



# Talking the Talk about Sportsman Racing's Best

**A** couple of weeks ago in this space, I wrote about the staff's love of Sportsman racing, and a couple of times each year, we get a double dose of Sportsman-racing action

when events such as the JEGS NHRA SPORTSnationals and JEGS Allstars are run on the same weekend as an NHRA Full Throttle Drag Racing Series national event.

Such obviously was the case at the O'Reilly Auto Parts Route 66 NHRA Nationals at Route 66 Raceway, again the site of the JEGS Allstars competition Saturday, a thrilling and prestigious battle of the best that came down to a real team-championship nail-biter before Craig Hutchinson's Division 4 Good Guys pulled out the win over Mike Rice's Division 7 troops. It was the sixth win for Division 4 and denied Division 7 its first, and even though some divisions fared much better than others, it's pretty safe to say that there were no real losers among the Allstars competitors.

You only have to read our coverage, which begins on page 65, to understand the sheer delight and pride that the 10 individual champs experienced and to understand what the event meant to all who competed there. Speaking I'm sure on behalf of the other seven drivers in each class who did not reach the winner's circle, the champs effusively praised the folks at JEGS, who have sponsored the annual event since 2002, for their hospitality and for the way that they make each of the participants feel.

I interviewed two of the Allstars winners — Division 1's Frank Aragona Jr., who won in Comp, and Division 2's Mike Griggs, who captured Super Street — and they were so emphatic in their comments about JEGS that it was touching. Aragona, who has won just about everything a guy could win short of the Mac Tools U.S. Nationals presented by Lucas Oil, called his victory one of his greatest and most emotional.

Griggs, who was participating in his first Allstars competition, made the drive of more than 1,000 miles from Florida pay off with the win, but felt he was a winner even before he entered eliminations.

"It's just an honor to make the team, and the people at JEGS really make you feel important," he said. "They bent over backwards to make us feel like we're something special. We Sportsman racers know that everyone is there to see the John Force Show — that's the bread and butter — but JEGS and NHRA put us up on stage before the Pros ran Sunday, and for a fleeting moment, we were on top of the world."

The Allstars has been a part of NHRA history since 1985, when TRW sponsored the first competition, which was held during that year's

SPORTSnationals at Beech Bend Raceway Park in Bowling Green, Ky. I was fortunate to have been able to attend that event, and the Beech Bend facility, with its down-home feel, was the perfect venue at the time for this grassroots celebration; there was even a pic-eating contest. The facility had hosted the SPORTSnationals from its inception in 1974 through 1980, during which time a working amusement park was also part of the event's charm, making for a mini-vacation for racing families, so it felt natural for a return there after a disastrous and weather-challenged two-year stint at the old Houston Int'l Raceway and two years in Indy.

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At the time of the first Allstars event, there were only six divisions (6 and 7 having been combined for a short time), so the first Allstars field was made up of six division points leaders plus the reigning (1984) U.S. Nationals and world champs. As appealing as the current rules are that afford the defending champ a chance to return the following year as a non-points-earning blocker, I wonder if the all-star allure wouldn't be well-served by having either the reigning Indy or world champ make up the eighth spot. It certainly would be a nice bonus for winning either of those battles, especially the season championship. This year's Allstars fields did include most world champs (Comp's Al Ackerman and Stock's Brad Burton being the exceptions), so maybe Indy winners might be a thought. I'm just saying ...

One of the fun things about interviewing Sportsman racers is the specialized vernacular with which they convey their strategies and race outcomes. While new fans of the Pro ranks are challenged to understand such cryptic phrases as "put a hole out" (an engine cylinder that stopped firing) or "banged the blower" (exploded the supercharger) — not to mention golden oldies like "dumped the laundry" (deployed the braking parachute) and "Akron fallout" (rubber particles from Goodyear tires made in Akron, Ohio) — today's Sportsman lexicon is equally if not more in need of a Rosetta stone for translation.

Only in Sportsman and bracket drag racing is "backing into" your opponent a good thing, describing not an accident of wayward reversing but a purposeful tactic of slowing down while leading a race to win by the narrowest of margins

to avoid a possible breakout, also known as "tightening up the stripe," the stripe being the finish line. Racers who don't think they can get "there" — "there" being the finish line — ahead of their opponent can "give up the stripe" to their opponent — purposefully letting their opponent cross the finish line first in hopes that he or she will run too quickly against the target dial-in — with a technique ingloriously known as "dumping."

Racers talk about "rolling in some small numbers" not to brag about frolicking in miniature digits but to describe adding thousandths of a second into their starting-line delay boxes, which originally was done with manual thumbwheel dials but now is all digital, hence the term. Racers who "dial soft" (or "hard") do not speak to their channel-changing habits but to how much cushion they've left themselves above or below their target dial-in elapsed time, allowing them to play out various finish-line driving strategies as described above.

Therefore, you end up with descriptions like this: "I was dialed soft, so I rolled a few numbers in. It didn't look like I was going to get there, and he was starting to back into me to tighten up the stripe, so I dumped him. He caught my dump and dumped, too."

If you think I'm kidding, go to page 48 and read Kevin Kleinewber's description of how his Super Comp final played out against Larry Bernshausen.

People used to like to say that drag racing was a pretty simple sport: "Two go down, one comes back" was a typical description. It's far from that simple anymore. Faith in your car and your ability to make split-second decisions are paramount, and simply crossing the finish line first does not always equate to a win. The amount of preplanning, record-keeping, strategizing, and on-the-fly adjustments that can go into a typical Sportsman race is staggering, and it happens hundreds of times at each event, each race its own little battle of tactics, attacks, and counterattacks.

It also happens well before the first round of eliminations as savvy racers jockey for positions beginning in qualifying. The studios have memorized every permutation of eliminations ladders in NHRA's arsenal so that, regardless of car count, they know where the most advantageous spots are. They know where the bye runs fall and how to position themselves away from faster opponents — such as in Comp or in a potential heads-up battle in Super Stock or Stock — or just how to stay clear of the top guns like Dan Fletcher and Peter Biondo for as long as possible. They can often land exactly where they choose with eerie precision.

I hope you enjoy this issue packed with Sportsman-racing goodness and take the time to appreciate the skills that go into winning even a single round. **ND**

# Kleineweber drives door car past dragsters for sixth win



by Candida Benson

**K**evin Kleineweber didn't intend to enter his '94 Lumina in the dragster-dominated Super Comp category, but when his first category of choice was full, he had to improvise a little.

"I was going to run it in Super Gas, and when I went online to enter, Super Gas was full, so I had no choice but to enter it into Super Comp," said Kleineweber. "We have been running the Lumina in Top Sportsman on the West Coast. On the way to Norwalk, Ohio, I stopped by Don Davis Race Cars, which is now owned by Hughes Performance co-owner Jim Hughes. Jim, Don, and I made some minor adjustments to the car to set it up for throttle-stop racing before I

headed out on the trip to Norwalk and then Chicago. When we arrived in Chicago, I was still a little unsure about how competitive I would be in Super Comp, and that's when Jim sat me down for a pep talk. The way he was explaining things to me about racing a door car in a dragster class gave me the confidence I needed to focus on driving and winning and not excuses for failure."

The work done on the car and the pre-race pep talk did the trick because Kleineweber outlasted the tough field that assembled in Chicago to claim his sixth overall win and second in Super Comp, and he did so in impressive fashion. His Lumina was consistently near the class index in eliminations, including two on-the-money 8.90s, and Kleineweber's reaction times were .02s or better throughout, including a perfect .000 on a bye in the quarterfinals.

Kleineweber began his title march with wins against Dan Northrop, Jerryka Lobner, Jerry Hoss, and Jim Gottsch. Following his bye run in the quarters, Kleineweber turned a starting-line advantage of more than three-hundredths into an 8.92 to 8.89 victory over reigning national champ Gary Stinnett.

In the final, Kleineweber nailed the 8.90 index to eke



out a narrow victory over Larry Bernshausen, who broke out by .009-second.

"Back in 2005, I had to run Larry in the final round of Super Gas [at this event], and at that particular race, I was ahead of him going into the first set of cones, and I actually dumped him," said Kleineweber. "I was ahead of him and actually dumped him off and let him take the stripe, and he broke out, and I was safe. Then here we are racing again in the final. I know that he's good friends with Don Higgins, and I figured what they would do was set the car up fast and try to dump me. So, I actually lifted after 1,000 feet, so I would stay behind him, and that way if he dumped, I would get the stripe and still be good, or if he ran it out, I'd keep my fingers crossed and hope that he ran it out, and I was still safe. So, I actually gave him a

## About the winning car

**K**evin Kleineweber's Hughes Performance '94 Lumina has been reconstructed by DDRC and is powered by a Sunset Racecraft 665 engine with Dart heads that have been ported by Sunset's new in-house CNC program. The powerplant also features a Dart block, Edelbrock's new intake, APD's new 1150 throttle-stop carburetor, Moroso pan and pump, MSD ignition, McCabe headers, Auto Meter gauges with Racepak data system, Hoosier tires mounted on Weld wheels, and Aeromotive fuel system using Rocket Brand race fuel. The drivetrain consists of a Hughes Performance XP4 transmission along with a new 10-20 9-inch torque converter.

Kleineweber thanked his wife, Kim, and stepson, Justin, for all their support; Jim, Jeff, and Jan Hughes and the rest of the gang at Hughes Performance; Joe Esposito; John Kyle at APD; Tracy Dennis; Faron and John at Hoosier; Don Davis; Tony Kane; Clint Hodgens; Jake and Joey Hughes; and Robin Ortis.

**Kleineweber earned a spot in the title round when he bested last year's top national points finisher, Gary Stinnett, in the semifinals.**



## SUPER COMP QUALIFYING

(TOP 16 OF 33 FIRST-ROUND WINNERS)

1. Sherman Adcock, Fortson, Ga. (dragster) .....	8.900 (0.000)
2. Pat Fitzpatrick, Peoria, Ill. (dragster) .....	8.901 (0.001)
3. Vince Naminini, Lake Bluff, Ill. (dragster) .....	8.902 (0.002)
4. Joe Serena, Petersburg, Ill. (dragster) .....	8.905 (0.005)
5. Steve Mikus, Ashley, Mich. (dragster) .....	8.905 (0.005)
6. Mike Wagner, Lapeer, Mich. (dragster) .....	8.907 (0.007)
7. Patrick Lamont, Lake Villa, Ill. (23-T Ford) .....	8.909 (0.009)
8. Jerry Hoss, Prior Lake, Minn. (dragster) .....	8.912 (0.012)
9. Nick Folk, Durand, Ill. (dragster) .....	8.912 (0.012)
10. Janice Swan, Mooresville, Ind. (dragster) .....	8.913 (0.013)
11. Steve Hoyt, Fort Wayne, Ind. (dragster) .....	8.913 (0.013)
12. Jim Gottsch, Omaha, Neb. (dragster) .....	8.914 (0.014)
13. Shane Carr, Williamstown, N.J. (dragster) .....	8.914 (0.014)
14. Kendra Rienschield, Sunman, Ind. (dragster) .....	8.915 (0.015)
15. Gary Stinnett, Emporia, Kan. (dragster) .....	8.917 (0.017)
16. Kevin Kleineweber, Phoenix, Ariz. ('94 Lumina) .....	8.919 (0.019)

### ROUND THREE

Driver, Hometown (Car)	R.T.	E.T.	M.P.H.
Kevin Kleineweber, Phoenix, Ariz. ('94 Lumina) .....	(.018)	8.927	169.68
Jerry Hoss, Prior Lake, Minn. (dragster) .....	(.012)	*8.868	139.08
Jim Gottsch, Omaha, Neb. (dragster) .....	(.007)	8.884	175.48
Shannon Mingee, Urbana, Ill. (dragster) .....	(.002)	*8.833	177.07
Steve Mikus, Ashley, Mich. (dragster) .....	(.016)	8.874	158.00
Heldi Robinson, Gardner, Kan. (dragster) .....	(.007)	*8.864	173.25
T.J. Schipping, Shakespear, Ont. (dragster) .....	(.020)	8.881	167.80
Dor O'Neal, Huntsville, Ala. (dragster) .....	(.024)	*8.860	170.49
Larry Bernshausen, Manito, Ill. (dragster) .....	(.005)	8.914	164.15
Sherman Adcock, Fortson, Ga. (dragster) .....	(.018)	8.901	172.32
Michael Miller, Santa Fe, N.M. (dragster) .....	(.021)	8.913	172.74
Steve Hoyt, Fort Wayne, Ind. (dragster) .....	(.021)	*8.883	179.61
Mike Wagner, Lapeer, Mich. (dragster) .....	(.020)	8.895	161.08
Kendra Rienschield, Sunman, Ind. (dragster) .....	(.009)	*8.872	167.88
Pat Fitzpatrick, Peoria, Ill. (dragster) .....	(.021)	8.949	160.98
bye			
Gary Stinnett, Emporia, Kan. (dragster) .....	(.021)	8.909	174.50
Tommy Phillips, Forney, Texas (dragster) .....	(.018)	*8.897	168.96

### ROUND FOUR

Kleineweber .....	(.011)	8.907	162.80
Gottsch .....	(.033)	8.921	167.57
Bernshausen .....	(.020)	8.917	164.73
Wagner .....	(.029)	*8.938	183.37
Mikus .....	(.027)	8.930	151.46
Schipping .....	(.016)	9.008	161.32
Miller .....	(.016)	8.972	167.32
bye			
Stinnett .....	(.051)	8.935	169.42
Fitzpatrick .....	(.010)	9.016	141.97

### ROUND FIVE

Bernshausen .....	(.021)	8.900	164.27
Miller .....	(.014)	*11.593	89.46
Stinnett .....	(.001)	8.948	171.34
Mikus .....	(.014)	8.947	160.56
Kleineweber .....	(.000)	8.922	162.33
bye			

### ROUND SIX

Kleineweber .....	(.022)	8.926	162.76
Stinnett .....	(.056)	*8.893	184.19
Bernshausen .....	(.012)	8.921	163.37
bye			

### FINAL ROUND

Kleineweber .....	(.021)	8.901	171.77
Bernshausen .....	(.012)	*8.891	163.35

\*red-light \*\*breakout



(Right) In the quarterfinals, Stinnett paired a .001 light with an 8.948 to defeat Steve Mikus, who wasn't far behind with a .014-initiated 8.947. (Below) Kleineweber cut a .011 light, then ran right on the 8.90 index to defeat Jim Gottsch in the fourth round and earn the quarterfinal bye.



Michael Shelton (round one) and Gottsch (round two) also registered .000s.

**Did you know:** This is the second time that Kleineweber has scored a win in Chicago on a 60th anniversary. "When I won in 2005 in Chicago, that's where Jim's folks are from, and they were

completely opposite picture from what happened last time we raced, and it still worked out."

**The key race:** "The key round, I think that would have been fourth round, and that was against Jim Gottsch," said Kleineweber. "He was .033 on the Tree, and he actually dumped me pretty good at the finish line, and I took way more stripe than I had anticipated. I went .907, and that round actually gave me a bye the next round, so that was the crucial round right there. That one was the round that I was in control, but then at the end, I lost control."

**The runner-up:** This was the first national event Super Comp final for Bernshausen, who has three Super Gas money rounds, two of which he won, to his credit. Though his '11 Gebhardt dragster was running well, Bernshausen earned a spot in the title round largely on his driving. He averaged a .012 light through the seven rounds of competition, achieved with a couple of .00s. Bernshausen defeated Greg Kamplain, Janice Swan, Sherman Adcock Jr., Mike Wagner, and Michael Miller en route to the final.

**Fast facts:** The last time that a non-dragster won in the class was at the 2009 Gainesville event when Brian Forrester wheeled his Super Gas Corvette roadster to the winner's circle. ... Adcock took home the NHRA Perfectly Strange Performance Award cash for his 8.900 in the first round. ... Bernshausen also ran dead on the index, in the quarterfinals. ... Kleineweber wasn't the only racer to cut a perfect light;

celebrating their 60th wedding anniversary that weekend," said Kleineweber. "There's something to the number six [with me] because I was born on the sixth of October in 1966. It was the 60th anniversary for Jim's parents when I won in '05, and now this was my sixth national event win on the 60th anniversary [of NHRA]."

**Quotable:** "Bringing a slingshot to a gunfight is not the best idea, especially if you're going against some of the best shooters in the class." — Kleineweber, on racing a door car in a dragster-filled category

**Best packages:** 1. Adcock (Fortson, Ga.), .007/8.900 (round one); Gottsch (Omaha, Neb.), .000/8.907 (round two); 3. Tommy Phillips (Forney, Texas), .001/8.910 (round two). **ND**



(Above) Bernshausen earned a free pass in the fourth round when Mike Wagner fouled out. (Right) Pat Fitzpatrick, near lane, took a .041-second lead at the Tree in round four before his car slowed, opening the door for Stinnett, who turned on the win light with an 8.93.

