



MPE Motorsports Report:

Summit Racing Equipment NHRA Nationals
Summit Motorsports Park
Norwalk, Ohio, June 26-28

Clay Millican
Drummonds, Tenn.
Hope4Sudan/Motorvation Top Fuel Dragster
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Clay Millican goes for another win at Norwalk; Lance Larsen pleased with car's recent performances

The thought of racing again at Bill Bader's Norwalk, Ohio-based Summit Motorsports Park speed emporium evokes many good memories for NHRA Top Fuel driver Clay Millican.

"We are going to a race track where I have won several times before in IHRA," he said. "It is one of my favorite tracks. I've been fast there and have won a lot of rounds there. It's one of those tracks I like going to. The last time I was there, in 2007, I was the No. 2 qualifier. It will be nice to get back."

In a TV network feel-good film, the happy ending of Millican's return to Norwalk would find him accepting hearty congratulations for adding yet another win to his track total, only this time it would be an important first in NHRA Full Throttle competition.

Such an accomplishment is certainly attainable, given recent performances of Millican, crew chief Lance Larsen and the Hope4Sudan/Motorvation team. After an unremarkable start that included two missed races, the Munford, Tenn.-based team flashed its winning potential in the recently-completed trio of races at Topeka (Kan.), Joliet (Ill.) and Englishtown (N.J.).

Millican was runner-up in the first outing, a semifinalist in the next and a quarterfinalist in the latter. He piled up enough Full Throttle markers to climb into 10th place, only 57 out of ninth in the fight for a Countdown to the Championship berth.

Larsen, the cool, calm and collected tuning guru, was at the forefront of the improved performances.

“We put a lot of effort into the turnaround,” he commented. “We had some things we were doing wrong, but we weren’t that far off all along. I’m happy for the guys; happy for Clay; and happy for (team owners) Mark and Lauren (Pickens).”

Larsen was able to isolate the cause of early-season headaches to the first 60 feet of the runs.

“All along, the car leaving the starting line was the problem,” he said. “It ran fine in the middle, ran good speed, and it wasn’t hard on the engine. It was pretty consistent so we just kept working and working on it. We went through a lull there where nothing was working exactly right because I became so obsessed with fixing the problem.

“It was still qualifying and making good runs. Now that we found what was up, we are having a little trouble getting the car to the finish line as often as I like, but it’s a lot faster, so it requires a little bit different touch, so to speak.

“The fact Mark and Clay are so much happier really makes my job so much easier.” Seven regular-season races remain and Larsen isn’t fretting about what lies ahead.

“I don’t want to look over my shoulder. We are in the top 10 now by the skin of our teeth (22 points), but we are in,” Larsen says. “I’m not as worried about No. 11 as I am about No. 9, because if we keep going rounds, No. 11 will have trouble catching us and, eventually, we’ll pass No. 9. And if someone should pass us, we’ll still be No. 10.

“Because we missed a race (at Las Vegas) and circumstances being what they were at Pomona (when rain limited qualifying to one attempt and Millican wound up 17th), I am pretty pleased we are in the top 10 at all. I don’t want to say I’m satisfied, but I am pleased. We need to continue to progress at about the same speed to get better.

“I can’t say enough about the guys and how they are working together,” Larsen continued. “To see the spring go back in their step and to see something happen in the last three races that’s never happened – you can be in the middle of doing something and without even asking, someone jumps in to help you. That’s the essence of a team and we definitely have that now. I look forward to every weekend with no trepidation at all because we get to race our car.”

Millican is also enjoying the car’s consistency. “The guys do have the car running very, very good. It’s nice to know every time you pull up to the starting line that you definitely have a car that can win the race. You have to do your job and that just makes it more fun when I know we’ve got a car that can win.”

Larsen believes in the team and its driver.

“I felt all along that this team has if not the best, certainly one of the best Top Fuel drivers to ever live. We just need to keep pursuing things. If we come to his level, we can’t be stopped. I realize there are extraneous factors that are involved, but if you want to be successful in life, when you reach the bar, you have to raise the bar. We reached it during those three weeks. Now we’ve raised it a little bit. Now we have to keep digging and trying to be successful.

“I want to bring one of those little gold men (an NHRA winner’s trophy) to Memphis; that’s the whole thing. And after we get one and get that out of the way, I want to bring the whole family back. It’s going to take time and all the effort in world on our part. Hopefully we can give Mark and Clay more tools to help us find funding so we can do this for decades and not worry from race to race.”

Another three races in succession – the traditional Western Swing – are scheduled for Denver (July 10-12), Seattle (July 17-19) and Sonoma, Calif. (July 24-26).

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