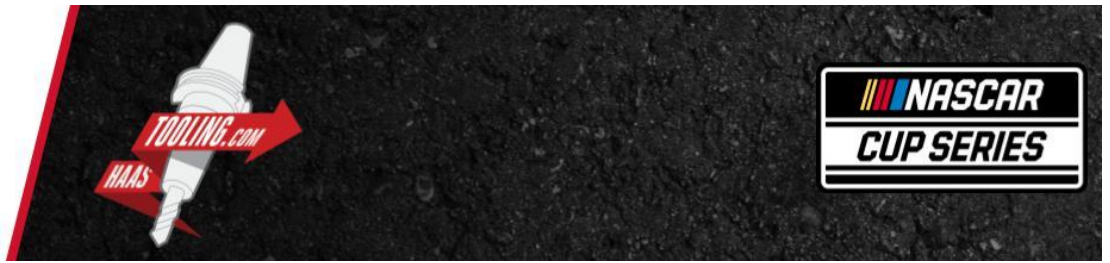


# 41



## COLE CUSTER

### First Charlotte Cup Series Start

KANNAPOLIS, North Carolina (May 22, 2020) – This Sunday, Cole Custer and the No. 41 HaasTooling.com Ford Mustang team for Stewart-Haas Racing (SHR) makes the short trek to Charlotte (N.C.) Motor Speedway for Sunday’s 61<sup>st</sup> running of the iconic Coca-Cola 600 NASCAR Cup Series race. Custer’s Mustang will once again highlight SHR co-owner Gene Haas’ newest holding, HaasTooling.com. [Haas Tooling](#) was launched just weeks ago as a way for CNC machinists to purchase high quality cutting tools at great prices. Haas’ cutting tools will be sold exclusively online at HaasTooling.com and shipped directly to end users.

While racing has returned, SHR’s contribution to help fight the COVID-19 pandemic hasn’t stopped. The race shop is serving dual purposes – race team and medical device manufacturer. SHR has partnered with healthcare provider [Novant Health](#) to produce intensive care unit mobile webcam carts. The carts allow a medical professional to monitor a patient electronically, ultimately limiting the professional’s possible exposure to COVID-19. Additionally, SHR helped transport and deliver 2 million facemasks to replenish Novant’s supplies during the pandemic.

In the first two Cup Series events since the onset of the pandemic, both at Darlington (S.C.) Raceway, Custer finished 22<sup>nd</sup> last Sunday and 31<sup>st</sup> Wednesday night. Sunday’s race was his first in the Cup Series at the 1.366-mile egg-shaped oval.

Sunday’s Coca-Cola 600 is NASCAR’s longest event of the season, requiring the drivers, crew members and cars to be in excellent shape to go the extra distance. Most NASCAR races are 400 or 500 miles. Even though the Coca-Cola 600 is a grueling race, Custer’s goal is a solid finish. “We need to build consistency in these races and work up from there,” he said. “We’re definitely making gains with this package. It’s just figuring out how to improve every race.”

The traditional Memorial Day weekend event is bringing some normalcy during the COVID-19 outbreak. NASCAR is a longtime supporter of the United States military, and this weekend will be no different. For the past several years during the spring holiday weekend, NASCAR has worked with the families of fallen soldiers to be recognized on each Cup Series racecar. Custer’s No. 41 Mustang will carry the name of Dillon Baldrige, who was an Army sergeant based in Fort Campbell, Kentucky, and was part of 1-187 Rakassans, 101st Airborne Division. The 22-year-old was killed in Nangarhar Province, Afghanistan, when an Afghan soldier opened fire in an apparent inside attack. The Taliban claimed responsibility for the attack. Baldrige, a native of Youngsville, North Carolina, died on June 10, 2017.

“It’s definitely really cool how we honor the fallen military members on our cars,” Custer said. “NASCAR has always done a really good job saluting the military and everything they’ve done for our country to keep us safe. We wouldn’t be here without the military. Especially during these times, you really appreciate the people who risk their lives for us. I think it’s really cool that we do this and hopefully we can give them a good run.”

While Sunday marks Custer’s first Cup Series start on Charlotte’s 1.5-mile oval, the Ford driver has good track record there in the Xfinity Series. Even though he hasn’t visited victory lane there, he’s finished inside the top-10 in all seven starts, the only exception being in May 2019.

The California native has one Charlotte appearance in the NASCAR Gander RV & Outdoors Truck series, starting 16<sup>th</sup> and finishing 13<sup>th</sup> in 2016.

SHR has 62 Cup Series starts at Charlotte with one victory earned by No. 4 Ford driver Kevin Harvick in 2014. In total, the Kannapolis-based team has seven top-fives, 22 top-10s, and five pole awards there.

Haas Automation, founded in 1983 by 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 manufacturing facility in Oxnard, California, 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 top series. He's competing for rookie honors 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 HaasTooling.com Mustang for Stewart-Haas Racing:***

**One of the biggest differences from the Xfinity Series to the Cup Series is the length of the races. Sunday's Coke 600 is the longest of the season, how are you physically and mentally preparing for the lengthy race?**

"The 600 is definitely a lot longer than what we've done in the Xfinity cars and it's definitely the longest race I've ever run. I think the biggest thing is staying hydrated and making sure you're loose before the race and not sore. Just try and relax, especially in the first part of the race. At halfway you just need to try and settle in and get some laps done. The thing about it is you can't really relax too much because you have to fight for the stage points, and fight for track position as much as you can. You have to stay hydrated. I guess I'll probably need a snack in there somewhere, too, but it's definitely going to be the longest, most grueling race that I've run."

**You've had two races since we've been back, including a rain delay. Do you feel like you're starting to get into some sort of routine – on and off the track with competition meetings, etc.?**

"I feel like we are getting in more of a routine. It seems like we were all kind of new at the start and didn't know what to expect. Then, as it's all kind of come together, we've been able to calm down and get in a rhythm. Now, I think it's just trying to perfect things and get in a better rhythm. We're trying to figure out how we can excel at every single part of the weekend. We're just going to keep working at it and get better every race."

**Your Xfinity Series track record at Charlotte is pretty strong – all top-10 finishes with the exception of your oval finish last year. Why do you think you've excelled on both courses at Charlotte?**

"Charlotte has always been a good track for me. I've always run pretty good there. It's definitely one of the most difficult mile-and-a-half tracks that we go to because it's so edgy. It's starting to get bumpy and you have to move around a little bit. It's definitely a challenging mile-and-a-half to race on. It's worked out for me and been good to me in the past. It's just a matter of trying to figure out how you can work traffic in these cars and work your way to the front."

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