

A RECORD EVENT



Peeps Pennington Scores His Biggest Win

WORDS/PHOTOS JOHN DiBARTOLOMEO

The rules were changed. Whether or not that had anything to do with it, is a moot point. Regardless, the K&N Spring Fling Million presented by Optima Batteries held at The Strip at Las Vegas Speedway in April was the largest Spring Fling brand event held out west since the event began there seven years ago.

"A typical Fling rule has always been a car can only go down the track one time, which precludes a driver

from doubling up in the same car," said co-promoter Kyle Seipel. "However, being in the middle of the desert and with the travel for most racers, along with wanting to bring in more east coast cars, we chose to allow two drivers to share a car. The same driver may not double enter the same car, but two drivers can share. This made a lot of sense for racers coming from a far distance. It allowed them to load two or more cars in a trailer for the trip and share expenses."

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There have only been four people who can lay claim to holding a Spring Fling Million race trophy, a feat Peeps Pennington can now add to his resume. (Left to right) Luke Bogacki 2017, Pennington 2019, Jeff Verdi 2016, and Randall Reid 2018.



With the presenting of our nation's colors, Ivey Brannon singing the National Anthem and the first pair of cars ready to go under the arch at The Strip at Las Vegas Motor Speedway, Million Dollar Friday began and some 12 hours later a new champion was crowned.

Ironman of the week had to be John Labrous driving Anthony Bertozzi's Super Gas Corvette, a whip Labrous won the 2017 NHRA world championship with. An already former four-time Fling champion, two runner-ups and a semifinal appearance only goes to prove how tough he is.



The end result was the largest Spring Fling Million event in the history of the brand out west. Wednesday's auxiliary \$30K-to-win event had 562 entries make first round. Thursday 586, and finally Saturday 544.

The actual Maytag/Silverstate Refrigeration Million Dollar Friday race typically "only" has roughly 200-300 entries due to the entry expense, and of course the winner's share of the purse is progressively tied to entries with a guarantee of \$250,000 regardless of entries. The remainder of the purse is guaranteed. However, following along with the week's activities, a record 344 racers ponied up the \$2,000 entry fee to make the winner's share of the Million main event, a record \$375,000-to-win with an obvious asterisk.

We mention the word "asterisk" and "record," but as this is being printed, that amount of money is the highest that has ever been paid to any one winner of any drag race regardless of class. However, by the time this is printed, there will have also been a bracket race in June which could pay as much as \$525,000-to-win, not to mention the Fall Fling 500K race in September which will guarantee \$500,000 to the winner. Nonetheless though, to say the Spring Fling Million in Las Vegas was a rousing success for everyone, is a definite understatement.

Quite possibly though the one person; if there even was just one; who had an exciting successful weekend would have to be Preston Scott Pennington; otherwise known as Peeps. "I don't know how I got that name," Peeps says. "I think I

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What has become a tradition at all Fling events is the Family Photo, an invitation to everyone on the grounds to be part of an historic photo never again to be duplicated in the history of the brand, let alone the world.

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If there was a second place in the week's ironman competition, it had to be Shane Carr (left). Driving a car owned by Shane Thompson (right), a dragster Carr never sat in before arriving in Las Vegas, he drove it to the runner-up position in the Million.



The event becomes more popular every year drawing in quite a bit of NHRA sportsman racers such as former national event champion Bobby Dye in his Specialty Fasteners-sponsored Super Comp car.

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was just a little pip-squeak when I was small and somebody called me Peeps and the name just stuck."

Still a little on the "small" side, he probably grew to ten-foot tall after he went through the finish line at the biggest race he has ever won. A definite contender regardless of where he races, his biggest payday was "only" a \$25,000-to-win affair. "I know the money makes this race very prestigious," he says, "but we'll spend the money. The trophy and the knowledge of what we accomplished will last forever."

The "we" he speaks about are his brothers Michael and Phillip, along with Michael's wife Cassie, their two kids Cash and Corbin, and not to forget where he inherited the sport to begin with. Dad David, with his wife and the kid's Mom, Cindy, built ten of these roadsters back in 1994, selling nine and keeping one for himself. Obviously quickly seeing how good they work, the family has bought back four of them, racing two with two more in the shop to be completed. In addition, a dragster is part of their repertoire when they travel to the races.

Partners in a used car dealership with his brothers, Peeps scored a Fling win in 2015, while brother Michael has a Fling runner-up to his credit in '17.

"I guess it's every kid's dream to win one of the Million Dollar races," Peeps says, "and I feel very fortunate to be one of the just 25 guys who have won a Million Dollar event." [21 have won the Million in Alabama, and now four who have won the Vegas Million. -Ed.]

Driving two of the identical roadsters at this race, sharing along with his brother Michael, it's ironic that the car Peeps won in was not the one in which he had the utmost confidence. "I don't exactly know why because we've made lots of runs in both of these cars, but until it started to make good runs, I wasn't real sure of it," he said.

The pressure of winning an event of this magnitude could very well be monumental. But having been in the position of winning big races before no doubt helped the 28-year old block it all out. "I guess I felt a little bit of pressure when we got to the ladder round of 16-cars," he says. "They told all 16 of us how much money was left in the pot at that point so it started to become a reality of

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A special class of PRO38 footbrakers joined the party with Idaho's Andy Schmall footbraking his way in a sea of delay box racers to several late round appearances, including a semifinalist on Million Dollar Friday.



The Brodix Run For The \$50K allowed each attendee one chance for a perfect run which would net that person \$50,000. No one "perfected" it but first place with the best package earned Sean Page a new set of Brodix SR20 cylinder heads.



The patented Fling Reaction Time Challenge gave 25 randomly selected racers one chance to score either a .000 or .00X reaction time. Steve Hayes was one of six, each of whom received \$100 for their .00X reaction time with none able to pull off a perfect light.

how much money we were playing for. I was just able to block it all out and concentrate."

The winnings included a two-night stay in a luxurious suite at the Cosmopolitan Resort in addition to a limo ride there. "That was pretty amazing," he says. "I'm just a redneck from south Texas and I've never been in a hotel that nice. We actually had the limo driver hang around at the track while we all took showers before we went down there.

"After the win light came on in the final, I took the last turnoff at the end of the track," he added. "The turnoff is slightly higher in elevation than the rest of the track and I got a good glimpse of all the lights downtown, so it was really neat to then go down there. The suite overlooked the fountains at Caesars Palace and we took lots of pictures. It was a great experience." And one that he no doubt will remember forever.

As for some of the other "experiences," last year Vinny DiMino couldn't seemingly win more than just a couple of rounds of racing. That is until the final day, where he bested Brian Cireddu for the \$30,000 prize. After this past year, maybe DiMino should only race on Saturday. Once again not able to string together many round wins, he again went to the final on Saturday beating John Labbous for the Saturday title.

Speaking of Labbous, had there been a points champion of who did the best, there's little doubt his name would have been at the top. With two runner-ups and a semifinalist, the only thing stopping the already four-time Fling champion, might have been himself. Each loss came by virtue of a red-light but you'd better not ever count this guy out when it comes to big money races.

A Swear Jar was once again in existence whereby those choosing to use some "salty" type of language, were expected to visit the tower and add some dollars. The money collected has always then been donated to a worthwhile charity. Weeks prior to the event, Funny Car racer Shawn Langdon's father Chad; also an NHRA national event champion; received the gift of a liver transplant. Shawn was also racing at the event and it was decided to donate the money to the Langdon family to assist with what probably are a mountain of medical expenses. Quite a bit of money was raised which just goes to prove how thoughtful racers can be, helping those in need.

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BOXSCORE

K&N Spring Fling Million
presented by Optima Batteries
Las Vegas, Nevada

Tuesday American Race Cars/Brando Custom Paint Dragster Shootout

W-Jeff Burns, Lebanon, TN
R/U-Gary Williams, Bradenton, FL

Maytag/Silverstate Wednesday

W-Kevin Thorp, Knickerboker, TX
R/U-John Labbous, White House, TN

Racepak Thursday

W-Johnny Ezell, Ventress, LA
R/U-Trevor Larson, Glenwood, MN

Maytag/Silverstate Million Friday

W-Peeps Pennington, Three Rivers, TX
R/U-R/U-Shane Carr, Bradenton, FL

FTI Saturday

W-Vinny DiMino, Staten Island, NY
R/U-John Labbous, White House, TN



Brodix Run For The \$50K

Sean Page - Brodix SR20 Cylinder Heads
Cassie Pennington - \$2000 Cash
Wes Anderson - 2020 Spring Fling Million Friday Entry (\$2000 Value)

Reaction Time Challenge Winners

Larry Ericksmoen
Tim Schuster
Tobor Kadar
Steve Hayes
Marl LaLond
Kris Whitfield



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