

TIPS for the Y-BLOCK NATIONALS & SHOOTOUT at EXPO FORD by Bob Martin

Part 1 of 2: Event Overview and the Basics of taking your Ride down the Track

Maybe you've never been to one of these events, or maybe it's the first time you've thought about running your car down the track and/or participating in the fun we've cooked up for the Annual Y-Block Nationals and Shootout. Regardless, this article is designed to tell you just the basics of what you need to settle in with the rest of us Y-Blockers and get in on the happenings. Issues 37, 38, 39 and 44 had companion articles on the fundamentals of Bracket Racing the Y-Blocks, but here, I'm just going to keep it as simple as possible so you can enjoy and learn at the same time. A few of us, John Feistritz, Harry Hutten, Rick Martin, Jerry Christenson, and Ted Eaton, are serious about what they do with their Y's and have a steady diet of racing. But most of us participants, like myself, have street pieces, customs, restos, etc. and only occasionally go to the tracks for the Classic Car Meets, Hot Rod Drags, and the like, to Show & Shine, hit the swaps, and take our cars down the track. And for some, this event is IT for the year! It's these last two groups that I wrote this article for. It's all of the above on a Grander scale! Hundreds and hundreds of Ford family vehicles (only), lots to Show & Shine, lots more to Race, acres of Swap stuff, featured Nostalgia Cars, and a seriously growing field of Y-Blockers with our own Bracket on Saturday. So tune it up, clean it up, and if you are going to take it down the track, look over and follow the rules needed to get through tech (below paragraphs). Pack a few lawn chairs, some sun screen & sun glasses, and "BRING IT ON" to Columbus Ohio over Labor Day weekend.

WEEKEND SCHEDULE

"Casual Friday" is the best way do describe that day. Gates are scheduled to open at 9 AM, but have been known to open early when the lines back up to the roadways. Claim your spot in the Y-Block pit section, get through tech (the lines are short on Friday), buy a \$20 track permit and prepare for open time trials (no limit on the number of runs you can make). Go for the prizes set-aside for the lowest reactions of the novice/first-timer Guy and Gal Streeter/Cruiser - \$50 for the Best Reaction, \$30 2nd Best & \$20 3rd Best, all of which count for the \$25 Shootout lowest reaction "qualifiers" for both stick and automatic cars (if you race in the Shootout on Saturday). Some of the "Big Dog" Quick-Y-Blockers will probably use the open time trials for some heads-up testosterone contests to see who gets to the finish line first for that \$ set-aside. The track even has a Gamblers Race from 3 PM till 5 PM where the participants put \$10 in a pot. The competitors Bracket Race on a .500 handicapped full tree and the purse is split according to the number of entries. I recommend watching the "hard cores" duke it out to mentally prepare you for Shootout Saturday – or jump in if you feel lucky (you will see what I mean when I say "hard cores"). The track secures at 6:00 PM. I strongly recommend that you come up on Friday to at least get yourself tech'd in and get that mandatory requirement out of the way.

"Shootout Saturday" can be a "white knuckler" if you have never been to a BIG MEET. You can't get there early enough (gates open at 8 AM). You are going to find yourself at the end of a long line – but they do a good job moving them through. It's just that there's going to be so many cars there, so you better be mentally prepared. Find a spot in the Y-Block pit section, dump your stuff and get to tech. For the newcomers that are going to race in both the Shootout AND the EXPO Brackets, get to and thru tech as soon as possible and purchase the EXPO Bracket track permit. If you've already gone thru tech on Friday, just go and purchase the track permit. **Note!** - For those that are ONLY going to race in the Shootout, the Track Officials will provide us with a complimentary Tech Card - by the Tech official, but you still have to go thru Tech inspection. Our gathering point for handouts/information is at Jerry's Y-Block Nationals Tent/Banner – but go to Tech to get the Card. Time Trials start at 10 AM, with two different sessions per EXPO Class – SUPER PRO (electronics) 7.00-11.99; PRO (no electronics) 9.00-13.99; and STREET, 13.00 & Up. In 2002, the Officials gave us our own Y-Block Shootout Class for Saturday. **Be prepared by 9:30ish!** Note – if there's a bunch of track down time for oil-downs or whatever, you may be faced with only ONE time trial (that's why I recommend coming up on Friday and seeing what your car can do then. About 12:45 they will give the first call for the Y-Block Shootout cars to come to the lanes. We'll send the Modifieds/veterans up first, followed by the Streeters/novices to keep it as even as possible in the early rounds. The head of staging official will pull chips for lane choice and pairing. The first round winners and losers who are also going to race in the EXPO Brackets have to wait for that Class's call – it could get interesting – they will give us cooling time if you get your butt (in your car) up there and ask for it. About the third round of the Shootout, the (computer) will ladder the rest of the field out for the final rounds. May the best Y's Guy or Gal get the gold and the honors. Immediately after the last Y-Blocker is done and ready to leave, we'll all head to the Cruise site for dinner (separate checks) and hand out the Shootout awards and talk about next year. Your input is desired and appreciated. The bigger it gets, the simpler it has to be to stay fun and continue the original "run what you brung" spirit, further the camaraderie of the Y-Block contingent within EXPO FORD. And at the same time, to attract yet more Y-Blockers to the fun of Bracket Racing among ourselves and to teach and learn the fundamentals first hand.

"EXPO Sunday" is the grand finale where the Y-Blockers get another opportunity to participate in the EXPO Classes and take out as many of "the others" as we can. Gates and Tech opens at 8 AM for yet a busier day than Saturday because of added classes. EXPO Classes include SUPER PRO (electronics) 7.00-11.99; PRO (no electronics) 9.00-13.99; STREET, 13.00 & Up; Nostalgia, (no electronics) '78 and older, 10.00-13.99, and other Classes to suit, in addition to the Featured cars that include Nostalgia Superstock. We'll have our Pit areas staked out from Saturday, but you have to get there early to re-claim open asphalt. While we have a \$50 prize for the best time trial reaction, be advised that, with over 500 cars, you might only get one pass, so make it good. The Pit/Race gate closes at 12:30, and shortly thereafter, they start calling EXPO Classes to the lanes, and the action starts at 1:00 PM.

FINDING THE Y-BLOCK PITS. Next month we'll have maps and more information to get you to the facility and to the Y-Block pits. In a nutshell, National Trail Raceway is off I-70 East of Columbus. You exit I-70 at Rt. 37 (exit #126). Turn left (north) on Rt. 37 and go about a mile to a light at State Route 40. Race rigs with trailers continue on Rt. 37 about ¾ mile and turn left (west) on Refugee Road and go ¾-mile to Pit/Race Gate "H", and turn left into the facility. From the same light at State Route 40, street-driven Y-Blockers, spectators and crew turn left (west) on 40 and go ¾-mile to Spectator Gate "A", and turn right into the facility. Both gates lead to the east end of the pits. The Y-Block Pit area (space claim we try and block off) is at the North-East "corner" of the Pits. If you get there before most of the Y-Blockers, look for Jerry's "Y-BLOCK NATIONALS & SHOOTOUT" banner on the side of his van (if it's windy), or hanging from his "Y-BLOCK Tent".

GOING THROUGH TECH. Tech is located at the far end of the pits, past the grandstands, down opposite the track's finish line, but it's entrance is further down the return road to provide as much space as possible for the high number of cars. National Trail Raceway is an NHRA track, and they enforce those rules. The quicker you run, the closer they look, and safety is paramount. Fortunately, or unfortunately, the fast cars get most of the attention, but as I mentioned in the last issue (and again here), us Street cars 13.00 and up are still required to cover the basic rules. While they might be busy and tend to gloss you over to get at the Bid Dogs, they could also have an interest in your car – or, worst case, the guy in front of you got the official all wound up and he might be looking for anything. Besides seat belts and a valid drivers license, there are items that get their attention and might make them look a bit closer if they don't see them. Any hubcaps should be removed (exceptions by individual cases – they don't want them to sail into the standss) and they like to see wheel studs extend thru the lug nuts. The rule states that the stud threads have to engage the hex portion of the nut by a minimum of the diameter of the stud. If your car looks like a "race car" and your lug nut is covered (not open), they might have you take one off for a look-see. A 16-oz. "catch can" is required if you have an overflow cooling system, and it has to be securely fastened. From experience, 16 oz. is NOT enough, especially if your cooling system is marginal and it's in the mid-90's. A maximum of 10" of rubber fuel line. Go steel or stainless braid covered. Your battery must be securely mounted. No bungee cords or wire ties (like I had – my mounting bracket was nearly rusted off – since taken care of. Have two positive-acting return springs on the carburetor. One is mandatory, two would show you're thinking. Have an air cleaner on the carburetor (flash shield). A fire extinguisher within reach of the driver is not mandatory, but recommended. If you run slicks, they'll look for a driveshaft loop. Makes good sense anyway, because you'll have way more traction than you'll ever see on the street. No shorts or tank tops! If you are wearing shorts, have long pants with you – in the car. You will either receive the complimentary Shootout-Only Track permit (run punch card) and/or purchase the additional EXPO Class Track permit. The staging lane official will punch it in the staging lanes. And the staging and starting line officials look inside your car to make sure your seat belt is fastened and you have long pants on.

For the owners of Street Cars that can run 13.99 or quicker, you need an "approved" helmet (mandatory at any ET if your car is topless or have a convertible) and they'll look for a driveshaft loop anyway. Your neutral start safety switch (automatics) must be working. I was with John Feistritz and his '57 "Hoosier Hurricane" Ford as he was "Tech'd in 2001 – the official didn't even look under the hood when John opened it. John, somewhat disturbed, volunteered "It's supercharged" – and still didn't get his attention until he asked John how quick it ran and was told 12.0's. Then he got some serious attention. Keep in mind, this official had been going strong for over 2-hours on Saturday morning. This year we have some low 12-second stick cars coming, and rollbar and scattershield rules kick in at 11.99. While no shields were made for the Y-block, the rulebook allows for home-made ¼" plate attached to the frame (in case the clutch blows the bellhousing off). It's your feet – another reason I'm glad I run in the 16's. If in doubt, get an NHRA Rule Book.

WAITING IN THE PITS FOR THE CALL. Back in the pits, start preparing for the time trial sessions. On casual Friday, they start at 11 AM and there's no limit to the number of time trials you can make, but on Shootout Saturday and EXPO Sunday they start at 10 AM, with two on Saturday, and possibly only one on Sunday (busy and very-busy). A recommended Shootout "race kit" should include a tire pressure gage to keep the pressures even. We should have enough air tanks in our group (there's an air line somewhere at the facility), otherwise, bring one to top off with. White shoe polish for Dial-ins – Tech will put your car number on the windshield, everything else is your responsibility. They will tell you to put it on your driver's side windows and rear windshield for the tower officials to see it. I'm a firm believer in a log book (Jegs, Summit, or mine) for recording everything, but you can get by with clipping your time slips together and writing the pertinent info on them – you have to remember to also write your time slip data in the Shootout Log in our pits for the medias (and me). If you're more serious, you might include a Temperature-Barometer-Humidity gage to follow the weather, and if all else fails, put a tape recorder on the front seat and talk to it – works for Rick Martin. The track recommends pitting near a speaker, or having a radio on tuned to the track's PA system (FM 88.1 – subject to change – they'll tell you). When they call your class (EXPO Class), give your car the once over, fire it up and head for the lanes.

GOING TO THE LANES FOR PAIRINGS. You can create your own "fun" in time trials by asking the lane official if you can time trial with a certain car/driver – easiest on "Casual Friday". Get behind one another and get the attention of the official - beforehand. If it's Saturday or Sunday, and "late", probably little chance. Otherwise, he'll either pull you out side-by-side with someone, or two cars from the same lane, trying to keep the lanes even. On "Casual Friday", they won't

punch your race permit – there’s no limit to the number of times you go down the track – until 5 PM. But on Saturday and Sunday, they will punch your track permit each time, and take it the last time. If they limit it to one, for whatever reason, they take it, and you are done time-trialing. **Lane Choice During Eliminations:** The lane official has 5-chips, each with a number that represents that specific lane. For all the cars at the front of the lines, the first chip indicates the car that gets the lane choice – he’ll get your attention and ask you to indicate which lane you want, far (left) lane, or near (right) lane. After you indicate your lane choice, he pulls another chip – your opponent – and gets his attention and indicates to him which lane he gets. When the cars ahead of you have moved up, you two will be motioned to take your places in the proper lane. **Pairing Strategy During Eliminations:** If there’s someone you would like to “get at” be in the lane next to him and take a chance you will be at the front of the line with him and draw him – or, if that person is near the end of the class, hang back with them and try and achieve the same outcome. But if there’s someone you definitely DON’T want to race – say you are the first novice Street car behind a serious veteran Modified in the Shootout, then get BEHIND HIM – with a car between you - in the same lane. Minimize your chances! In the later rounds, it won’t matter. If the computer doesn’t ladder the last three rounds, the official uses a different set of chips – that can either take cars on the side of you, or the ones behind you. In other words, you can’t dodge a bullet in the finals. Have your mental armor on!

STAGING LANES. When they motion your pair toward staging, you will take your “lane”, bearing right, pass under the tower, and come out in view of the Tower officials and computer controllers. While the head of staging holds you back, your car number (and Dial-In during eliminaitons) gets entered into the computer for the run. After the pair ahead of you does their burnouts and moves toward the starting line, your pair will be motioned forward. If you have street tires, I recommend going AROUND the water box – water can stay in the treads, or get thrown up into the wheel well and drop down at the line – hopefully, you will know your car better than I, so, you’re on your own. After the pair ahead of you leave the line, the starters will motion you to stage. Those in the water box make their burnout – those not, clean off their tires and stage. Street cars and cars with 4-wheel brakes are NOT permitted to burnout past the starting line or risk disqualification for delaying the program.

STAGING & MAKING A PASS. You roll forward until your front tire breaks the first pre-stage beam. You are now about 6” from being staged. Clean out your engine, roll forward until your front tire breaks the stage beams. If you are the first to stage, nothing will happen until the second car stages. Get ready with your procedure. If you are the last to stage, BE READY, because about 2.5 seconds after the second car stages, the Auto-Start feature starts the tree - if it’s turned on. You won’t know until you get your time slip, so assume it’s on. At .500-second intervals, the tree lights three yellows on the way to the green light.



Leave when you see the last yellow light. Do this consistently, so you can also evaluate your reaction strategy – which we’ll go into more deeply in Part 2 in the next issue – right now we’re just concentrating on consistency for choosing your Dial-In. Leave the line the same, hit your gears in the same, at the same rpm, and once you’re in high gear, watch yourself through the finish line – completely through the finish line. Then, ease off the gas, and slow it down in the next 3/8 of a mile. You exit the track to the right. If you are on the left lane, KNOW WHERE YOUR OPPONENT IS! Move over and lead if you are far enough in front, or fall in behind him, and proceed to the time shack for your time slip.

TIME SLIP INFORMATION. As you get your slip, mentally go over the particulars of your pass. What rpm you left, what temperature your motor was, what rpm you shifted, etc. When you get to the pits, write it down with the slip information. If you don’t have a logbook, write it on the slip. The more slips you get, the easier it is to predict a Dial-In. Be prepared to be able to do it with two. Are your reactions close? Likewise for all your marks? 60-foot, 330, 1/8 ET & mph, 1000-foot, and most importantly, your 1/4 ET & mph. When you really get it right, they’ll all be WITHIN ½ of 1%.

CHOOSING YOUR DIAL-IN. Right now, we’ll only look at the ET. If you are within 0.1 of a second, you are ready (0.05 is better), if not, keep time-trialing and working on your procedure. The simplest way to look at the Dial-In is to pick your quickest so you won’t break-out (if you run under your Dial-In you lose – unless your opponent goes further under his). That’s what I would recommend - or you could Dial “soft” and plan on hitting your brakes at the finish line. Whatever you do, let me put it in perspective. Every tenth (0.1) of a second you are wrong, you are giving your opponent (or yourself) a car length of decision to make at the finish line. If you choose a Dial-In you are comfortable in “just” making, you have less to do at the finish line – which YOU should take. Don’t lift unless you are sure he can’t catch you. Actually, NEVER LIFT, just ease your left foot on the brake and shave off some ET. If you lift, you just might be GIVING the race to your opponent. Your car won’t be able to recover the momentum, and you’ll watch your opponent take the line.

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