

Next Generation



Doug Duell's Dodge Challenger drag car is the first-ever modern-day Dodge Challenger to compete and win in an NHRA national event.

Chip Off the Old HEMI Block

Words: Darren Jacobs

Newburgh, Ind., resident Doug Duell was weaned on the drag strip as young boy, soaking up the environment while his father did battle on the quarter-mile in a Mopar®-powered Stock Eliminator race car. Fast forward years later, and where do we find the 48-year-old Duell? Piloting a Mopar-powered drag car like his father. Competing in the NHRA Stock Eliminator class like his father. And, like his father, experiencing the sweet taste of victory.

The second-generation racer debuted the first Mopar-powered production Dodge Challenger to compete in an NHRA national event in May at the O'Reilly NHRA Summer Nationals in Topeka, Kan. Duell wasted little time in powering to the first win for any modern-day Challenger, claiming the A/Stock Automatic (A/SA) class win in Stock Eliminator at Heartland Park Topeka.





“It was the first national event I went to, and there were eight cars in A/SA to run for class. I ran Danny Fletcher in his Camaro in the final and I won it,” Duell proudly recalled.

Growing up, Duell was an eyewitness to plenty of wins by his late father, Dave Duell, who was a factory-Chrysler racer behind the wheel of his 1963 Dodge Dragøn Wagøn. The elder Duell owned national records in Stock Eliminator for three years in the 1960s and captured a number of national event wins, as well as a runner-up finish at Indy. Doug Duell tagged along on many a trip to the strip with his father, getting an enviable view of drag racing legends in the making.

“I remember seeing Don Garlits, Shirley Muldowney, Herb McCandless and Sox & Martin at the track,” said Doug Duell. “I vividly remember that.” The elder Duell left racing for a spell, then returned to the fray in the 1990s with his son again in tow.

“I caught the fever,” said Doug Duell. “In 1992 I had a 1967 Barracuda that I started bracket racing in. So I’ve been racing for about 17 years.”

Duell’s fondest quarter-mile memory came when he lined up against his father on the strip. “It was down in Bowling Green, [Ohio], back about 2003, and I got to race my father in the finals. It was a real, real close race, and I won. It was on Father’s Day, too. It was a real cool deal.”

After his father passed away about 3 ½ years ago, Duell began competing in the 1964 Plymouth Dragøn Wagøn his father campaigned in the 1990s. “He knew we would never sell the car,” said Duell of his father. “He knew that I would race it, and I’ve had some pretty good success with it. I ran the Max Wedge class in the Chrysler Classic Series in his Plymouth Wagøn the year after he died and won the points championship.”

Spurred on by the buzz over the new Dodge Challenger Drag Pak by Mopar—the “first” drag-race-only factory package car to be built by Mopar and Chrysler Group LLC in 40 years—Duell decided to build his own Dodge Challenger drag car.

“I went out and bought the cheapest 6-cylinder Challenger I could find and literally drove it from the dealer right to the chassis builder,” explained Duell. “Matt Wright at BRC Race Craft is an excellent chassis builder and he worked on that car for about three months, then we took the car to the PRI Show in Orlando and displayed it.”

Of course, there was work—lots and lots of work—to ready the car for its maiden run on the quarter-mile.

“First thing, all the safety equipment, the air conditioning, all the creature comforts all came out,” detailed Duell. “The challenging part is that you have to build the rear suspension, which is a 4-bar set up. It’s a pretty complicated rear end to build, and it incorporates into the roll cage of the car. The engine is not in the stock location like a regular Challenger. It’s moved back a little bit and there are motor mounts that you have to build. The plumbing and wiring of all that stuff – you’re starting from scratch. You just have a body shell and you’re adding all this stuff to it. It’s pretty complicated.”

Duell received valuable assistance from Mopar as well, with Dale Aldo, Coordinator, Performance Parts, Mopar, receiving an especially grateful tip of the cap.

“Mopar helped me out,” Duell said. “The hood is a specialty piece. You can’t buy it anywhere but Mopar. It was on back order and it was getting down to crunch time, and Dale came through for me and got me the hood in time.”

The finished product was a home run, to say the least. After shakedown runs at a local track in Evansville, Ind., in early April, Duell entered his Dodge Challenger in an NHRA points meet at Indy later that month (a non-national event). Duell’s Challenger was the second fastest A/Stock Automatic and advanced to the fourth round in a field of 101 stockers. His next event was at Topeka, where he captured the class win.

“Out of the box, it has performed very good,” said Duell, a master of the obvious.

The Challenger has received nothing but positive reactions – from fans, from racers, and from Duell himself.

“The fans love it. When I’m driving through the pits people are pointing at the car and when I get up to the starting line, they’re watching to see what it will do,” said Duell. “The racers like the new car coming out as well. It’s kind of a new thing for me, to start this NHRA racing, and the racers have been very helpful and supportive and have made it a lot of fun.”

Duell himself is perhaps the biggest fan of his Challenger.

“The thing has got some power, man!” praised Duell, who has clocked a best run of 10.10/132 mph in his Challenger, which is powered by a 6.1L HEMI® engine. “I love the way it drives. It actually drives like a new car. It doesn’t drive like a race car. I tell people, ‘The thing drives the same way as when I drove it away from the dealership. It’s just loud.’ It’s real solid and you feel real safe in it. It goes straight, but the feel of it is incredible. It’s a neat car to drive.”

Duell has raced his Challenger about five times total to date. He plans to compete in September at the U.S. Nationals in Indianapolis and will enter at least two other events later in the year. Duell will also continue to compete in Nostalgia Super Stock A/Class events in his 1964 Plymouth Waggon and currently leads the point standings in the NMCA Nostalgia Super Stock Class. The die hard racer plans to split his time between the “Waggon” and the Challenger in 2010.

Duell is the torchbearer of a passion ignited by his father more than 40 years ago. The elder Duell would no doubt be proud that the “wins” of the father have been visited upon the son.

“Our family has always been very closely tied to the automotive business and we’ve always been big race fans,” Doug Duell said. “The same passion my dad had for it, I’ve certainly got it too. I’m carrying on the tradition.”