

MPE Motorsports Report:

Mopar Mile-High NHRA Nationals
Bandimere Speedway
July 10-12, Morrison, Colo.,

Clay Millican
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Millican, Larsen ready to tackle oxygen-starved Mile-High Nationals atmospheric conditions

Twenty-three times a year, Top Fuel and Funny Car tuners go through the same routine while preparing for an upcoming NHRA Full Throttle Series race. Only once does that deviate, but when it does, tuning those nitromethane-guising engines can become a big headache.

That event, the aptly-named the Mopar Mile-High Nationals, unfolds Friday through Sunday at Bandimere Speedway in Morrison, Colo., near Denver. It is the 13th of 18 regular-season races and another important stop for Clay Millican and the Hope4Sudan/ Motorvation team in their bid to secure a top 10 finish and qualify for the six-race Countdown to the Championship that begins in September.

The track sits 5,860 feet in the rare air and, yes, lack of oxygen at that height is what causes the crew chiefs' anxiety.

During the last four races, Millican has climbed from 11th into 10th place. He now is only 38 points behind ninth-place Doug Kalitta as the 20th NHRA Western Swing – it includes stops at Seattle (July 19) and Sonoma, Calif. (July 26) – gets underway.

“This is just my second Top Fuel race at Denver,” Millican said, “but the last time Lance Larsen, our crew chief, tuned a dragster there was in 2007 and he was the No. 1 qualifier with driver Melanie Troxel. We plan to use that (tune-up) information wisely and get solidly qualified, and then see what we can do to inch closer to Kalitta on Sunday.

“I’m certainly glad I don’t tune the cars. I’m glad to leave that to Lance.”

Larsen accepts the challenge, but admits it can be gut-wrenching..

“On the first run, when you go up to the starting line at other tracks, you get butterflies in your stomach because you are so nervous about doing well,” Larsen said. “But, when you go to Denver, the situation is so extreme because of the altitude. It’s really nerve-racking. You want to throw up because it puts so much pressure on you. It does for everybody . . . and you can’t wait to get back down off the hill.



“They have great fans, great track and everything else, but it’s just that the conditions throw you so many curves that it is hard to run good up there.

“It is a mechanical challenge,” he added. “Years and years ago when I started doing this, that’s the thing that kept me enthused about it. And as the years have gone by, it does get a little easier. But the NHRA rules have changed (in recent years) and they lowered the percentage of nitro we can use, and then they took things away that allowed us to fix it. Denver is the only place in the world where you can’t make power, no matter what.”

Millican admits there are definite challenges in the oxygen-deprived air, “but,” he says, “with the track sitting on the mountain, it is such a cool place to race. This track is so unique and the race setup we use there is so different from anything we use anywhere else.”

The good news is all the teams are in the same oxygen-starved atmosphere . . . and they return to normal sea level conditions next week at Seattle.

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