



Stewart Solid in SoCal

Old Spice/Office Depot Driver Logs Third Straight Top-10 Finish at Fontana

Date: Feb. 21, 2010
Event: Auto Club 500 (Round 2 of 36)
Series: NASCAR Sprint Cup Series
Location: Auto Club Speedway in Fontana, Calif. (2-mile oval)
Start/Finish: 16th/9th (Running, completed 250 of 250 laps)
Winner: Jimmie Johnson of Hendrick Motorsports (Chevrolet)

Tony Stewart put in a workmanlike performance in Sunday's Auto Club 500 NASCAR Sprint Cup Series race at Auto Club Speedway in Fontana, Calif., and the result was a solid ninth-place finish. It was Stewart's third straight top-10 finish at the 2-mile oval and his first of the 2010 season.

"We got a top-10 out of it, but that was about it," Stewart said. "We made gains on it all day, but we didn't quite get exactly where we wanted to be. Still, we got better as the day went on."

The driver of the No. 14 Old Spice/Office Depot Chevrolet Impala for Stewart-Haas Racing (SHR) started the 250-lap race from 16th in the 43-car field, but Stewart soon dropped back with a car that lacked grip whenever he sailed his 3,500-pound racecar into the track's corners. With less than 25 laps on the board, Stewart was outside the top-20.

Stewart didn't panic, nor did crew chief Darian Grubb. Instead they went to work, and after two scheduled pit stops on laps 37 and 59, respectively, where track bar and wedge adjustments were made, the red No. 14 responded.

Stewart was back in the top-15 by lap 92, and on lap 99 cracked the top-10 with an authoritative pass of four-time Sprint Cup champion Jeff Gordon. From there, Stewart was a top-10 mainstay, rising to as high as fifth when he passed Matt Kenseth on lap 119.

The handling of the Old Spice/Office Depot ride was much improved, but Stewart still needed help in getting his car to cut better through the center of the corner. A slight air pressure adjustment was made during a pit stop on lap 134, but a slow tire change dropped Stewart to 10th in the running order.

"No problem. We'll get it back," Stewart said. And by lap 155, he was proven correct, as Stewart was back in fifth.

With his car's handling still not as good as the leaders, Stewart couldn't hold onto to his slot among the top-five. He dropped back, but never outside the top-10. When the checkered flag waved after lap 250, Stewart was solidly in ninth.

"We just missed it on taking off on that last run. We got too free," said Stewart, who now has 10 top-10 finishes in 18 career Sprint Cup starts at Fontana. "But it's a top-10 and we'll take it and go onto Las Vegas."

Ryan Newman, driver of the No. 39 Haas Automation Chevrolet Impala and Stewart's teammate at SHR, finished a disappointing 36th when his engine expired shortly after a restart on lap 146.

Jimmie Johnson won the Auto Club 500 to score his 48th career Sprint Cup victory, his first of the season and his fifth at Fontana. Johnson has won four of the last six Sprint Cup races at the Southern California track.

Kevin Harvick finished 1.523 seconds behind Johnson, while Jeff Burton, Mark Martin and Joey Logano rounded out the top-five. Kurt Busch, Matt Kenseth, Clint Bowyer, Stewart and Greg Biffle comprised the remainder of the top-10.

There were six caution periods for 30 laps, with 10 drivers failing to finish.

With round 2 of 36 complete, Stewart is 17th in the Sprint Cup championship standings. He has 235 points and is 96 markers back of series leader Harvick. Newman is 36th in the standings with 116 points, 215 points behind Harvick.

The next event on the Sprint Cup schedule is the Feb. 28 Shelby American at Las Vegas Motor Speedway. The race starts at 3 p.m. EST with live coverage provided by FOX beginning with its pre-race show at 2 p.m.

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