



COLE CUSTER

Headed to Phoenix

KANNAPOLIS, North Carolina (March 3, 2020) – Cole Custer and the No. 41 Haas Automation Ford Mustang team for Stewart-Haas Racing (SHR) head to Phoenix Raceway for Sunday’s FanShield 500k. Sunday’s main event marks the third and final race on the NASCAR Cup Series 2020 West Coast Swing with the previous two races being Las Vegas Motor Speedway and Auto Club Speedway in Fontana, California.

This weekend’s race is of special significance because, when the Cup Series returns to the Arizona venue in November, it will be for the season finale. This is the first year Phoenix will have hosted Championship Weekend. Everything learned this weekend will become crucial for having a successful final race of the season.

SHR has fared well at the mile oval at Phoenix. Its six wins there are more than SHR has garnered at any other track. Custer’s teammate Kevin Harvick has five of those Phoenix wins while driving under the SHR banner. The young Custer leans on his veteran teammate Harvick for advice as he ventures through his Cup career. “I talk with Kevin every week prior to practice to try and get an idea of the things I need to look for around the track, things he’s found, and what he’s fought in the past,” Custer said. “He’s been a huge help, and Clint and Aric have been helpful, too.”

The 22-year-old Custer started 18th last weekend at his home track in Fontana. He battled a tight-handling Mustang before finishing 18th at the 2-mile oval.

Custer has six starts at Phoenix in the NASCAR Xfinity Series with an average starting position of 3.8 and an average finishing position of 8.3. In total, the Ford driver has two top-fives, which includes a runner-up finish last November, and five top-10s, along with six laps led in six starts. Additionally, Custer has three starts in the NASCAR Gander RV & Outdoors Truck Series at Phoenix with a best finish of fourth earned in November 2014.

“The biggest transition from the Xfinity Series to the Cup Series for me has been the feel of the cars,” Custer said. “We don’t get a lot of time to practice, anymore. We get about two hours of practice during the weekend and that’s pretty much it. There isn’t any testing, anymore, so it’s just me trying to get acclimated the best that I can.”

En route to his career in NASCAR’s premiere series, the SHR driver made three starts at Phoenix in the NASCAR K&N West Series for Bill McAnally Racing, which resulted in two pole awards and one win during the 2013 and 2014 seasons. Custer won the February 2014 race with a .376-of-a-second margin of victory.

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 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. Custer was the second-highest-finishing rookie at Fontana last weekend with his 18th-place result.

In the Cup Series at Phoenix, Ford currently has 16 victories. The season is off to a strong start for the Blue Oval with Ford holding the top two spots in all three of NASCAR’s top series.

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

Why do you walk pit road before the race?

“I walk it so I don’t miss the pit box. There are so many boxes and it’s sometimes hard to see where your sign is. I do it to give me reference points and get acclimated.

What will you do when you win your first race?

“I don’t know what I will do. It would be huge, I’m not going to lie. It would mean the world to me win but, right now, I have to take it one step at a time.”

Who were some of your favorite drivers growing up?

“They aren’t huge names, but I always liked Jason Leffler and Johnny Sauter growing up. I got to race against Johnny when I was in the Truck Series, which was pretty cool. Those guys are both hard racers.”

What are your favorite types of tracks to race on?

“I like all of the bigger, worn-out tracks. Tracks like Homestead-Miami and Chicago are pretty good to me.”

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Contact Lauren Emling with True Speed Communication
(704) 875-3388, ext. 811 or Lauren.Emling@TrueSpeedCommunication.com
www.TrueSpeedCommunication.com • Online Media Kit Available at: www.TrueSpeedMedia.com