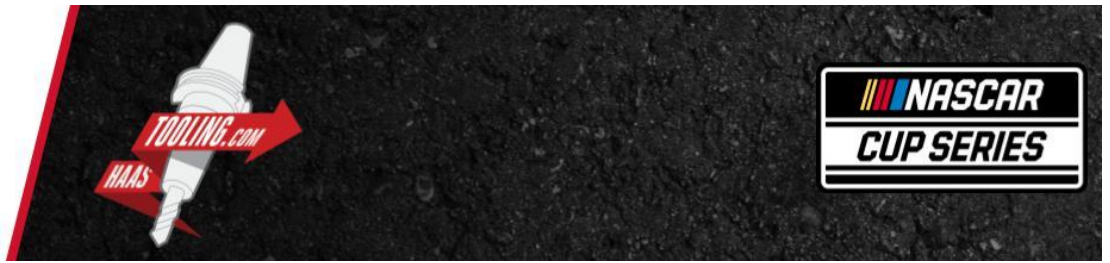


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COLE CUSTER

A Second Consecutive Cup Series Start at Darlington

KANNAPOLIS, North Carolina (May 18, 2020) – Cole Custer and the No. 41 HaasTooling.com Ford Mustang team for Stewart-Haas Racing (SHR) head back to Darlington (S.C.) Raceway on Wednesday for the second consecutive event at the egg-shaped oval. Custer’s Mustang will once again highlight 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.

After much anticipation, the 2020 NASCAR season resumed Sunday with a 400-mile race at Darlington. Custer received the 14th starting position after a drawing was held to set the field. The Cup Series rookie had a strong run in Stage 1 of the race but, after his car’s handling tightened up, he was relegated to a 22nd-place result. The 22-year-old feels fortunate to have another opportunity to master the South Carolina “Track Too Tough To Tame” Wednesday night.

“I think we definitely made gains during Sunday’s race,” Custer said. “The car drove fairly well. I think if I would’ve gotten a little more confident with running the wall, that we could’ve had a better day. I think we’re going in the right direction. It’s just a matter of working out the little things and being a rookie, and we’ll be on the right track.”

Riding along with the California native for Wednesday’s race will be Novant Health employee Dean Hines. Hines is part of NASCAR’s support of The Real Heroes initiative. He has been a patient transporter at Novant Health Matthews Medical Center since 2011. Hines, who calls himself a huge NASCAR fan, is from Kinston, North Carolina. Hines is said to always put his patients first. His contributions to the hospital, especially during these uncertain times, warrant the honor of him riding along with Custer at Darlington. Hines’ patients are always complimenting him for instinctively knowing how to comfort them with his kind words of healing and understanding during their darkest times. Along with his passion for people, Hines also enjoys playing multiple musical instruments with his band on the weekends.

SHR has 39 starts at Darlington and two victories, both earned by No. 4 driver Kevin Harvick – one in 2014, and most recently on Sunday after Harvick led a race-high 159 laps. In total, the Kannapolis-based Ford team has 11 top-fives and 19 top-10s in the Cup Series at the South Carolina track.

Harvick hit a career win milestone with Sunday’s victory. “It’s pretty cool seeing Kevin get to 50 wins,” Custer said. “He’s been on a tear and it’s pretty impressive to watch. Being able to be this close to it and see how he goes about it, and how he prepares for a weekend and thinks about things. I think he’s different than anybody else on how he puts it all together, and I’m sure he’s going to win a lot more races.”

Haas Automation, founded in 1983 by SHR co-owner 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 most prestigious 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. Custer was the third-highest-finishing rookie at Darlington Sunday and looks to improve his position Wednesday night.

Cole Custer, Driver of the No. 41 HaasTooling.com Mustang for Stewart-Haas Racing:**What did race day feel like Sunday after the 10-week hiatus?**

“It was definitely different. I think the strangest thing was how quiet it was before and after the race, without the fans. But other than that, it was kind of back to normal – driving to the track and climbing in the car. But it was definitely strange not having the fans there.”

What was it like to start a race after such a long break without practice or qualifying?

“It was a little tough to start the race after the long break and no practice or qualifying. It left you guessing a little bit more. I felt like we fired off pretty good and the guys had built a great car. It was well prepared for the race. It’s just those little things that you try and work through in practice, but you don’t have that time to work through them now. You just have to jump into it, so it might lead to more mistakes, when more experienced guys might have more of an advantage.”

Once the race started, did it take some time get acclimated?

“I feel like the first lap was pretty good. I was pretty well adjusted to it. I think the biggest thing that I had to get acclimated to was just how I was going to run this car that I’ve never run before. The different lines, and how I was going to work the racetrack and do everything involved with that. It was just a matter of me getting used to the car.”

Was the level of difficulty even higher because of the nature of the Darlington track, and a race that’s notoriously difficult even with hours of track time beforehand?

“It was definitely a little bit difficult because it was Darlington but, at the same time, you try and do as much preparation as you can. Get yourself in the mindset of which different lines you’ll be running, working the dirty air and things like that. It would’ve been nice to test some of those things during practice, but I feel like we all do a pretty good job of showing up to the racetrack and being ready.”

Do you think you’ll feel much more comfortable coming back to Darlington Wednesday? What did you learn from Sunday’s race that you’ll apply when you return Wednesday??

“I think going back on Wednesday I’ll be a lot more comfortable. Just kind of being used to the whole racetrack and being confident in moving my car around is probably the biggest thing. I was pretty conservative with running the top during the race because I didn’t want to hit the wall my first time there and ruin our day. I think going back I’ll have a good feel for it to be aggressive.”

Any big similarities or differences from racing the Xfinity Series car there to now having done it in the Cup car?

“I definitely feel like there were a decent amount of similarities to the Xfinity car, how you got around the corner and which lines you would run, and stuff like that. I think the biggest thing is how you work traffic and how you want to pass people. I think traffic was the biggest thing that was different.”

Mike Shiplett, Crew Chief of the No. 41 HaasTooling.com Mustang for Stewart-Haas Racing:**What did you learn during yesterday’s race that you’ll apply when we return on Wednesday?**

“Since it was Cole’s first time with these cars at Darlington, we learned a lot for the race we will have on Wednesday. The track will be different since it is a night race, so we will have to make a few small adjustments.”

How good did it feel to hear cars on the track after 70 days without activity, see people in the garage, etc.?

“It was good to get back to the track and keep Cole’s rookie year going. We had a lot of plans for the early races this year that we had to make adjustments for to start the new 2020 season. We were following all of NASCAR’s protocols, so we didn’t get to talk much to the other teams.”

Your overall assessment of how NASCAR and the teams did with being organized and following the new and different policies and procedures at-track?

“NASCAR and the team did a great job with getting us back to racing.”

Now that Cole has one Cup Series race under his belt at Darlington, is there anything in particular that you’ll focus on for Wednesday that you think could really help him?

“We are going to work on the things that will get us the most speed moving into the race on Wednesday, now that he understands the lines he needs to run with this car.

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