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TONY STEWART

Strength of Schedule

KANNAPOLIS, N.C. (March 4, 2009) – Three races into the 2009 NASCAR Sprint Cup Series season and Tony Stewart’s foray into team ownership has proven to be impressive. While the 36-race marathon that is the Sprint Cup schedule is still very young, Stewart has shown that he can handle his dual role of driver and owner with aplomb.

Stewart has piloted his No. 14 Office Depot/Old Spice Chevrolet Impala SS to eighth in the championship point standings, where he is only 80 points behind series leader Jeff Gordon. Back-to-back eighth-place results in the year’s first two races at Daytona (Fla.) International Speedway and Auto Club Speedway in Fontana, Calif., placed Stewart in a tie for third in points entering last weekend’s race at Las Vegas Motor Speedway.

There, Stewart again had a strong car, as he qualified 10th and ran as high as second. A loose left-rear wheel thwarted what appeared to be a third straight top-10 effort, instead delivering a 26th-place result. Nonetheless, Stewart remained upbeat. His car was fast, and so was the Chevy of his Stewart-Haas Racing teammate, Ryan Newman, who suffered the same fate as Stewart at Las Vegas with a loose left-rear wheel that dropped him to 25th.

That Stewart was actually pleased with the overall effort and unencumbered by the end result speaks to two important facts: As a driver/owner, Stewart sees everything in the big picture sense, and Fontana and Las Vegas are bellwether tracks for how one will perform at many of the other intermediate tracks that make up the majority of the Sprint Cup schedule.

Run well at Fontana and Las Vegas, the theory goes, and you’ll run well at such stops as Atlanta Motor Speedway in Hampton, Ga., Texas Motor Speedway in Fort Worth, Lowe’s Motor Speedway near Charlotte, N.C. and Michigan International Speedway in Brooklyn – all tracks Stewart and his Sprint Cup counterparts will visit in the next four months.

It’s where seasons are shaped, for better or worse, with Atlanta being the next litmus test for teams via this weekend’s Kobalt Tools 500.

Stewart has two wins at the ultra-fast 1.54-mile oval, the first coming in the 2002 spring race and the latter coming in the 2006 fall race, where the two-time Sprint Cup champion showed off his version of Oktoberfest by leading seven times for a race-high 146 laps. Stewart followed up that win with another victory the very next week at Texas, the sister track to Atlanta.

Stewart continued his up-front ways when he returned to Atlanta the following March. In just the fifth race of the 2007 season, Stewart battled with Jimmie Johnson and led five times for 121 laps before finishing second to him. And in a case of déjà vu, Stewart finished second again, this time to Kyle Busch, when the series returned to Atlanta last March. The runner-up result was Stewart’s 12th top-10 finish in 20 career Sprint Cup races at Atlanta.

With a history of strong runs at Atlanta, especially recently with consecutive second-place finishes in the spring race, Stewart is intent on continuing to prove his worth as a driver/owner by taking care of business in Atlanta.

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

Despite your finish last week at Las Vegas, it was another race where you and your new team ran well. Are you happy with where your team is three races into the season?

“There’s still question marks I’m sure with a lot of people, ‘Can we do this?’ and three weeks in a row we’ve gone out and run well. We didn’t get the physical finish at Las Vegas that we deserved, but we had a good performance on the racetrack. Every weekend I’ve had cars that I’ve been extremely comfortable in. That’s half the battle. That’s half the worry you have as a driver when you get into a new program. It’s, ‘How is this package compared to what I’ve been driving?’ and I’ve been very, very happy with that. The pit stops have been good. All the variables and pieces are there, if we get a little luck on our side, we’re going to nail one of these down. Every time I leave the racetrack, it just gives me confidence that we’re going to be something to contend with at the end of the year.”

Has your new role as a Sprint Cup team owner changed your role as a driver?

“It hasn’t because I take the owner’s hat off on Thursday night when I get to the racetrack and put it back on Monday. I’m still dealing with three pedals and a shifter when I get in the car. It’s the same thing as it was last year whether I was a driver or an owner. That’s the reality of it. My job when I get in the car is to drive the car. It’s not until Monday that I focus on being an owner. It’s a full-time job being a driver, but Monday to Thursday when I’m not being a driver, we still have to shuffle things around like appearances and media days and try to figure out how we need to meet all these obligations. It’s been something that I think we’ve all been pretty efficient about so far.”

Has the team owner part of you calmed down the driver part of you, at least outside of the racecar?

“I think it’s probably calmed me down a little bit from the standpoint that there’s 150 people at the shop that I’m responsible for and it’s not only them. It’s their spouses, their girlfriends, their children, so that number easily turns into 450. Everything that you do you try to keep in mind how it’s going to affect yourself, but how it also affects the other people in your organization.”

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What makes Atlanta different from a lot of the other 1.5-mile ovals the Sprint Cup Series visits?

“The neat thing is that the times fall off so guys move around on the racetrack more. Everybody starts at the bottom, and the fast guys normally end up right around the wall midway through a run. That is something that is different than Charlotte and some of the other tracks on the circuit. I like having the flexibility to be able to move around. I know that if my car isn’t driving all that well in a particular spot that I have the flexibility as a driver to move around on the racetrack. You can make a difference. It’s like Michigan where you can move around and help yourself as a driver, versus being committed and whatever you’ve got, you’ve got. It does make you feel better as a driver to know you have that flexibility.”

With the current generation car, how fine of a line is it to find a comfort level when you’re out on the racetrack at speed, particularly at Atlanta when you’re running over 200 mph?

“Well I don’t know that it’s a fine line. I mean, either you’re comfortable or you’re not. Nothing is happening this year that hasn’t happened for 100 years in racing. There’s nothing magical or mysterious going on here. Everybody is going out every week and we’re working with technology, but still at the end of the day, you’ve got a driver that’s driving the car. No matter how fast the computer says that car is going to be, if that driver is not comfortable driving it, then they’re not going to go fast. So you’ve got to tune these cars to the drivers and their feels, and that’s what makes them go fast.”

Despite the history of good racing at Atlanta, the track has struggled to sell all of its tickets, as have some other tracks on the Sprint Cup circuit. Do you think it’s because of the economy, or are there other factors at play?

“Everyone wants to do their part to make it better, and I’m not sure we know exactly what that answer is. But our intentions are to do what we can to help make it a better experience for the fans every week. It’s one thing for the economy to be bad, but we’re competing in a time where everything is on the Internet and there are so many things for people to do. The simplest part about what we do here every weekend is we’re in the entertainment industry, and we’re competing against everybody else, whether it’s high school football on Friday night or whatever. We’re trying to figure out how we get these people to come watch us do what we love to do. And that’s the challenge for track owners and sanctioning bodies. It’s ‘How do you make it better?’ When the economy is bad like this, it’s that much tougher of a challenge. You try and find more ways to make it more efficient for the people to come watch us do what we love to do every week.”

TONY STEWART’S ATLANTA PERFORMANCE PROFILE

Year	Event	Start	Finish	Status/Laps	Laps Led	Earnings
2008	Kobalt Tools 500	32	2	Running, 325/325	0	\$162,866
	Pep Boys Auto 500	8	17	Running, 325/325	0	\$140,211
2007	Kobalt Tools 500	13	2	Running, 325/325	121	\$165,461
	xPep Boys Auto 500	30	30	Running, 323/329	0	\$130,461
2006	Golden Corral 500	21	5	Running, 325/325	50	\$154,961
	†Bass Pro Shops 500	11	1	Running, 325/325	146	\$373,286
2005	Golden Corral 500	9	17	Running, 325/325	0	\$115,861
	Bass Pro Shops/MBNA 500	10	9	Running, 325/325	1	\$143,311
2004	Golden Corral 500	19	7	Running, 325/325	127	\$133,778
	Bass Pro Shops/MBNA 500	15	9	Running, 324/325	0	\$130,063
2003	Bass Pro Shops/MBNA 500 I	8	5	Running, 325/325	17	\$112,578
	Bass Pro Shops/MBNA 500 II	24	2	Running, 325/325	109	\$207,678
2002	MBNA America 500	9	1	Running, 325/325	143	\$174,978
	*†NAPA 500	1	4	Running, 248/248	39	\$137,178
2001	Cracker Barrel 500	5	12	Engine, 320/325	0	\$55,020
	NAPA 500	12	9	Running, 325/325	33	\$78,650
2000	Cracker Barrel 500	27	34	Accident, 270/325	0	\$44,035
	NAPA 500	17	38	Accident, 195/325	0	\$54,625
1999	Cracker Barrel 500	3	11	Running, 325/325	2	\$35,815
	NAPA 500	30	15	Running, 324/325	1	\$55,815

x Race length extended due to green-white-checker finish. / † Qualifying canceled due to weather, starting position set via car owner points. / * Race cut short due to weather.

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