

Toyota's Rally RAV4 clinches championship along with NHRA Mile-High triumph over weekend

July 24, 2017

Image not found or type unknown



NASCAR

Camry driver Matt Kenseth had the top-finishing Toyota with a fifth-place result in Sunday's Monster Energy NASCAR Cup Series (MENCS) race at Indianapolis Motor Speedway, which was won by Kasey Kahne.

Kenseth led 21 laps (of 167) to tally his second-consecutive top-five result in an event featuring three red flag periods – including one for nearly two hours caused by heavy rain and track drying – as well as numerous cautions, including three in the race's closing laps as NASCAR fought off darkness.

In addition to Kenseth's laps led, Camry drivers Kyle Busch (race-high 87 laps led, 34th-place finish), Erik Jones (10 laps led, 31st-place finish) and Martin Truex Jr. (eight laps led, 33rd-place finish) all paced circuits around the 2.5-mile track before being collected in late-race accidents.

In total, Camry drivers led 126 laps at Indianapolis – the most of any manufacturer – and Busch won the race's first two stages as he appeared to have the strongest car in the field after starting from the pole position, but was involved in an accident that took him out of the race before the finish.

Camry driver Denny Hamlin was poised for a top-five finish before being involved in a last-lap incident and finished 17th, leaving just two Camry drivers running at the conclusion of the wreck-marred event.

Camry drivers Busch and Jones appeared poised for a one-two finish before pitting for tires late in the race and were not able to make their way back through the field to catch eventual race-winner William Byron. While the Toyota teams expected the field to follow them to pit road, the competition stayed out for track position, relegating the Camrys further back in the pack where Busch finished 12th and Jones ultimately finished 23rd, as the 21-year-old driver also received a pit road penalty.

Busch led a race-high 44 laps (of 100) in the NXS event before he won the pole position for the MENCS race later that afternoon.

In a rare, mid-week race, Tundra driver Matt Crafton was victorious in the NASCAR Camping World Truck Series (NCWTS) at Ohio's Eldora Speedway dirt track on Wednesday night.

The two-time NCWTS champion led 24 laps (of 150) on the half-mile Ohio dirt track to capture his first victory of 2017 and also earned playoff bonus points by winning the race's first stage of the evening.

"This definitely wasn't the one that I thought was going to put us in the playoffs without a doubt," said Crafton from victory lane. "I was looking to come in here and have a top five – a good solid top-five run.

"It's huge," added Crafton. "Since I was a kid, I've always heard about Eldora, and then watching all these guys the last few years put this thing on the fence, and I ran the bottom and I would run in the top five, and then I would fade at the end because the bottom would go away. I just came committed that I'm going to run the top and we're going to give up our bottom of the race track and not going to be quite as good down there, but I'm going to run the top when it matters. That's what we did tonight. It was huge. It definitely ranks up there amongst one of the greatest wins I've had so far just because it's something so out of the ordinary."

The result was also Crafton's 233rd top-10 result in the NCWTS and he needs just one more top-10 to tie Ron Hornaday Jr.'s record of 234 top-10 finishes in the NCWTS.

The MENCS and NCWTS will race at Pennsylvania's Pocono Raceway this weekend, as the NXS heads to Iowa Speedway for a Saturday afternoon race.

ARA

Toyota's Ryan Millen and co-pilot Rhianon Gelsomino clinched the American Rally Association's 2WD championship just by starting the first stage of the weekend's New England Forest Rally.

By collecting one point when the Rally RAV4 started the event in New Hampshire on Friday, Millen and Gelsomino secured the title with one race remaining on the 2017 schedule.

"We just finished the New England Forest Rally and we won," said Millen, following Saturday's event. "We're now the 2WD ARA champions and I can't thank Toyota, JBL and all the volunteers. We've had a great year and I'm super stoked and just so thankful."

Millen and Gelsomino finished seventh overall in the two-day event that began in New Hampshire on Friday and concluded in Maine on Saturday, July 22 while also winning their fifth-consecutive event of the six-race series.

The Toyota duo established a dominant points lead entering the year's fifth event by winning the 2WD class in the season's first four races and continued their success with a win in the weekend's event.

The ARA concludes its debut season with the Ojibwe Forests Rally in Minnesota in August.

NHRA

Toyota's Antron Brown had the advantage at the starting line and never trailed on the way to defeating Leah Pritchett in Sunday's NHRA Top Fuel final at Bandimere Speedway in suburban Denver.

Brown defeated Scott Palmer in the opening round, and knocked off fellow Toyota driver Doug Kalitta to advance to the semi-finals where he eliminated Brittany Force before winning his final round matchup to claim Toyota's third NHRA triumph of the season competition.

In addition, Cruz Pedregon advanced to the Funny Car semi-finals in Denver as he strengthens his grasp on the final Funny Car playoff berth.

The NHRA next competes this weekend in the Toyota NHRA Sonoma Nationals at California's Sonoma Raceway from Friday through Sunday, July 28-30.

LOORRS

After qualifying fourth for Saturday's Lucas Oil Off-Road Racing Series event in Missouri, Toyota's Eric Barron was involved in an incident on lap six that would end his weekend.

Barron was scored in 11th-place, but did not participate in Sunday's PRO 4 race at Lucas Oil Speedway in Wheatland, Missouri.

Toyota driver Hailie Deegan finished second in Pro-Lite competition on Sunday night in Missouri.

POWRi

The weekend's three scheduled POWRi events across Illinois and Missouri were cancelled due to an excessive heat advisory for the St. Louis area.

Races at Illinois' Tri-City Speedway and Belle-Clair Speedway, as well as Federated Auto Parts Raceway at I-55 in Missouri were cancelled in advance Wednesday when the National Weather Service issued a warning for the

area that predicted heat index values as high as 115 degrees.

Toyota's Zach Daum currently sits first in the POWRi point standings.

The POWRi National Midget Series next races at Federated Auto Parts Raceway in August.

More Toyota racing news is available at www.toyotaracing.com.