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COLE CUSTER

Ready to Rock the Roval

KANNAPOLIS, North Carolina (Oct. 7, 2020) – This weekend, Cole Custer and his No. 41 HaasTooling.com team for Stewart-Haas Racing (SHR) head just a handful of miles from the SHR race shop to Charlotte (N.C.) Motor Speedway to compete in Sunday’s Bank of America Roval 400 for the first time in his NASCAR Cup Series career. The road course event will mark the 35th career Cup Series start for the 22-year-old.

Last Sunday’s race at Talladega (Ala.) Superspeedway didn’t go as Cole hoped. After running in the top-five and earning one bonus point early in the race, Custer was collected in a multicar accident just past the halfway mark of the race. Despite his 31st-place result, Custer was happy to have a fast Ford Mustang prepared by the SHR crew. The event marked the final superspeedway race of the season with the next one set for the 2021 season-opening Daytona 500 in February at Daytona (Fla.) International Speedway.

Even though this Sunday’s “roval” race at Charlotte will be the first for Custer in the Cup Series, the rookie does have two starts on the 17-turn layout in the NASCAR Xfinity Series – in 2018 and 2019. He excelled in those events by starting and finishing inside the top-10 both times, and he led five laps. His best start was fourth last year and his best finish was seventh in 2018.

While Custer is out of contention for this year’s Cup Series championship, he’s motivated by the chance to capture more wins this season. The Roval 400 is the final race in the playoffs’ Round of 12, which leaves different groups of drivers with different agendas. Custer’s teammates Aric Almirola and Clint Bowyer, for instance, are both looking to advance to the Round of 8, and both are facing essentially must-win situations in order to advance. Each year, the Roval 400 has provided exciting entertainment for the fans with drivers trying to secure their spot in the next round of the playoffs. This weekend, a limited number of fans will be allowed to attend the 400-kilometer event while following socially distancing guidelines.

Sunday’s race is also the season’s last one on a road course. In August, Custer and his fellow competitors raced on the 3.61-mile road course at Daytona. That event replaced the originally scheduled race at Watkins Glen (N.Y.) International that was moved due to the COVID-19 pandemic. On the Daytona road course, Custer started 26th and finished 22nd after late-race contact.

So far this season, Ford has won 17 races, and Custer and his SHR teammate Kevin Harvick have both earned wins for the Blue Oval – one for Custer and nine for Harvick. Ford’s milestone 700th win in the Cup Series came at the hands of Harvick on Aug. 23 at Dover (Del.) International Speedway. Ford captured its first victory on June 25, 1950. Ford drivers made up 50 percent of this year’s starting playoff field, with eight drivers representing the Michigan manufacturer in the Round of 16, and five drivers continuing on to the Round of 12.

With Custer’s Cup Series win July 12 at Kentucky Speedway in Sparta, he became one of 10 drivers who have won in each of NASCAR’s top three national series, as well as in ARCA and one of NASCAR’s developmental series.

Team co-owner Gene Haas’ newest holding, [Haas Tooling](https://www.haastooling.com), was launched as a way for CNC machinists to purchase high quality cutting tools at great prices. Haas’ cutting tools are sold exclusively online at HaasTooling.com and shipped directly to end users. Beginning July 1, HaasTooling.com products became available nationally. The cutting tools available for purchase at HaasTooling.com are even more important during the current COVID-19 pandemic as CNC machines have become vital to producing personal protective equipment.

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SHR has eight starts at the Charlotte roval with one pole award and four top-fives and five top-10s at the suburban Charlotte track. In total, SHR has an average starting position of 10.9 and an average finishing position of 11.4 along with 43 laps led. On the Charlotte oval, SHR has 70 starts and one points-paying victory by Harvick in 2014.

Haas Automation, founded by Haas in 1983, 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.

Custer, who had a trio of starts in the Cup Series in 2018, clinched 2020 Rookie of the Year honors in his official rookie season in NASCAR's most prestigious series. Competing against fellow rookie notables Christopher Bell and Tyler Reddick, he was the only rookie to clinch a playoff spot this season.

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

What are your thoughts on going into the roval without any practice, especially since it's your first time on it in the Cup Series car?

"I've been watching video and going to the simulator to get ready for the race. You still don't know what's going to happen when you're going two-wide into those tight corners. You hope that everybody will give and take a little bit, at least for those first few laps. I'm sure it won't be like that at the end of the race, though."

How do you feel about the road courses on the schedule for the Cup Series?

"I love the road courses. I've always thought it would be cool to go to more of them and to go to a place like Road America, which we are next year. The roval-type tracks are nice, but they're unique on their own. Road racing keeps the driver more involved in the actual racing with all of the shifting, turning right and left, passing points, etc."

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