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Harry Strunk, former editor in chief of the Daily Nebraskan, is currently working on a biography of Don Schumacher and the history of his racing teams as well as a novel set within the world of drag racing called *Burning More Than Rubber*. To gather research for these projects, he's signed on as a crewmember for Don Schumacher's Jack Beckman-driven Mail Terminal Services Funny Car during the Western Swing and will chronicle his adventures for NHRA.com readers. Strunk can be reached at hstrunk100@gmail.com

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When everything goes right ...

I'm learning how to put on my game face.

I guess that's what you call it after you win your second national event in eight days and go on with life afterwards. A brief moment of jumps, high fives, hugs, and quick shouts of joy; and then it's back to normal without the typical into-the-evening celebration of other sports. It's the sign of a true professional and mature staff at the Mail Terminal Services Funny Car.

"It's just another race. Harry," was the comment I got from several of the crew members as I perused the hotel looking for further moments of glee. "We have to go to work tomorrow."

I knew in my heart they were right. Helping "Fast Jack" Beckman continue to break personal career records -- back to back national event wins, eight straight wins in a row, a possible sweep of the Western Swing only accomplished once in Funny Car history by John Force in 1994 -- is called keeping your eye on the ball.



It appears that I am also setting a few records myself: the only new crew member to go eight days with two national event wins. If you recall, I missed qualifying

sessions in Denver last week due to my late arrival on Sunday morning. God dropped me in the right place at the right time and when that happens, you just enjoy the ride. In fact Angela Lance, in charge of travel for DSR, asked me Sunday night during a political discussion if I was a Democrat. I replied no, I'm spiritual.

With all of the things that can and do go wrong in fuel racing, spirituality seems to play a huge part in the outcome of what goes on down at the track. From the fact that Beckman survived cancer and is even there in the first place to the failed engine parts we had along the way this past week. They included a blown burst plate, chewed up blower belt, broken crankshaft hub bolt, and the ultimate: a blown Force engine after John Force temporarily had taken the lead against Jack in the final at Seattle. The outcome of any of these things could have spelled a loss for the MTS team, but they didn't.

Which brings me to my next burning question that has been fanning the flames of my most recent obsession. How many parts does it take to build a Funny Car?

Veteran Crew Chief Ed "Ace" McCulloch of the Ron Capps Brut car said, "Who cares? Who would possibly sit down and count them and on what day?" Evidently, the number varies with daily conditions due to shims and other such adjusting parts.

It is a question left over from my memories of the space shuttle disaster a couple decades ago when a defective O ring led to the fatal explosion in the space program. At the time I remember being amazed at hearing there were 80,000 suppliers to the space shuttle. But that number represented only suppliers. The number of parts would most likely be astronomical (pardon the pun).

The whole point? There are so many things that can and do go wrong with a modern Top Fuel car that most fans are unaware of the complexity and difficulty of getting one of these monsters successfully down the track on any given race.

I may be one of the few people who have never seen Jack Beckman lose a race. He says that if we keep winning, he's not letting me go home. Little does he know, my wife isn't letting me come home anyway unless I shave the beard I grew for the race circuit. If you recall, I grew it thinking it might help me fit in better. So here is the deal Jack. You win Sonoma and I'll shave my beard in the winners circle for my wife and come to the eliminations on Sunday in Brainerd for the team. That is, if you still want me by then.

How's that for a dedicated imposter crewmember?

