



COLE CUSTER

Second 1.5-Mile Venue of the Season

KANNAPOLIS, North Carolina (March 11, 2020) – Cole Custer and the No. 41 Haas Automation Ford Mustang team for Stewart-Haas Racing (SHR) will compete at Atlanta Motor Speedway Sunday in this season’s second event at an intermediate track. Custer will make his first career NASCAR Cup Series start at the 1.54-mile track in Sunday’s Folds of Honor 500.

Custer heads to Atlanta coming off of his best career Cup Series finish, ninth, earned at Phoenix Raceway. The young driver was also the highest finishing 2020 Rookie of the Year contender. The Haas Automation driver started 16th and battled an intermittent power steering problem along with a tight-handling Mustang and finished ninth in the 316-lap event. It was a solid day for the four-car SHR organization with all four entries finishing in the top-10 in the season’s fourth race.

For the last five seasons, Atlanta was the second race of the season. The track is significant because it’s a 1.5-mile layout and a majority of the tracks on the Cup Series circuit are that length and similarly shaped. If things go well this weekend at Atlanta for Custer and the SHR organization, it bodes well for the team’s competitiveness on the same style of track for the rest of the season.

SHR has two wins at the Georgia track – Kevin Harvick in 2018 and team co-owner Tony Stewart in September 2010. Additionally, the Kannapolis, North Carolina team has amassed four pole awards and a total of nine top-fives and nine top-10s, in 39 starts there.

Custer has three starts at Atlanta in the NASCAR Xfinity Series with two top-10 finishes in three starts. Last year, he captured the pole position and finished second to Christopher Bell. He has one Gander RV & Outdoors Truck Series start at Atlanta. He started sixth in 2016 and finished 17th.

In his last nine Xfinity Series starts at 1.5-mile tracks, Custer earned two wins, four top-fives, six top-10s and one pole award. The victories were captured at Chicagoland Speedway in Joliet, Illinois, and Kentucky Speedway in Sparta. He led a total of 410 laps in the nine starts on his way to an average finishing position of 10.4 and an average starting position of 3.2.

The 22-year-old has made two starts at intermediate tracks behind the wheel of a Cup Series car, both at Las Vegas Motor Speedway. The first occurred in March 2018, when he started 30th and finished 25th for the No. 51 Rick Ware Racing team. The second was in his No. 41 Mustang last month, when he started 17th and finished 19th.

“The Xfinity cars have more horsepower than the Cup cars at the bigger tracks, but the Cup cars have a lot more downforce and drag,” Custer said. “The Cup cars are going slower down the straightaways, but much faster in the corners. For me, the biggest difference is getting used to how much speed I can actually carry into the corner with the Cup car, when I’ve been doing something different for three years.”

Haas Automation, founded in 1983 by SHR co-owner Gene Haas, is America’s leading builder of CNC machine tools. The company manufactures a complete line of vertical and horizontal machining centers, turning centers and rotary tables and indexers. All Haas products are constructed in the company’s 1.1 million-square-foot Oxnard manufacturing facility and distributed through a worldwide network of Haas Factory Outlets.

Even though Custer had a trio of starts in the Cup Series in 2018, 2020 officially marks his Rookie of the Year campaign in NASCAR’s most prestigious series. He’s competing for the honor with notables Christopher Bell and Tyler Reddick. The three have battled against each other in the Xfinity Series and are making the full-time transition to the Cup Series together.

Cole Custer, Driver of the No. 41 Haas Automation Mustang for Stewart-Haas Racing:

What do you do to decompress after a race?

“It’s hard to decompress because all we think about is racing. I try and hang out with friends. We have a lake near the house in North Carolina and I like to go out on the boat with friends as a way to relax. I golf a little here and there, too.”

What is the biggest difference for you between the Xfinity and Cup Series?

“I think, for me, it is getting used to the cars. They are a lot different, especially with the 550 package, and how you work the throttle and everything. How you are going to do that is a lot different than Xfinity. At the same time, you make one little mistake and are a little off in one area, you will lose a ton of spots. Everybody here is pushing it to the limit. Everyone in the top-25 in the Cup Series is probably capable of winning races. It is a matter of trying to perfect every part of it.”

Have you had any pranks pulled on you as a Cup Series rookie?

“Nothing yet, but I’m waiting for it. I feel a guy like (Clint) Bowyer is probably going to be the first one to pull a prank on me. Who wouldn’t pick Bowyer as the first person to do it?”

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