



BACK ON HOME TURF

**NICK AGOSTINO LOOKS
AHEAD TO ANOTHER SUMMER
OF RACING IN ONTARIO**

Story by Greg MacPherson

After spending years racing in the US, the pandemic caused Markham, Ontario racer Nick Agostino to get back to his roots, in 2020. With the border closed, he spent the summer racing his black '69 Camaro in the Super Street class of the Canada Heads Up Shootout Series (CHU), which put on three events. He also took part in several RCSS races, at Toronto Motorsports Park.

In the end, he took the CHU title after winning all three events. And he finished runner-up in the RCSS series after winning two of those races, as well as the big Smackdown event, at St. Thomas Dragway.

Most importantly, Agostino enjoyed reconnecting with some old friends at some familiar tracks, and it looks like he's in for a repeat of that scenario again in 2021.

Since 2018, Nick has piloted a black and white '69 Camaro. That was the replacement after his red 2000 Camaro suffered heavy damage in a grudge match.

"The body and carbon work were done by Joe Van O; it's beautiful. It's a billet, small block Chevrolet with 4.600-inch-bore-space," said

Agostino, describing the car. "I build the engines myself. Twin Precision turbos, on alcohol, with a two-speed M&M transmission."

Detailing his 2020 season, Agostino continued, "For Ian's series [Ian Hill's Canada Heads Up Street Car Shootout Series], we made all three races and ended up winning two of them, just not 'the Smackdown.'

"And the other series – the RCSS at Toronto Motorsport Park – I think we only went to half of the races. We were actually kind of waiting to see what happened with the border last year, and did a bunch up here, in Canada, when we couldn't cross. Once it was clear we couldn't race in the States, we made some changes to the car and got back in gear but missed two races at TMP, and we still finished second there, behind Pano Moros."

Outlining the success he's enjoyed in recent years, Nick said, "We've done pretty good. Last year, because of COVID, our focus was on local racing, which was great to be back at those tracks and see our friends and acquaintances again.

"But before the lockdown, we were racing a class called Pro 275

and we actually won the first race in that series, at the end of January at Bradenton Motorsports Park, in Florida. That was a pretty big event with Pro Mods and everybody there.

“We went down to that race qualified in the middle of the field and ended up finally inching our way through the crowd and we ended up winning that. So that was a huge win for us, against some of the top teams.”

Going back even further, Agostino continued, “Four or five years before that, we were racing Outlaw 10.50 and Radial Vs. The World (RVW). For that, the car kind of didn’t fit, but we did really good with our old red car, before we crashed it. We won quite a few of the Outlaw 10.50 races. RVW is a pretty tough class. We didn’t win any of those races, but we qualified at almost every race we went to, and there are 40 to 50 cars going for a 16 or 32-car field.”

If not for the pandemic, Agostino would have continued to race in the Pro 275 series, in the US. But as it turned out, he got an alert that the border would be closing down and he drove an RV and his equipment back to Canada, from Florida, barely making it across in time.

“After that, we had all the equipment at home and we tested and raced locally, competing in the two series. To be honest with you, it was great to stay home last year. Our car isn’t really set up for the classes here, so we made some changes and added some weight. We added 300 pounds and put in a smaller turbos on it, to race Super Street.

“So while we miss the Pro 275 racing, we really enjoyed supporting the local series and racing and getting back with the friends we grew up with when we were 20 years old. It was a lot of fun.”

With the border situation still in flux, what does Agostino have planned for 2021?

“This summer, we actually might double class. Because we did pretty good last year, in Super Street, we actually qualified ‘number one’ and won every race that we went to last year. But unfortunately, because of that, we ended up getting the ‘lead’ trophy, which is another 150 pounds of weight added to her.

“So with the borders still closed, it looks like we’re going to be racing locally again. We can get a weight break for putting a smaller turbo on the car, so we’re going to try that. To get around the added 150, we’ll take a smaller turbo and that will let us just put on 50 pounds instead. It’ll reduce the power and we’ll run Super Street



The restrictions on travel have allowed Nick Agostino to find a home in the Canada Heads Up Shootout Series. Photos by Blake Farnan

again, as best we can.”

Nick is also looking at the new CHU Pro 10.5 class.

“It’s a little quicker than Super Street, and we have already pre-entered and pre-paid for it. It’s pretty close to Pro 275. We might double-class in that one – we want to support it, too – but we’re going to keep the car in Super Street. There are three of those 10.5 races this year and six Super Street, so we might just flip-flop back and forth.”

Agostino anticipates tough competition in the CHU Super Street division, with many top drivers in serious equipment set to take part. Ricky Carlos is even coming out of retirement, with a beautiful new ‘69 Camaro, which Agostino believes will be a contender right out of the box.

“Super Street is going to be an awesome class this year. There’s probably 16 to 20 cars that will be right near the top. It’s going to be phenomenal.”

For updates and schedule info for CHU, visit lanHillRacing.com and click on the Canada Heads Up tab at the top. //

ST. THOMAS RENOVATIONS: PHASE 2

In late March, St. Thomas Dragway owner/operator Paul Spriet outlined the next phase of upgrades being done at the popular London, Ontario-area drag strip. Several of the projects were started last season and will continue through 2021. At the top of the list was the repaving of the shutdown area. “In 2020, the track was repaved from the end of the concrete pads to approximately 400 feet past the quarter-mile finish line. The shutdown was also ground smooth from this point to the first turnoff, approximately 650 feet down-track.

“The remaining portion of the track was ground flat but still has a corduroy texture. While this setup was safe and usable, it wasn’t optimal. So prior to this season, we will be paving the shutdown, continuing from where we stopped last season to approximately 200 feet from the end of the track.”

Spriet also announced that additional lighting will be installed, beyond the finish line to the end of the track, using solar-powered systems. The tower will also be revamped to incorporate a new main floor souvenir shop, which will also handle fuel sales. This will also be where racers will go for re-entry and payouts. Broken windows have been replaced, washrooms added, and the suites have been updated and re-painted. Some small bleachers have been moved to make space for new pit spots and track signage will be updated or removed, as needed. All of this is being done in addition to the ongoing general repairs that were started last season.

Spriet also noted that his son, Jarrett, is working on adding an off-road park and mud bog area to the property, which will be able to run independently of the dragstrip operations. Construction of these new components start in the summer. // – With Files From St. Thomas Dragway



Paul and Jarrett Spriet. Photo by Peter Anderson



NICK KEMPERS

CHU STOCK WHEEL BASE 2020 CHAMPION

Story by Tanya Teetzel with Photos by Blake Farnan

How do you start as a father taking his 1963 Nova and children to the racetrack, and end up with a motorcycle drag racing addiction? This is exactly what happened to Nick Kempers and brought him to be the Stock Wheel Base Champion in the Maxima Racing Oils Canada Heads Up 2020 race series. Nick takes us through his history as a racer and how his 2014 ZX-14R came to be.

Eleven-year-old Nick had his first set of two wheels: a Honda Z50, ridden around the family farm. It didn't take long for him to decide the bike wasn't fast enough and he swapped in a manual transmission and a 70 cc cylinder on the 50 cc block.

Family influence did not stop at Dad, Nick's brother purchased a 1998 Kawasaki ZX-6R, which quickly caught Nick's interest in street bikes. The brothers made their way to Toronto Motorsports Park and, of course, Nick had to give it a try, running an 11.10 seconds at

126 mph. A ZX-9R replaced the ZX-6R, which is when Nick ran his first ever 10 second pass and knew he must have a bike of his own. Knowing he loved Kawasaki, and the power of a 600 cc motorcycle would not be enough, a 2000 Kawasaki ZX-12R became his first motorcycle. The bike was loved for 12 years and even received some swingarm extensions bringing a new personal best quarter mile time of 9.47 seconds at 147 mph. The bike then was sold with no intentions of purchasing a new bike.

This is where many motorcycle and drag racing enthusiasts have a small chuckle to themselves as we all know that's never the case. Once racing is in your blood there is no escape. Not having a bike lasted less than a month before an orange and black 2009 ZX-14 Special Edition came into Nick's life. Nick, along with his brother, spent many test and tune days at St. Thomas Raceway Park, which is where Randy Hope invited them to join CanCup drag racing series.



(Above) Nick Kempers launching his turbocharged Kawasaki ZX-14R. (Right) Murray Lonsbary (centre) joins the Kempers family in the winners circle.



Nick recalls this was the day where it went from a part-time enjoyment, to so much more. Racing in the Street Fighter 9.50 class with an amazing rival, Karen Hope, every race was a nail-biter and could go either way for both of them.

In 2016 a new bike joined the fleet; this time a 2014 ZX-14R. It was in this season that Nick ran his fastest passes on both bikes. The stretched 2009 brought in a 9.35 seconds at 145 mph and the new bike, which had a stock wheel base, ran a 9.35 seconds at 150 mph. Just like that Nick fell in love with Stock Wheel Base, winning the CanCup Street Fighter championship in 2018. Nick participated in the Canada Heads Up – Stock Wheel Base class in 2020. The unique part of this class is that power adders are permitted. Anxious to be on top, Nick turbocharged his ZX-14R. The class was competitive with some incredibly talented riders and it was an extremely close series all season. On the final race weekend of the series, the ZX-14R engine ended up hurt and was not able to perform after running an 8 second, 173 mph test pass. To say Nick was overwhelmed with emotion is nearly an understatement. Murray Lonsbary offered his Stock Wheel Base bike to Nick so he could finish out the weekend and season. Nick managed to ride a bike he was unfamiliar with and obtain the points he needed to win the series championship, and this became the most memorable moment of the season.

So why run the turbo and not nitrous? For Nick, this was easy. He had been using power adders for many years. He knew nitrous would be a cheap initial investment to get power quickly, but you never truly finish paying for the system. Turbocharging the engine, for him, was the more economical way to go.

“Drag racing has been an amazing experience for me over the years. Between the friends that become family, to the way it helps me escape the everyday stresses and pressures,” is exactly how Nick describes racing to him. Balancing life and drag racing can be trying, with many late nights and even some all-nighters leading up to race weekends. Nick runs his own business and has a young family. This does not leave him much time for playing with the bike. “Lucky for me, my wife and kids enjoy what I do and support my racing addiction. It’s also a way for the family to enjoy some camping (trackside).”

The 2021 season will be a continuation of the 2020 season for Nick and his 2014 ZX-14R, with more seat time and a few minor changes. The Canada Heads Up series, headed into its third year, is supported once again by Maxima Racing Oils with the addition of Speedwire Systems and RM Racing Lubricants for 2021. This year features a five-race series, split between St. Thomas Dragway and Toronto Motorsports Park. The JP Powder Coating Short Wheel Base Bike class is complemented with a Long Wheel Base option for pro category bike competitors as well as a bike dial-in (bracket) class. Canada Heads Up is presented by Ian Hill Racing Productions, their Board of Directors and volunteers with more info found on their website www.ianhillracing.com. *IT*

MOTORCYCLE SPECS

Bike: 2014 Kawasaki ZX-14R ABS, with BST wheels

Weight: 545 lb

Modifications: Stock motor, Garrett GT3071R turbo, Tial 8 psi wastegate, CBR F4i radiator, electric water pump, Spectrum lithium battery, air shifter, M2 S2 rear shock, Catalyst +4 rear tail, Catalyst Grudge tank cover, Hardcore fuel cell with external fuel pump, Unit 5 Grudge pegs

Fastest Pass: 8.73 @ 177.47 mph



(Above) Ontario Gassers, Altereds and Dragsters driver Larry Kerrigan. Photo by by Kenny Kroeker

ONTARIO GASSERS, ALTEREDS AND DRAGSTERS

Series Aiming to Kick Off Pandemic-hit 2021 Season in July

Story by Greg MacPherson

One of the biggest trends in drag racing, in recent years, has been the rise of nostalgia vehicles. In Ontario, the newly renamed Ontario Gassers, Altereds and Dragsters (OGAD) are proof of this surge.

Headed by Tom Hough, from Brantford, ON, the group puts on events at St. Thomas Dragway. The pandemic has played havoc with the series' early-season dates, but it looks like it OGAD will be able to take to the track on July 10, with subsequent dates on August 7 and September 18.

In terms of the rules for the various divisions, the Gassers must be '72 and older. Most 'door' body styles are accepted, if they "have a Gasser look, from back in the day."

For the Nostalgia Dragsters / Altereds and Funny Cars, OGAD allows Front-Engine Dragsters, Altereds (centre steer), Nostalgia Funny Cars and Pre-1980 Rear-Engine Dragsters.

Competition is index-style racing, on a .400 pro tree, in .00 and .50 brackets (12.50, 12.00, 11.50, etc.). Banned are delay boxes and traction control, but single-stage nitrous oxide is permitted. All events take place on an 1/8-mile track.

According to a post on the series' Facebook page, "The focus will always be to have fun and put on a great show. We encourage all racers to park as a group and invite/open your pit spot to fans, particularly kids."

Talking about the OGAD series, Hough

said, "Several of our racers also participate in the Ontario Nostalgia Drag Racing (ONDR) series but we're a little more flexible in terms of the rules. Our big things are that the cars look correct to the period, but they can be more modern in terms of what's inside."

Pat Cheatley – who is heavily involved in nostalgia drag racing on the west coast – is excited about the new Ontario Gassers, Altereds and Dragsters series.

"There are a lot of cars out there," said Cheatley. "Altereds and Dragsters that are looking for another series to run in, as well as the ONDR stuff."

Asked about the potential for growth for the new series, Cheatley continued, "Most definitely. As much as the name is 'Ontario' Gassers, there will be people coming from all around once we get up and running. I can see people coming from Montreal, Buffalo, New York and Detroit.

"There's such a rich drag racing history in Southern Ontario that pulled people in. So once the border opens, I can see it attracting racers from a good distance."

According to Cheatley, nostalgia drag racing attracts a wide variety of competitors. Some are coming out with cars that have been parked for a while because they didn't have a place to race.

And others are being built by younger racers who are attracted to the class by the unique character of the vehicles.

"It's going to be a mixed bag. I know a

guy who has been working on a nostalgia dragster for a couple of years. He's young and looking to get into it himself and bought a Nostalgia Funny Car and they're building it now to come out with the series.

"Tom Hough has a dragster and another guy has a Fuel Altered. I know of five cars in Brantford (ON) alone that can come out. And I know of a couple other Fuel Altereds that are sitting, that guys are looking at getting back on the track.

"There was a track day at St. Thomas, last year, that attracted like 50 cars. Gassers, Dragsters and old hot rod stuff.

"There's definitely a mix of young guys getting into the sport and older guys who have a car but haven't had anywhere to race or a series to compete in and have been out of it for a couple of years. We'll have pros and guys who are learning to get down the track."

Cheatley envisions a friendly group of grassroots racers, competing, putting on a spectacle for the fans.

"The neat thing about this type of racing is that it's multi-generational. You see grandfathers, dads and sons into it, and gender isn't an issue, either.

"There are lots of women involved in the sport. And even those who aren't racing, are getting into it as mechanics and that can translate into a career."

For more information, join the Ontario Gassers, Altereds and Dragsters group on Facebook. 17