



## Dean Antonelli (Ashley Force Hood Crew Chief) EA Student of High Performance

Dean "Guido" Antonelli, crew chief on the Castrol GTX® Ford Mustang in which Ashley Force Hood last year became the first woman to win the Funny Car title at the Mac Tools U.S. Nationals, was uniquely prepared for a career in drag racing.

While it's true he had great racing genes as the son of the late Joe Antonelli, who earned a reputation driving some of the most cantankerous vehicles on the planet including the "Nanook" fuel altered, he had some other assets, too.

One was experience gleaned from his job as a "destruction engineer" at the U-Haul Technological Center and Test Laboratory in Tucson, Arizona. Another was the 12-year apprenticeship he served under Hall of Fame crew chiefs Austin Coil and Bernie Fedderly during John Force's total domination of Funny Car racing.

Nine times during his 12-years as Team Leader on Force's Funny Car, the 45-year-old celebrated a championship. As a result, when Ashley moved from the Top Alcohol Dragster class to Funny Car in 2007, Antonelli was Force's personal choice to supervise her development.

In just three seasons, he and tuning partner Ron Douglas have transformed Force Hood from a novelty into a legitimate contender.

"He earned his shot," Force said. "My crew chiefs told me he was the guy they wanted. I could have gone out there and hired anyone, but 'Guido' grew up in the system, he trained under the best and he's proved himself."

After directing Ashley to Rookie-of-the-Year honors and a 10th place finish in 2007, Antonelli turned up the wick the last two seasons. Not only did he put his 27-year-old driver in the winners' circle three times, he guided her to second place in Full Throttle points last year.

As for his career at U-Haul, Antonelli said it was one of the best jobs ever.

"We'd take trucks designed to carry 2,000 pounds and fill them with 6,000 pounds of concrete," Antonelli said. "Then (we'd) try to roll them over."

As for his relationship with Ashley, it goes far beyond that of crew chief and driver, requiring Antonelli to be equal parts tuner, advisor and confidant.

"It's a very special relationship," he said, "because Ashley is more family than co-worker. I've known her since she was a little girl (so) her safety and well-being mean a great deal to me."



Under Antonelli's tutelage, Ashley appeared in 13 final rounds in her first three seasons, set the NHRA national speed record and started nine races from the No. 1 qualifying position (including a category-best six races in 2009).

"We have an excellent crew," Antonelli said. "As a result, Ron and I don't have to worry about the preparation of the car. We're totally confident that everything is right every time we pull up to the starting line.

"That makes (the car) a lot easier to tune. Not having to worry about whether the clutch pack is set right or the blower is too loose. Everything is prepared right so you're never chasing (the tune-up). That is very positive."

As for his driver, Antonelli marvels at the way she has handled the pressure.

"I don't know how many people realize how much pressure was on her," he said. "Her dad obviously expected performance (but) he didn't want us out there not qualifying and crashing – and we had some of those instances. But, for the most part, the car ran good and she drove it really good. She's very good at keeping it in the groove. For the amount of pressure that was on her, how calm and collected she is was a pleasant surprise."

Antonelli's biggest regret is that his friend, Eric Medlen, a JFR driver who lost his life in an 2007 testing accident, isn't here to share he and Ashley's success.

"Eric had been here almost as long as me," Antonelli said, "His dream was to drive and he was one of the biggest supporters of me being a crew chief. So, not sharing (this) with him is really disappointing. I miss him."

