



Mark Pickens goes from last to first in Top Sportsman Overnight

Mark Pickens, owner of Clay Millican's MPE Motorsports team, did not expect to compete in Saturday's special Top Sportsman Invitational NHRA Division 2 race because his 2007 Pontiac GTO didn't go down the track once during Friday qualifying.

"But my crew chief, David Slidewell, said we were going to run," said Pickens, who went on to eliminate every driver in the other lane during eliminations to pick up his third -- and totally unexpected -- Top Sportsman victory.

"David said to me this morning that we'll be fine," continued Pickens. "He said 'trust me, you'll do fine.' Trust in him and listening to Frank Hawley talking about what I needed to do made a big difference. That car ran 7.08 seconds all day."

Only 19 drivers were invited to compete, and none could keep up with Pickens, of Memphis. He won the championship at the starting line, leaving in .049-second to Jeff Brooks' .085. Pickens' win light came on 7.086 seconds later (at 192.82 mph) to Brooks' 6.929 at 196.99 mph.

"We really struggled in qualifying, but we made good runs on Saturday," Pickens said.

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