

Clay Millican
Drummonds, Tenn.
Hope4Sudan/Motorvation/Matco/Lucas Oil Top Fuel Dragster

NHRA Kragen O'Reilly Winternationals
February 5-8
Auto Club Raceway at Pomona, Calif.

New tune-up could lead Clay Millican to NHRA race victories

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A friendship could become the catalyst that ultimately leads Clay Millican to the National Hot Rod Association's Top Fuel winner's circle.

Limited by economics to a seven-race 2008 season, Lance Larsen, the Hope4Sudan/Motorvation team crew chief, used it wisely. He gleaned as much information as possible from each 1000-foot run as while stuffing his 2009 log book with tune-up possibilities.

When Larsen, Millican and team owner Mark Pickens opted to forgo pre-season testing, it afforded the affable tuner a chance to help old friend Brian Corradi and – as things unfolded – add to his own expertise.

Corradi, whom Larsen refers to as an “old friend,” recently was named crew chief for Top Fuel driver Antron Brown. Corradi has been tuning Funny Cars for much of his career and he and co-crew chief Mark Oswald sought Larsen's input on the nuances of making their dragster run quick and fast.

“Brian asked if I would come and watch what they did at the Phoenix test session,” said Larsen, “and we all learned from it. There were some things I saw that definitely will help our team, too. And I'm sure we'll continue to talk over the weekend.”

Drag racing fans will have the opportunity to see just how much each team learned when NHRA launches its first Full Throttle Series with the Kragen O'Reilly Nationals, Thursday through Sunday, at Pomona, Calif.

The Larsen-Corradi collaboration produced the pre-season's quickest 1000-foot time, 3.781 seconds, in the Matco Tools dragster during that Phoenix test outing. It's obviously the same kind of performance Larsen hopes to emulate for Millican.

“We had some fun at Phoenix and we were real pleased with the result,” said Larsen.

All this is tantalizing for Millican, the six-time IHRA champion, who desperately wants to lay his hands on his first Wally, a.k.a. NHRA's winner's trophy.

“Even though we didn't go to Phoenix,” said Millican, “it looks like Lance came up with a good tune-up for us. I'm really looking forward to the Winternationals. I'd like nothing better than to win the race so fans will quit asking me when I'm going to win an NHRA race.”

Millican's late season performance was solid considering there was very little on-track preparation before their August debut at Reading, Pa. – where he went to the semifinals. He qualified at all seven stops.

“This has been a very tough off-season for all of us in drag racing. We hope things turn around so we can start talking about racing again instead of economic news,” he added.

Four round wins on Sunday would give the loquacious Millican the perfect subject for discussion.

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Pro qualifying times are Thursday and Friday at 2 p.m. and 11:30 a.m. and 3 p.m. on Saturday. Sunday's eliminations begin at 11 a.m.

Television schedule on ESPN2 and ESPN2HD:

Saturday – two hours of qualifying highlights beginning at 10 p.m. (ET)

Sunday -- NHRA Race Day, a 30-minute news magazine show, 11:30 a.m. (ET); three hours and thirty minutes of coverage starting at 7 p.m. (ET)