

BRENDAN GAUGHAN

Leaving Las Vegas, Viva Talladega

TALLADEGA, Ala. (June 15, 2020) – Most people head to Las Vegas as a reprieve from work. Brendan Gaughan leaves Las Vegas to get away from work. And in the COVID-19 era, Gaughan has been working overtime.

Whether it's been doing his part to help homeschool his two boys, Michael James (age 9) and William Ryland (age 6) with his wife, Tatum, or earning more responsibility from his father, Michael, in running the family's casino business, or seeing his startup cleaning company, New Wave Cleaning Solutions, explode in the wake of COVID-19, Gaughan's semi-retirement from NASCAR racing has seen the 44-year-old Las Vegas-native busier than ever.

Being able to drive the No. 62 Beard Oil Distributing/South Point Hotel & Casino Chevrolet Camaro for Beard Motorsports in the NASCAR Cup Series and race at 200 mph on the circuit's biggest track, surrounded by 39 other racers in the heat and humidity that is a hallmark of June in Alabama, is Gaughan's way of unwinding.

The GEICO 500 Sunday at Talladega (Ala.) Superspeedway is Gaughan's getaway, and thanks to an impressive seventh-place finish in the season-opening Daytona 500 four months ago, Gaughan has a reserved seat in the 40-car field. Had he not scored that result back in February, Gaughan would likely be watching the GEICO 500 from his couch instead of seated in his racecar.



Unlike past races where Gaughan has participated in qualifying, taking full advantage of Beard Motorsports' alliance with Richard Childress Racing (RCR) that includes the power of an ECR-built engine, the field for this year's GEICO 500 is being set by current owners' points. Without that seventh-place finish in the Daytona 500, Beard Motorsports wouldn't have had enough points to be ahead of the top-40 cutoff. Instead, the independent team is 39th in points, allowing Gaughan to line up with the best in stock-car racing.

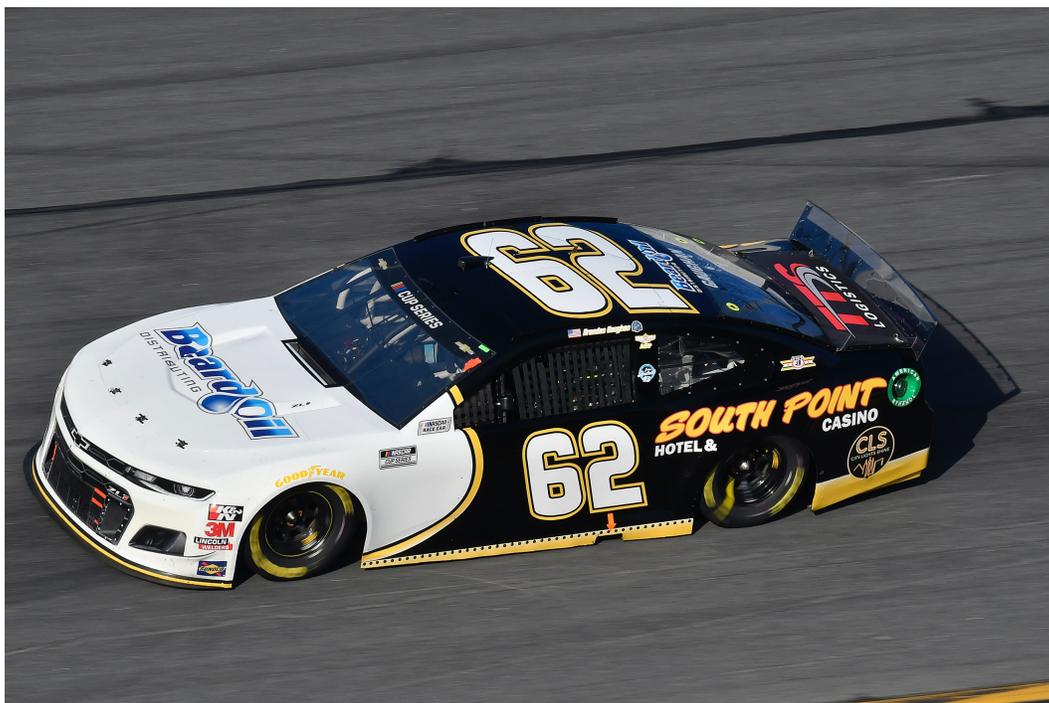
Beard Motorsports has proven to be the little team that could, a modern-day David competing against the Goliaths of the NASCAR Cup Series. Owned by Mark Beard Sr., president of Beard Motorsports and various family businesses, Beard Motorsports has taken a strategic approach to its racing endeavors, forming a technical partnership with RCR and running only the superspeedway races at Daytona and Talladega. With cars constructed by RCR and powered by ECR engines, Beard Motorsports has scored three top-10 finishes, including an eighth-place drive in April 2019 at Talladega where Gaughan led five laps.

Gaughan has made 13 NASCAR Cup Series starts with Beard Motorsports, all coming at Daytona and Talladega. And in a series dominated by multicar teams with hundreds of employees, Beard Motorsports does it with one full-time employee, crew chief Darren Shaw. Its one part-time employee, car chief Drew Mickey, is

a fulltime, industrial plumber. And the two mechanics that come in on race weekends – one is a boat captain (Nic Hill) and the other is an automotive body technician (Jack Cagnon).

This throwback race team has proven it can hang with the multicar outfits whose “guys back at the shop” reach into the hundreds. Want proof? Look beyond Gaughan’s seventh-place drive in the Daytona 500 and focus on his most recent visit to Talladega last October where five laps short of the finish, Gaughan took the lead as the field approached turn three of the 2.66-mile oval. Unfortunately, Gaughan never made it through turn three, as he was sent airborne after being collected in a multicar accident. Gaughan walked away from the spectacular crash unhurt, and despite the 27th-place finish, remained upbeat as he spoke to reporters outside the infield care center following a precautionary medical evaluation.

The No. 62 Beard Oil Distributing/South Point Hotel & Casino Chevrolet Camaro had run up front, and was this close to slaying Goliath. Gaughan could taste the victory, and while the outcome proved to be bittersweet, it set the stage for Gaughan’s run in this year’s Daytona 500. With that finish under his belt and the same No. 62 Camaro awaiting him Sunday at Talladega, Gaughan is happy to leave Las Vegas and say, “Viva Talladega.”



Brendan Gaughan, Driver of the No. 62 Beard Oil Distributing/South Point Hotel & Casino Chevrolet Camaro for Beard Motorsports:

A lot has happened since your seventh-place finish in the Daytona 500. How have you handled life amid COVID-19?

“When it first happened, you thought, ‘Oh, OK, nothing’s going to happen. We’ve got to be homeschooling. Work’s going to be slow.’ So the first crazy thing, as most parents know, is homeschooling. If you were ever on the fence about homeschooling, good or bad, you learned, good or bad, if you wanted to do it. From my standpoint, I don’t ever want to do homeschooling ever again. I love teachers and I’ve always thought teachers are underpaid. I now know teachers are way underpaid. I can’t wait for regular school to get back in, and the kids can have their friends to go play with every day, and be with their teachers. That will be a glorious day in many households.”

You’re only slated to compete in four races this year, which means you have a regular job for the majority of the year. How has COVID-19 impacted your work life?

“What was weird for me is that at the casino, my father has let me do more at the SouthPoint Casino than he ever has before. I was part of a lot of decisions that I was normally left out of. He gave me some responsibility with it, which was nice because I do other casinos of ours, but never the mothership, so to speak. So that was impressive. And then, my little cleaning company that I don’t talk much about – New Wave Cleaning Solutions that I started about three years ago – it’s just exploded. It’s been a great little, no frills company, but with all of the disinfecting and sanitizing that needs to be done, New Wave Cleaning Solutions became a big part of what it took to get Vegas back open. Trying to get PPE for casinos, trying to get disinfectants and the machines for disinfecting in the casinos, sourcing out sanitizers other than alcohol-based ones because everybody is getting tired of alcohol-based sanitizers – we did all of that. I don’t think I’ve ever slept less in my life, talking to people across the world at all hours of the night, trying to source and find supplies, and getting those products and protocols into the casinos. The Station Casinos use a lot of my products. They’re massive in town. My family’s casinos, everybody who’s a friend of ours and is a casino operator, we called and said, ‘Hey, we want to take care of the people we know and get this town open.’ It was really exciting, if you want to know the truth. But to do it while being the homeschool dad and just staying current with things in NASCAR, I’ve been busier than I’ve ever been.”

Has quarantining and self-isolation made you look forward to competing at Talladega even more than before?

“I definitely picked the wrong time to retire. I’ve been digging, and no off-road races have been happening because they canceled all of those in Mexico, so I haven’t been able to sneak away to get any of that racing me time that has always been such a big part of my life. So, I’m ecstatic to get back into the Beard Oil Chevy. I love Talladega and Daytona. I cannot wait, honestly, to get to the motorhome there at Talladega and just be at the track.”

With no qualifying at Talladega, how intently were you watching Beard Motorsports’ points standing, as the team needed to be among the top-four independent teams after the series’ last race at Homestead to secure a place in the 40-car field?

“Sweatin’ it, especially at Bristol when Tommy Baldwin Racing and B.J. McLeod Racing both had a phenomenal run. I’m torn. I love Tommy Baldwin and B.J. McLeod. They’re a hard-working group of guys, and they have top-30 finishes at Bristol and I say, ‘Way to go, guys.’ And then I look at the standings and I say, ‘Oh no, guys.’ It was a sweated-out situation for a minute, but for some reason B.J. McLeod didn’t show up at Martinsville or Homestead, so that guaranteed that we will be, at the worst, 39th in points. But, we’re there, the Beard Oil Chevy is in the show. Darren (Shaw, crew chief) has the same racecar we had at Daytona, so it’s the same Chevrolet that had the top-10 finish. We got it to RCR to do a little fluff and buff on it to get it good. With no practice and qualifying, we had to make sure our travels were all correct because, as a little team, that’s what will hurt us – if we get there and miss our travels really badly.”

Originally, there had been a practice session scheduled for all teams on Saturday, but that was canceled. Now, it’s just show up on Sunday and go. Does not having that practice session affect Beard Motorsports?

“Not having that practice probably hurts us more than others because we haven’t been at the track every week. We’re not really in a routine, and getting kind of refreshed with the car, knowing it’s pulled down, we won’t have that. But I’ve been doing this for 23 years now, so I’m comfortable with just jumping in and going. I trust Darren and I trust Drew (Mickey), our car chief, that they’re going to have me in that same great piece that we had at Daytona. We’re going to be as safe as we can be and I feel comfortable knowing that to where I can let her fly at the start.”

Obviously, finishing seventh in the Daytona 500 was a great accomplishment. It is for any team, never mind a team that has just one fulltime employee. But how important was that seventh-place finish to allowing you to compete in the GEICO 500 at Talladega?

"Just look at the points situation. If we wrecked and finished in the late-20s back at Daytona, we'd be sitting on the couch and not able to race. We would've missed the show by points. So, having that amazing run at Daytona, having that great start to our season, meant the world because it put us in position to run this race. And there's still a future here. We don't know what going to happen by the time we get to Daytona for the next race, and it might boil down to the same position where we need the points. So we've got to have a good run at Talladega, again."

We've described Beard Motorsports as David going up against the Goliaths of the NASCAR Cup Series. Describe what it was like to finish so well in the Daytona 500.

"For us, David and Goliath might've been an even more fair fight. We work hard. Darren Shaw works extremely hard for the Beard family. And Drew, who's our car chief, has a regular job, tries to come in and help out. These are guys who are like every Saturday-night racer in America. They just have a dream to go race. For me, I've been racing against these guys my whole life. Inside that racecar, I understand the gravity of what we're doing with the Beard Oil team and how bucking the trend of what NASCAR is nowadays. So when we crossed that finish line back at Daytona – when Ryan Newman flew over my head, I said, 'Oh my God, Ryan Newman didn't hit me, I can't believe I missed him.' And I think he's OK. Immediately, the first thing I think is he's OK, because of how safe we are in these things. Then, I thought, 'Oh my God, I don't know where we finished, but I know it was in the top-10,' and that was an amazing run for us. We finished in the top-10 of the Daytona 500. That's an amazing deal, right there. I even feel the gravity in the car when that happens, because – name a team – you could say that Front Row Motorsports and David Ragan had a phenomenal finish that day, and Cory LaJoie was up there with us with a phenomenal finish – they are Goliath compared to us. So, the gravity of that situation is not lost on me while I'm in that racecar at that finish line. It felt so good to give the Beards that moment to smile and to say, 'Holy cow, you just beat the Hendrick organizations and the Gibbs organizations and the Penske organizations. We just beat 'em to come home with a top-10 finish.' It feels amazing to be able to say that to Mr. and Mrs. Beard."

Do you carry that pride into Talladega, and can that sense of accomplishment yield some tangible results on the racetrack?

"It does a lot for our team as a whole. When we show up, we're not some team that everybody goes, 'Oh boy, watch out for that one.' When we walk in that place, people want to work with us. Now, our first year and even our second year a little bit – I had to go up to people and remind them a bit and say, 'Hey, hey, Jimmie (Johnson), don't forget, I've got a big-thumping ECR motor and a good RCR-built Chevrolet. Remember, I've got good stuff.' Now, we show up to the racetrack and I've got guys from other manufacturers going, 'Hey, do you have to play in the Chevy games or are you a free agent?' Then I've got Chevy inviting us to play in their reindeer games and say, 'Hey, you're a Chevy, you're here with us.' It feels great to know that this little bitty team, when we show up now, people come and find us and say, 'Hey, we'll work with you. We know how good you are.' It feels amazing, especially knowing what this team goes through to get a racecar on the track."

Your crew chief, Darren Shaw, mentioned that you just sort of mind your own business during the race, that you stay smart and position yourself at the end to get a good finish. Can you expound upon that. Specifically, what do you do to avoid the carnage to compete at the end of these races at Daytona and Talladega?

"You've got to learn to feel the energy of the pack. You can feel when the energy starts to get ugly, when I don't like what they're doing, I think they're about to get a little goofy, a little funky, I want out of here. And, so, you back out. And then I go race when I feel the energy is good, when I see the guys staying in line well and not getting too froggy and not trying to make too many moves that put things at risk. You have to learn how to see that, you have to learn how to say, 'I don't like what I'm looking at there, I'm going to back out and try to play safe.' So I'll go race when I need to race, and I need to show those guys that our racecar is good. You have to show something during the day or else they won't want to work with you. I go in, I make sure we show them a little something, that our Beard Oil Chevrolet is that good, make sure they know that 62

number, when it comes up, they like what they've got next to them, they like what they've got pulling, pushing, they know it's something good. And then, when it gets a little too sketchy, you back out and you let your car stay in one piece. And it's amazing how many times I've been in there and we'll be in the top-10, and I call Ron Lewis, my spotter, and say, 'Hey, Ronnie, get me out.' And he's like, 'But, but, OK.' And he gets me out and, two laps later, there's a 15-car pileup right where I was running. You've got to learn how to see those moments and wait till the end because there's just one lap that pays, and it's the last one."

Typically when we race at Talladega, it's in the relative cool of spring and fall. This time, you're racing in the heart of the summer when it's hot and humid. Does that change your approach?

"Maybe I'm not as used to the heat as I was because I'm not doing it all the time, but I've always believed in the mental toughness of me. I've always believed in the mental toughness of what Coach Thompson instilled in me. So, I'm going to rely on my mental toughness and say that this isn't the toughest thing I've ever done in life. I'll deal with the heat, and at the end of the race, I'll still get out, smile and walk away like I always do."

(Note: Gaughan was a walk-on of the Georgetown Hoyas men's basketball team, playing under Coach John Thompson from 1995-1997. Gaughan was a role player, and his specific role was to make practice as hard as possible for the team's starters, which included future NBA all-star as Allen Iverson. In fact, when Iverson was inducted into the Naismith Memorial Basketball Hall of Fame in 2016, he thanked Gaughan in his enshrinement speech.)

Brendan Gaughan at Talladega:

- Gaughan has made nine NASCAR Cup Series starts at Talladega in a career dating back to 2004. His best finish is fourth, earned in his second Cup Series start at the 2.66-mile oval in October 2004.
- Gaughan has led a total of 20 laps at Talladega, including in April 2019 when he led five laps en route to an eighth-place finish.
- Outside of the NASCAR Cup Series, Gaughan has 11 other starts at Talladega between the NASCAR Xfinity Series and the NASCAR Gander Outdoors & RV Truck Series. He has six Xfinity Series starts, with a best finish of fifth in April 2016. He has five Truck Series starts, with a best finish of eighth in October 2011.
- Beard Motorsports has fielded a car in six NASCAR Cup Series races at Talladega. Its best finish is eighth in April 2019. All of Beard Motorsports' starts have come with Gaughan.
- Beard Motorsports is part passion project and part corporate initiative, with the race team serving to market Beard Oil Distributing and TTS Logistics. Beard Oil Distributing is a third-generation, family-owned company that services the nation's pipeline construction industry. TTS Logistics is an international freight company delivering an assortment of goods via ground, air and sea.

#NotGaughanYet