

DID YOU KNOW?
Ford has won seven of the 10 Cup races held at Texas Motor Speedway.

NASCAR INSIDER

THIS WEEK

Race: Samsung/Radius Shack 500
Where: Texas Motor Speedway
When: Sunday, 1:30 p.m. ET
Television: Fox
Defending race winner: Greg Biffle



Don't mess with Roush-Yates engines at TEXAS

Motor collaboration has yielded wins in 5 of past 6 Texas races

By RICK MINTER
Cox News Service

When it comes to racing at Texas Motor Speedway in the spring, there are few teams tougher than Roush Racing and Robert Yates Racing, who now collaborate on the engines that are such a key to success at big oval tracks like Texas. In last spring's Samsung/Radius Shack 500, Roush's Greg Biffle put a Texas-sized whipping on the field, leading 219 of 334 laps. He ran strong again in the fall at Texas, only to have some loose lug nuts on a pit stop derail his efforts. But his teammate, Carl Edwards, won the Dickies 500, running the Roush-Yates victory record to five in the past six races.

Biffle said last week that even a crash in practice that put his primary car out of action didn't slow him down at Texas last spring. "We had a right-front tire that went down, so we started from the back and led the most laps," he said. "Both of our cars were really good cars. We have a good setup for that race track." He said the changes in the racing conditions from April to November, and from one year

to the next, require adjustments to the car, but he's confident his basic setup — with a little tweaking — will serve him well this weekend. "What tends to happen is the track loses just a minuscule amount of grip every year, so you've got to kind of change small things and drive the track a little different — sometimes move to a little bit different spots on the race track," he said. "We'll find out if the fall race and coming back in the spring is going to have any impact on how the track is going to drive."

Dale Earnhardt Jr., who got his first Busch and first Nextel Cup victories at Texas, is optimistic about this week's race after running a Goodyear tire test at the track. "I thought we were pretty good," he said. "We were turning some pretty good times."

He said that while a tire test isn't as beneficial as a regular test session, it does help, especially this year as NASCAR has limited the testing that teams can do at venues where races are held.

"I like the opportunity to the test with Goodyear," Earnhardt said. "I think I figured out what my opinion was on what tires we should be running. Hopefully, that is the one they pick."

Earnhardt has had a solid start to his season. Three top-10 finishes have him sixth in points. On the other hand, Biffle, who finished second in the standings last year, has seen several opportunities to win slip away

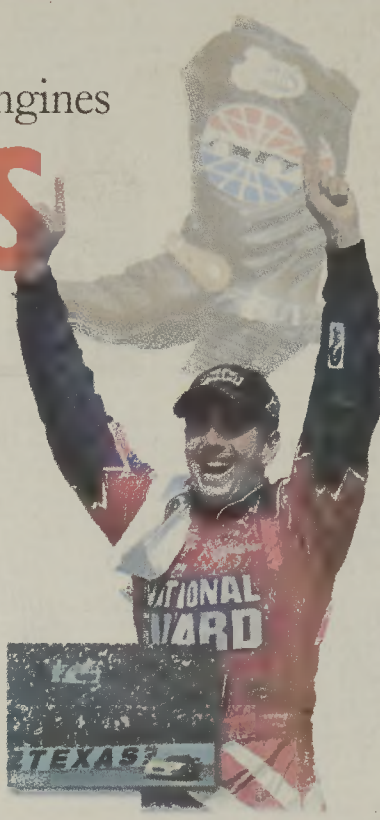


Photo illustration by Cox News Service / images by NASCAR

Greg Biffle (above) dominated last year's Samsung/Radius Shack 500, leading 219 of 334 laps on his way to victory. Biffle will be hoping for a similar performance Sunday. He's 18th in the standings, falling three spots following a 31st-place finish Sunday at Martinsville.

He's been as low as 38th in points (after California) but has bounced back to 18th, despite wrecks and finishing 31st at Martinsville on Sunday.

He had what he described as his best Martinsville car ever, but made a mistake and hit the backstretch wall trying to pass Jeff Burton.

The week before, he had what appeared to be the fastest car at Bristol, but lost three laps because of a flat tire and still finished seventh.

He ran out of gasoline at Atlanta, blew an engine while contending for the victory at California and crashed on the last lap of the Daytona 500 after being in the top 15 on the backstretch and into Turn 3 on the final circuit.

"It's hard not to think of that," he said. "But when you go out and get in the car, you've just got to concentrate on not making any mistakes and try to win or try to finish in the top five."

Rick Minter's OBSERVATIONS

A weekly State of the Union as NASCAR heads to Texas.

TEMPERATURE'S RISING

A look at who's doing it right ...

Dale Earnhardt Jr.: Although he has led just 33 laps this season (32 of them in the season-opening Daytona 500), Earnhardt is off to a rock-solid start after missing the Chase for the Nextel Cup last year. After six races, he's sixth in points with two top-five and three top-10 finishes. In one of the more remarkable drives of his career, he drove a car wrecked in a Lap 2 incident at Martinsville Speedway to a fourth-place finish in the DirecTV 500. "Even if we didn't win, it felt like it," he said.

Kasey Kahne: Finally Kahne is beginning to show the racing world why team owner Ray Evernham lured him to drive the No. 9 Dodge. After spending the offseason pondering his first two seasons, Kahne has emerged a much more mature driver. He's fourth in Nextel Cup points on the strength of a victory at Atlanta Motor Speedway and two other top-five finishes. The low spot? A blown engine at Martinsville. "We'll regroup and bounce back at Texas," he said.



KAHNE

Jimmie Johnson: Since 2002, his first full season in Nextel Cup, Johnson has won 20 races, more than any other driver in that period (Kurt Busch and Jeff Gordon are tied for second with 15, and Tony Stewart is third with 13.) Even a four-race suspension of crew chief Chad Knaus for cheating hasn't slowed him. He has won twice this year and is on top of the points standings, 59 ahead of runner-up Mark Martin. "We are right where we need to be," he said. "Hopefully we can keep this magic rolling."

Tony Stewart: A normally slow starter as Nextel Cup seasons go, Stewart scored a dominating victory in the sixth race of the season at Martinsville Speedway on Sunday. He's eighth in points and on a roll, having led at least one lap in every race this season and 533 in the past two races alone. Crew chief Greg Zampelli said his driver was in top form at Martinsville. "He stayed focused and concentrated and didn't use himself up, mentally or physically," he said.

STUCK AT LUKEMARH

Just a shout away from the good ... and bad

Janie McMurray: Roush Racing had to do some fancy negotiating with McMurray's ex-employer, Chip Ganassi, to get McMurray into the car vacated by Kurt Busch. But McMurray hasn't adjusted to Roush's system of running similar setups on all the team's cars. "We decided we would just do our own program and see if we can try some things," he said. "So we've adjusted our car and made it better for me." After finishing ninth at Martinsville, his second top-10 of the season, he's 17th in the standings.

Carl Edwards: After he finished third in points and won four races last year in his first full season in Nextel Cup, he has had a definite so-so season. After a 18th-place finish in the DirecTV 500 at Martinsville, he's 19th in points. He has two top-fives — at California and Bristol — but he also has finishes of 28th, 40th and 43rd.

Martin Truex Jr.: The two-time Busch Series champion is finding the going a lot tougher on the Nextel Cup side of the garage. He's 20th in Nextel Cup points and still seeking his first top-10 finish. In his favor is a teammate, Dale Earnhardt Jr., who knows how hard it is to succeed on NASCAR's elite circuit, especially on short tracks like Martinsville and Bristol, where Truex finished 19th and 38th, respectively. "The first time I came to Martinsville, I hit and ran over everything," Earnhardt Jr. said.

TEMPERATURE'S DROPPING

Things aren't going so well ...

The No. 49 Dodge team: The decision to go with the relatively inexperienced Brent Sherman as driver looks unwise in hindsight. In his first five starts, his average finish of 34th dropped the team out of the top 35 in owners points, meaning the team was no longer guaranteed a starting spot. Veteran Jimmy Spencer failed to get the car in the field at Martinsville, dropping the team to 46th in owner points.

Bill Davis Racing: The flagship No. 22 (run by Dave Blaney) is 31st in owner points with a best finish of 17th at Martinsville. Michael Waltrip's No. 55 Dodge, which is run in conjunction with Davis' team, is 35th in owner points with a best finish of 18th at Daytona. Apparently, Davis and Waltrip are putting considerable effort into the Toyotas they'll race next season.

Jeremy Mayfield's No. 19 team: After making the Chase for the Nextel Cup the past two seasons, Mayfield has just one top-20 finish this year. His team is 34th in owners points, just eight points inside the group that is guaranteed starting spots for races, and seemingly unsure of where to start looking for a cure. "We've just dug ourselves in a hole, and we've got to figure out how to dig out," he said.



What ever happened to ... Waddell WILSON

Waddell Wilson, a longtime engine builder and crew chief, now works as a trouble-shooter and salesman for Ferrero Transmission, which serves many top NASCAR teams. Now 69, he's still in the NASCAR garage most weeks working with his customers. During the week, he makes the rounds at the race shops in North Carolina. He estimates he played a significant role in about 120 victories and 120 poles in the division now known as Nextel Cup. He recently sat down for a conversation with Cox News Service staff writer Rick Minter.

On his biggest highs in racing: "Winning races. I went to work for Holman Moody in 1983 with Fireball Roberts and Fred Lorenzen. John Holman

expected us to win every race and run one and two. That's the way he programmed us. It was the same with [car owners] L.G. Dewitt and Harry Ranier."

On the lows: "I remember more about the problems we had. ... The losing hurt. One of the worst was at Darlington in 1985 when Bill Elliott won the Winston Million."

"We were leading the race with Cale Yarborough, and the power-steering pump went out and cost us the race. At Atlanta in '85, we were leading and lost the engine in the latter part of the race. It happened at Charlotte, too."

On the big victories: "Winning the Daytona 500 in 1980 with Buddy Baker was big. He'd been trying for 19 years. We won in '85 with Lorenzen, in '67 with Mario Andretti, and in 1975 with Benny Parsons. I would have never believed that one. We went down there just hoping to finish the race with a bunch of parts I'd scrambled up to build an engine with."

Catching up with ... Rick CRAWFORD

Craftsman Truck Series veteran Rick Crawford is tied with Jack Sprague for career starts with 226. The Mobile, Ala., native has four victories and is 10th in points after a 26th-place finish at Martinsville last week. He sat down with Cox News Service writer Rick Minter to discuss a number of topics.



CRAWFORD

Q: How is your son Adam doing early in his career?

A: "He would be the fourth generation of my grandpa's family that had the opportunity to go racing. I'm proud to give him an opportunity that I wish I could have had when I started. I keep telling him that this is not something Dad wants him to do. I just want him to enjoy the sport like I have. If he's passionate and dedicated to it, the opportunity is there for him."

Q: How do you feel about racing late in your career?

A: "It's like being on the fastest roller coaster in the park. Man, what a ride. I could stay on one of these all day. It's been a great career."

Q: How is it that your owner, Texas businessman

Tom Mitchell, never attends races?

A: "I've tried to twist his arm. A.J. Foyt has offered to let him stay in his condo at Texas. But Mr. Mitchell's his own person."

If he doesn't feel comfortable about doing something, he's not going to do it. He just feels better about being at home and finding out about the races on TV or the Internet or in the newspaper."

Q: How long will you continue to race?

A: "Not much longer. We're not going to put a date on it yet. I'm still having a great time. I feel really competitive."

"I drive for a great team and a great owner, but I see the end coming."

Q: Does it bother you not to race in Busch or Nextel Cup?

A: "If my career ends in the Craftsman Truck Series, that's great. There's nothing wrong with the truck series. You don't have to be a Cup driver to say you're one of the best drivers in the country."

Q: What would you like people to say about you at the retirement dinner?

A: "That was a good race. He tried to help younger drivers. He was polite, and he thanked the people who helped him. He's been an ambassador for the truck series and for the sport."



NUMERICALLY SPEAKING

685 Laps led this season by Tony Stewart (below), tops among Nextel Cup drivers



22 Tony Stewart's position on NASCAR's all-time win list. His 25th victory at Martinsville last week, tied him with Jim Paschal and Joe Weatherly.

13 Drivers who have competed in all 10 races at Texas Motor Speedway

10 Different race winners in 10 Nextel Cup races at Texas

STANDINGS

NEXTEL CUP

Following the DIRECTV 500

- Jimmie Johnson 933; previous: 3
- Mark Martin 874; previous: 4
- Matt Kenseth 873; previous: 1
- Kasey Kahne 832; previous: 2
- Kyle Busch 832; previous: 5
- Dale Earnhardt Jr. 824; previous: 6
- Jeff Gordon 814; previous: 7
- Tony Stewart 791; previous: 9
- Elliott Sadler 735; previous: 11
- Casey Mears 724; previous: 9



Cup next up: Samsung/Radius Shack 500, Texas Motor Speedway, TV: 1:30 p.m. ET, Sunday, Fox

Busch next up: O'Reilly 300, Texas Motor Speedway, TV: 3 p.m. ET, Saturday, Fox

Truck next up: Dodge Ram Tough 200, Gateway Int. Raceway, TV: 8 p.m. ET, April 29, Speed Channel

BUSCH SERIES

- Kevin Harvick 952; previous: 1
- J.J. Yeley 831; previous: 2
- Denny Hamlin 814; previous: 5
- Clint Bowyer 791; previous: 4
- Carl Edwards 774; previous: 7

TRUCK SERIES

- Mark Martin 720; previous: 1
- Ted Musgrave 665; previous: 3
- Todd Bodine 662; previous: 2
- David Reutimann 576; previous: 4
- Dave Starr 556; previous: 13