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TONY STEWART

Driver/Owner Role a Texas-Sized Challenge That's Being Met

KANNAPOLIS, N.C. (April 1, 2009) – Eyebrows were raised on July 10, 2008 when Tony Stewart announced that after spending his entire, 12-year NASCAR career with Joe Gibbs Racing, he was leaving to become a driver/owner in the NASCAR Sprint Cup Series with Stewart-Haas Racing. The last driver/owner to win a Sprint Cup race was Ricky Rudd on Sept. 27, 1998 at Martinsville (Va.) Speedway, and many pundits saw Stewart's new undertaking as a massive, if not impossible, challenge.

Fast forward to last Sunday at the same Martinsville Speedway. It was there where Stewart, in just his sixth race as a driver/owner, finished third in the Goody's Fast Pain Relief 500. Augmenting Stewart's best result of the year was the effort of his Stewart-Haas Racing teammate Ryan Newman, who came home a season-best sixth.

Stewart is now slotted a healthy seventh in points with round seven of the marathon-like, 36-race Sprint Cup schedule at Texas Motor Speedway in Fort Worth next up on the Sprint Cup docket.

Thanks to four top-10 finishes in the season's first six races, the driver of the No. 14 Old Spice/Office Depot Chevrolet Impala SS has been messing with the conventional thinking that driver/owners can't make it in NASCAR. And come Sunday's Samsung 500, Stewart gets to mess with Texas, despite the preponderance of bumper stickers in the Lone Star State advising him to do just the opposite.

Tell Stewart "No" and it's bound to make him more determined. In fact, it's practically an invitation. So, the slogan "Don't Mess with Texas" might as well be embossed on fancy stationary and addressed to one Anthony Wayne Stewart.

Stewart has been messing around in Texas since November 1995 when he drove A.J. Foyt's Indy car at Texas World Speedway in College Station during a commercial shoot. And while those laps were a long way from an actual race, the then 24-year-old Stewart parlayed his time with Foyt – the racing icon for whom he is named after – into a full-fledged drive in the IRL IndyCar Series that brought Stewart back to Texas in 1997.

Before Stewart became synonymous with stock cars, he was the poster child for the IRL. In his three IRL races at Texas Motor Speedway, Stewart started on the pole twice (June 1997 and June 1998) and second once (September 1998). And while he never finished an IRL race at the 1.5-mile oval – engine failures hampered him in June 1997 and September 1998 and mechanical woes sidelined him in June 1998 – Stewart still led 208 of a possible 624 laps (33.4 percent).

The Texas trophies he was unable to attain in Indy cars were found in stock cars.

In November 2006 – Stewart's 10th trip to Texas as a Sprint Cup driver – he dominated, leading eight times for a race-high 278 laps en route to victory. Serving as a precursor to that win was Stewart's drive seven months earlier when the four-race International Race of Champions (IROC) visited Texas. Stewart won that April race and then followed it with another victory on the road course at Daytona (Fla.) International Speedway. With a third-place finish in the season finale at Atlanta Motor Speedway, Stewart secured his first IROC championship – the last in the 30-year history of IROC.

Its memories like those, along with the strong friendship Stewart has with Texas Motor Speedway President Eddie Gossage, which makes Texas a welcome venue for Stewart.

Now, the two-time Sprint Cup champion returns to Gossage's playground ready to prove himself all over again. Buoyed by the podium finish he scored last Sunday at Martinsville, Stewart sees the exquisitely carved wooden cowboy boot that serves as the trophy for the Samsung 500 as the perfect metaphor to kick conventional thinking to the curb and score his first win as a driver/owner and the 34th of his Sprint Cup career.

TONY STEWART, Driver of the No. 14 Old Spice/Office Depot Chevrolet Impala SS for Stewart-Haas Racing:

Now that you're invested as both a driver and an owner with Stewart-Haas Racing, how much did that third-place finish last Sunday at Martinsville Speedway mean to you?

"I remember when we won our first World of Outlaws Sprint Car Series race in 2001 and how proud I was then to be a car owner. It was that moment that kind of led us to where we are today.

"I'm so proud of everyone at Stewart-Haas Racing. I've left Martinsville after a third-place finish mad because I knew we had a shot at winning the race or at least a shot at a better finish than third. But this third-place finish was like a win to us. A year from now, it won't necessarily be like that. I think we'll constantly adjust the yardstick as far as where we expect to be. But six races in, to have a top-three run like that, and for Ryan to have a sixth-place run, I felt that was an awesome accomplishment for a young team.

"That's the car owner side of me talking, because I know where we started and what we're up against. I like that success. I like that feeling when we have a good day. The success isn't just necessarily measured by wins, it's also measured by seeing where you stack up against the competition. To know the teams that we're up against every week, but to know that in six weeks we've been able to get right in the middle of those teams, that's something we're really proud of."

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How does a strong run as an owner compare to winning as a driver?

“It does, but it doesn’t. A win is more of an individual feeling, where as a team owner, you’re happy for the whole organization. I think being a car owner has helped put it in perspective – that it’s not just a personal accomplishment. You always know it’s a team effort. When you’re at that shop as much as we are, and when you’re there to build this organization and to see these people come in from all these different great teams, and to see it grow, it makes that satisfaction of watching it grow that much greater.”

With four top-10s in the season’s first six races – including two at the intermediate-type tracks that make up the majority of the Sprint Cup schedule – how do you feel coming into Texas with a new team and a car that is set-up differently from what you were used to at Joe Gibbs Racing?

“I feel like our superspeedway program is really good. We’ve been to California, which is a two-mile oval. We’ve been to Las Vegas and Atlanta, which are mile-and-a-halves. Our mile-and-a-half package is really good, even though we’ve really run only two of them. I have a lot of confidence going into this weekend. Texas is a track that I really enjoy. It’s a lot of fun. I feel like we’re going to have a good run this weekend. I have that gut feeling. I don’t have any facts other than just my gut to support it right now, but I’ve been comfortable everywhere we’ve been with this new package that Darian (Grubb, crew chief) has brought. I feel like this weekend will fall right in line with that.”

After spending your entire Sprint Cup career up until this season with one crew chief, what’s it been like getting to know your new crew chief at Stewart-Haas, Darian Grubb?

“From day one we’ve felt very comfortable around each other. So from that side, it’s been really easy. At the racetrack, obviously it’s taken me a little bit of time to get used to the cars that we’re bringing to the racetrack. But every week that we go out and have a good run, I gain that much more confidence in him and in the relationship we have. Our communication just keeps getting stronger and stronger each week. We’re getting to the point where we’re starting to narrow that gap of when I say, ‘Well, it’s a little loose,’ how much ‘a little’ is. Things like that just take time, but Darian and I are having a lot of success in that category, and we’re getting more comfortable with each other each week.”

Before you raced at Texas in a stock car, you raced there in an Indy car. What was the difference?

“The IRL car was nothing like driving a stock car. You could go anywhere on the track with the IRL car that you wanted to, and you could run wide-open while doing it. It was as easy as riding down the interstate, whereas with a stock car, you’re not off the gas very long, but you do have to lift. With the track being so line-sensitive, it’s really important that you’re doing the same thing every lap, and making sure you’re very consistent in how you’re driving the car.”

You and Texas Motor Speedway President Eddie Gossage have developed quite the rapport. How did your friendship begin?

“We’ve just been friends for a long time. Eddie’s always been good to us, and we’ve spent time on the Kyle Petty Charity Ride and we’ve worked on some charity events together. He’s a great guy, and someone I’ve looked to for help in my career as a track promoter at Eldora Speedway. Eddie and everyone on his staff has always been a group that we enjoy working with and have had fun with, and that’s something that makes the Texas race weekend a lot more enjoyable.”

TONY STEWART’S TEXAS PERFORMANCE PROFILE

Year	Event	Start	Finish	Status/Laps	Laps Led	Earnings
2008	×Samsung 500	24	7	Running, 339/339	0	\$206,841
	Dickies 500	8	16	Running, 334/334	0	\$149,811
2007	†Samsung 500	9	25	Running, 332/334	0	\$146,861
	Dickies 500	15	11	Running, 334/334	0	\$159,361
2006	Samsung/RadioShack 500	40	3	Running, 334/334	99	\$286,386
	×Dickies 500	8	1	Running, 339/339	278	\$521,361
2005	Samsung/RadioShack 500	10	31	Engine, 296/334	45	\$131,311
	Dickies 500	16	6	Running, 334/334	15	\$190,486
2004	Samsung/RadioShack 500	17	8	Running, 334/334	0	\$156,453
2003	Samsung/RadioShack 500	22	34	Engine, 293/334	0	\$113,728
2002	Samsung/RadioShack 500	29	5	Running, 334/334	15	\$168,053
2001	Harrah’s 500	41	23	Running, 331/334	0	\$82,400
2000	DirecTV 500	38	9	Running, 334/334	0	\$99,225
1999	Primestar 500	19	6	Running, 334/334	0	\$107,315

× Race length extended due to green-white-checker finish.

† Qualifying canceled due to weather, starting position set via car owner points.

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