



Ron Douglas (Ashley Force Hood Crew Chief) Experience Brings Balance

Ron Douglas is Frick to Dean Antonelli's Frack. Lewis to Clark. He's yin to Antonelli's yang. Quite simply, the two crew chiefs on Ashley Force Hood's Castrol GTX Ford Mustang are decidedly better together than they would have been apart.

Together, they directed the 27-year-old daughter of drag racing icon John Force to a second place finish in the 2009 Full Throttle driver standings, to victory in the Mac Tools U.S. Nationals at Indianapolis Ind., and to a level of respect few could anticipate when Ashley made her professional debut just three years ago.

Now, she is poised to become the first woman ever to win the NHRA Funny Car Championship and she never fails to thank her crew chiefs for the opportunity.

With 15 years of experience working with some of the most productive teams and well-known drivers in drag racing, Douglas was the anchor that Antonelli needed when he was assigned responsibility for Force Hood's development in 2007.

Although he learned the sport under the tutelage of Austin Coil and Bernie Fedderly, it was Antonelli's first turn as a crew chief after 12 years as a crew member at John Force Racing, Inc. Douglas, who had worked at Don Schumacher Racing, Doug Herbert Racing and for two-time NHRA Funny Car champion Cruz Pedregon, provided the one thing Antonelli lacked – crew chief experience.

"We just hit it off right away," Douglas said. "We are incredibly similar in a lot of our thought processes and our approaches with preparation and management styles. So, for better or worse, we got along right away."

"We both put the preparation of the car above anything," Douglas said. "We want to make sure the product is right before we take it to the starting line or worry about track temperatures. We make sure the car is prepared properly and safely – that's priority one. Then we discuss how we want to attack the racetrack."

Douglas came about his career almost by accident.

"I used to go to the races with my friends when we were in high school and I remember leaving a race one day and I just didn't want to go home and go back to my normal job," he recalled. "I remember I really wanted to stay there and travel with a team. That's when I decided 'this is what I want to do for a living.'"

After some inquiries, he caught on with Skuza Motorsports at the end of the 1993 season. It was the perfect starting point because, as a smaller Funny Car operation, it gave Douglas the chance to do a little bit of everything.

"We only had three crew guys," he said. "I mostly maintained the cylinder heads and top end of



the engine, but we all had to drive the truck, learn how to work on the body and build engines.”

It was the ultimate in on-the-job training and it provided a perfect foundation for Douglas who worked briefly on Randy Anderson’s Funny Car before being hired as a crewman on Schumacher Racing’s Exide-backed Top Fuel dragster.

“We started with nothing,” Douglas said. “We had a bare shop floor and in just a matter of weeks, we got a truck and trailer and built the whole operation.”

His work at Schumacher’s caught the eye of former World Champion Dick LaHaie, who hired him at Doug Herbert Racing. Working with LaHaie for six seasons as assistant crew chief provided fortuitous inasmuch as he was named crew chief when LaHaie announced his retirement.

Nevertheless, having invested 10 years in the sport, Douglas felt like if he wanted to continue to advance, it would be advantageous to move to Indianapolis, which was becoming home to more and more pro teams. As a result, he relocated to Indy and went to work as crew chief for Pedregon, his last stop before landing at JFR.

“To hear Ashley’s perspective on things is pretty cool,” he said. “She really enjoys it (and) to hear how she describes things that are going on in the car is great. Plus, she is always really positive and upbeat; easy to work with.”

“I’m glad she was the first female Funny Car winner, but that wasn’t the number one objective,” Douglas said. “The first objective was for this team to compete for a championship; now it’s to win one.”

