

Office
DEPOT.14Mobil 1

Red 14 Hits at Vegas

Tony Stewart Scores First Victory of 2012 and 45th of Sprint Cup Career in Las Vegas

Date: March 11, 2012
Event: Kobalt Tools 400 (Round 3 of 36)
Series: NASCAR Sprint Cup Series
Location: Las Vegas Motor Speedway (1.5-mile oval)
Start/Finish: 7th/1st (Running, completed 267 of 267 laps)
Winner: Tony Stewart of Stewart-Haas Racing (Chevrolet)

Red 14 hit in Las Vegas, but where it mattered most wasn't on a roulette wheel at the MGM Grand. Instead, it was at the 1.5-mile Las Vegas Motor Speedway where Tony Stewart drove his No. 14 Mobil 1/Office Depot Chevrolet Impala for Stewart-Haas Racing (SHR) to an impressive victory in Sunday's Kobalt Tools 400 NASCAR Sprint Cup Series race.

In just the third race of the season, Stewart picked up right where he left off in 2011, as the three-time and reigning Sprint Cup champion collected his first win of 2012 but his sixth in the last 13 Sprint Cup races.

"It wasn't a layup weekend, throw the notes from 12 months ago and say, 'All right, this is the magic here,'" said Stewart, who has now won four of the last seven races at intermediate-type ovals. "It still took going through the steps and processes to try to figure out exactly what it took to keep the left-side and right-side tires happy and figuring out what it liked that was different from last year's tires. Don't underestimate the amount of work we had to do this weekend to get us to where we were today."

Stewart led three times for a race-high 127 laps to score his 45th career Sprint Cup Series and his first at Las Vegas. He has now won a Sprint Cup race at every track on the circuit except for Darlington (S.C) Raceway and Kentucky Speedway in Sparta, the latter of which conducted its first race last season. Stewart is now just one victory behind 1956 and 1957 Sprint Cup champion Buck Baker for 14th on the all-time series win list.

"Man, I'm just finally glad to win one here," said Stewart, who prior to Sunday had two runner-up finishes at Las Vegas, including last year where he led four times for a race-high 163 laps only to finish second to winner Carl Edwards. "We were so close last year and had a dominate car. I'm not sure we had the dominate car today, but we had an awfully fast Mobil 1/Office Depot Chevy. Just glad to finally get one at Vegas."

Stewart started seventh in the 267-lap race, but quickly moved toward the front of the field. He took the lead for the first time on lap 134 as he slipped past five-time Sprint Cup champion Jimmie Johnson.

Track position, however, was everything, and when Stewart found himself third on a lap-234 restart, he made a daring three-wide pass on the frontstretch to retake the lead for the final time.

However, holding that lead proved challenging, as three separate caution periods allowed his competitors, notably four-time Las Vegas race winner Johnson, to mount a charge against Stewart. Each time the Mobil 1/Office Depot pilot held him off, and when the checkered flag waved, Stewart had a .461 of a second margin of victory. It was the 13th time Stewart and Johnson finished 1-2, with Johnson taking seven victories and Stewart holding six.

"It just seemed like every time the caution was out, we started building the lead back up and started pulling away," Stewart said. "The trend we were getting every time the caution came out, we're starting to get to where we can relax, run our rhythm, not have guys pressure us on entry, back my corner up and do what I wanted to do."

"When the caution came out, it seemed like for the first three laps, those guys were able to put a little pressure on us and were probably quicker than us. It seemed like if we could get six or eight laps under our belt, we could start building that margin out again. As soon as you started pulling away, the caution would come out again."

-more-

“It was a matter of getting a good restart, hitting our marks for a couple laps, and going on. But every time the caution came out, you cringed knowing you were giving them another opportunity to take a shot. Seemed like everybody got their turn at it. Just a different person on each restart that we had to hold off.

“You sit there and go, ‘How many times are we going to risk losing this race because of a restart? Something is going to get taken away from us because of this.’ It’s very nerve wracking. But that was the great thing about our racecar. It would go from there to turn one, and it was just awesome. I think we were hands down the strongest car on restarts of getting to turn one from the restart point, and all the technology Mobil 1 brings to the table certainly helped us with that.”

With the victory coming in just the third round of the 36-race Sprint Cup schedule, it marked the earliest Stewart has ever won in his 14-year Sprint Cup career. Prior to Sunday, the earliest Stewart had won in a season was in round four at Atlanta Motor Speedway in March 2002, Stewart’s first championship season. Forty-two of Stewart’s 45 Sprint Cup victories have come between May and November.

The win also gave new crew chief Steve Addington his first with Stewart.

“He’s (Addington) been pretty nervous to start with here, but he’s doing an awesome job,” Stewart said. “We win the championship, and it’s hard to come into a team after they’ve won a championship. I don’t know that there are too many guys other than a guy like Steve Addington who could step into a role and succeed Darin Grubb (former crew chief) and do the job he’s doing. Really proud of Steve. Really proud of our guys. I mean, it’s the same guys that we had last year, just throwing in a little bit different leadership. We had a great leader with Darian, and I miss him, but I’m proud of our new leader, Steve.”

Ryan Newman, driver of the No. 39 Quicken Loans Chevrolet Impala for SHR, finished fourth to score his first top-five of the season and his sixth top-10 in 12 career Sprint Cup starts at Las Vegas.

The last time both SHR cars finished in the top-10 was last November at Phoenix International Raceway, where Stewart was third and Newman was fifth.

Greg Biffle finished third, while Newman and Edwards rounded out the top-five. Clint Bowyer, Paul Menard, Jamie McMurray, Trevor Bayne and Dale Earnhardt Jr., comprised the remainder of the top-10.

There were eight caution periods for 33 laps, with eight drivers failing to finish.

With round three of 36 complete, Stewart leads the SHR contingent in the championship point standings. He is seventh with 100 points, 25 markers behind series leader Biffle. Newman is 13th with 86 points, 39 markers out of first.

The next event on the Sprint Cup schedule is the March 19 Food City 500 at Bristol (Tenn.) Motor Speedway. The race starts at 1 p.m. EDT with live coverage provided by FOX beginning with its pre-race show at 12:30 p.m.

- TSC -

Contact Mike Arning with True Speed Communication
(704) 875-3388, ext. 802 or Mike.Arning@TrueSpeedCommunication.com
www.TrueSpeedCommunication.com • Online Media Kit Available at: www.TrueSpeedMedia.com