, as those ahead of him either had to pit for fuel or didn't have the tires to hold off Stewart. Climb to 11<sup>th</sup> in points.
- **Finish 10<sup>th</sup> at Sonoma** after rallying twice from deep in the 43-car field at the first road course race of the season. After starting 39<sup>th</sup> and **picking up 37 positions to run second to teammate and eventual race winner Kyle Busch by lap 104**, Stewart was punted two laps later in a chain-reaction crash in turn seven when Harvick overshot the corner and knocked Jamie McMurray's Ford into Stewart's Toyota. All three drivers spun, but Stewart quickly re-fired his No. 20 Home Depot Toyota and sped away in 19<sup>th</sup>. Even with four of the race's last eight laps run under two caution periods, the second of which set-up a green-white-checkered finish, Stewart **picked up nine positions**. Remain 11<sup>th</sup> in points.
- **Finish 13<sup>th</sup> at New Hampshire** after a deluge of rain thwarts yet another shot at victory. Stewart **led twice for a race-high 132 laps** in the rain-shortened race, and when rain cut the race 17 laps short of its scheduled 301-lap distance, Stewart was caught outside the top-10 after having to pit for fuel and right-side tires. Other teams gambled that they'd either have enough fuel to go the distance or that rain would end the race prematurely. All were ahead of Stewart when rain washed over the 1.058-mile oval. Climb to ninth in points.

And that's where Stewart is entering Saturday night's Coke Zero 400 in NASCAR's return to Daytona. Needless to say, the driver of the No. 20 Home Depot Toyota is zeroed in on the 400-mile contest, for he knows that at some point, proper preparation and smart execution have got to coincide to give him his first victory of 2008.

Daytona's July night race is a perfect venue for Stewart to kick the bad luck that's been dogging him and pick up his 33<sup>rd</sup> career Sprint Cup victory. Stewart has won the Coke Zero 400 at Daytona twice in his 10-year Sprint Cup career, and both times it has been in dominating fashion.

In July 2005, Stewart won the pole and led all but nine of the race's 160 laps (94.4 percent) en route to victory. And in a repeat performance of that winning drive in July 2006, Stewart started second and led a race-high 86 laps (53.8 percent).

Having led 600 of the 2,616 laps available in the past 14 races at Daytona and its sister track in Talladega, Ala., (22.9 percent), Stewart is ready to translate his up-front tendencies into the breakthrough win he's sought since finishing third in the Daytona 500 five months ago.

**Tony Stewart, driver of the No. 20 Home Depot Toyota for Joe Gibbs Racing:**

**Are you a believer in luck and superstition?**

“Absolutely. This year is proof that you can also have bad luck, too. We’ve just not had any luck all year. It seems like the races that we do get ourselves in good position, then toward the end something bad happens and we get out of that position. I think it’s that way in everything and every aspect of life. You have to have some luck on your side. There are people that you know that just have absolutely rotten luck, and no matter what they do, they just can’t get a break. It seems like in this sport it always comes around. For every bit of success you have, you’re going to have a low moment also, and it’s just weathering the storm and waiting until it gets back on a high note again.”

**Do you receive good luck charms from fans?**

“I’ve got enough stuff to fill the trunk up and the passenger side of The Home Depot Toyota with good luck trinkets. The good thing is that it shows how dedicated your fans are, and they want to give you something to try to help you have good luck. The hard part is that if you have another bad week, it’s trying to decipher which trinkets provided the bad luck. But it’s a good thing that the fans try to do what they can to get you going in the right direction.”

**What are some of the interesting good luck charms you’ve received?**

“It’s all been pretty much the same stuff. You always get someone who finds a four-leaf clover for you and somebody that has something in the shape of a horseshoe that they think is going to be good luck. At this point we’ll try anything. If we think it’s going to be good luck, then we’ll try it.”

**Despite the run of bad luck, you are running well and history indicates that it’s at this point of the season where you typically get hot by winning and winning often. Why are you always strong at this point in the season?**

“The wise-crack comment would be, ‘If I knew what it was, we would have done something nine years ago.’ I don’t know. I really don’t. The only thing that we can think of is that it seems that when the tracks get hotter and slipperier, that’s when we do a little better. I don’t know if it’s just the set of tracks that we come around this time of year or what. It is because for nine straight years it’s been this way, so I don’t want to break the string of 10 years in a row. Hopefully we’ll get on that run again here soon.”

**Are you happy with where the No. 20 team stands among the competition?**

“This business is strictly a week-to-week business. What you did last week may or may not work this week. The main reason for that is technology. Every week people are working to get their programs better than what they were the week before. If some organization hits on something, you could be a top-five car and all of a sudden struggle to be a top-10 car. That being said, I’m fairly happy with where we’re at. We just don’t have anything to show for it, and that’s what is so frustrating. There’s a lot of racing left. We want to win everywhere we go, and our team is working hard to do just that.”

**You’ve been in Sprint Cup for 10 years. When you first started in the series, you seemed frustrated after getting out of the car at Daytona and Talladega because you weren’t used to the draft and that style of racing. Now, you appear to be a master of the draft. Do you feel like you’ve come full circle when it comes to restrictor-plate racing?**

“If you’re smart, after 10 years, surely you’ll learn something. We’re not sending a space shuttle to the moon here, so it’s not like it was something that was out of our reach as far as trying to be able to learn. You hope that with 10 years of experience, you’d at least learn enough to keep yourself competitive. I don’t think we’re a master of the draft, but I do feel like we’ve learned enough about it. I think our record

speaks for itself for how many laps we've led and where we've been. We obviously know how to get ourselves in position to win. It's just sometimes finishing the race off has been the hard part."

**When you're in the draft, how much control do you feel you have inside the race car?**

"It depends on the circumstances. You can't see the air and you hit different pockets (of air). You hit a pocket where you get a real big tow or you hit a pocket where it seems they're getting a tow and pulling you back, and you just have to play the circumstances. That's why we spend so much time and run so many laps at practice. You just try getting in different scenarios and try to learn if you get in the middle of the draft, what does it do? Will it give you a push? Will it not give you a push? If you get next to this car, does it suck you up or does it slow you down? That's why so many guys will stay out for so long in practice. It's trial and error, but at the same time, it's like pulling a pin on a grenade. You know through that process that if one guy makes a mistake, the car's torn up for the race. It's just a delicate balance of how hard you go, how many things you try, and how much time you spend doing it."

**How difficult is it to win one race at Daytona, never mind two in a row?**

"The restrictor-plate races at Daytona are always a wild card race. You never know who's going to win. We were fortunate enough to win one and then back it up a year later. To do it back-to-back like that is something we're really proud of."

**Is Daytona drastically different in July than it is in February? Does it become even more of a handling race track?**

"Yes. Absolutely. It's probably five times more of a handling race track in July than it is in February because of the heat. Even though it might cool off a little bit at night, there's so much heat in the race track that it just stays there and soaks in the asphalt."

**In order to win a restrictor-plate race, you've got to have drafting help. How do you get that help? Is it something you develop over time?**

"I think it's more a situation of guys finding the fast cars, and you finding the guys that you know are going to go with you because they know you're quick. If they go with you, they're going to get you to the front, which is going to get them to the front. It's kind of 'help me, help you.'"

**How important is it to be part of a multi-car organization at a track like Daytona, where you have two teammates to draft with and you have an extra set of notes?**

"It definitely helps, but it doesn't always work out that way. You've still got 40 other guys out there that are trying to get in between you and break your cars up. It doesn't always work out the way you want it to."